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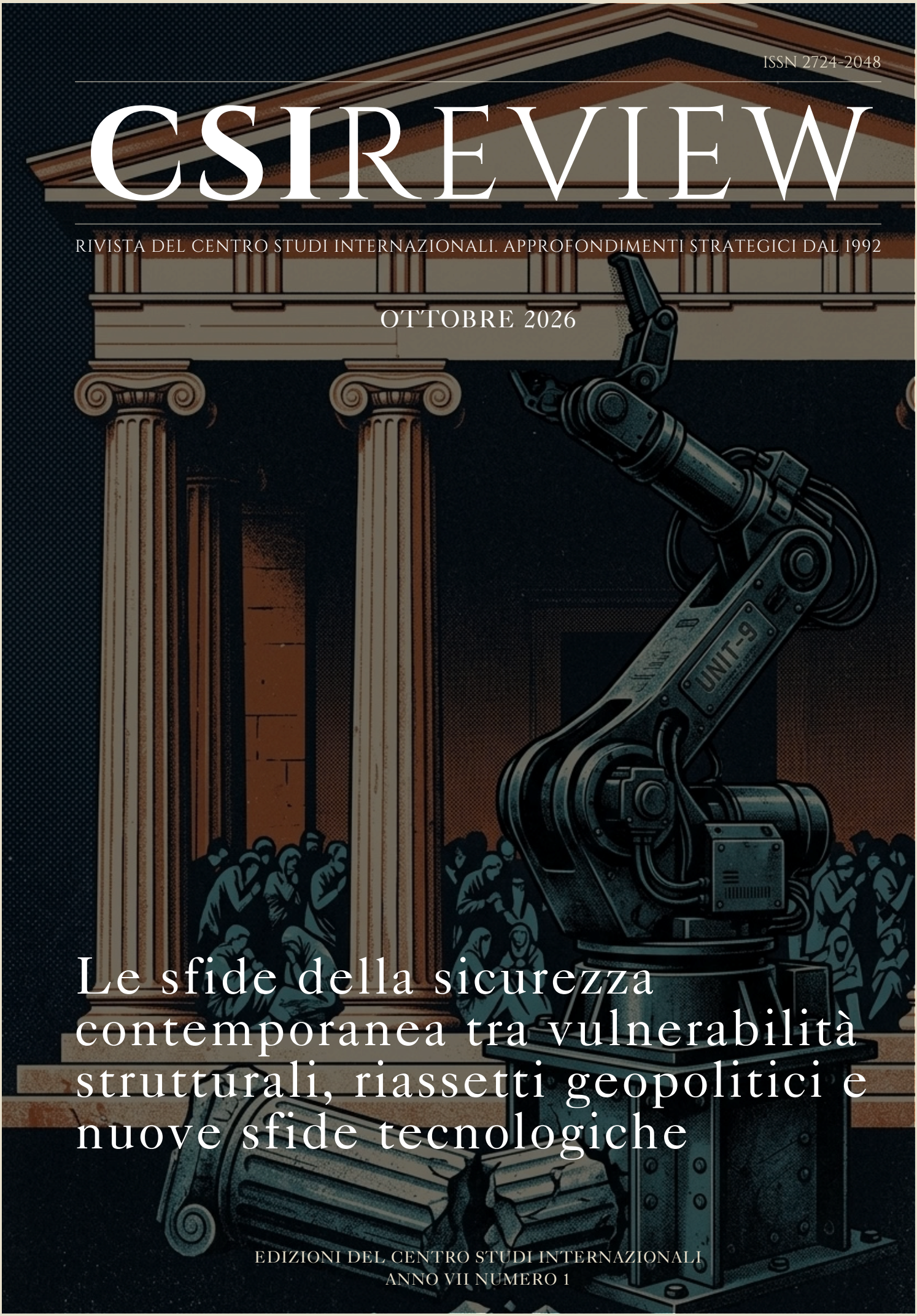

Le sfide della sicurezza contemporanea tra vulnerabilità strutturali, riassetti geopolitici e nuove sfide tecnologiche

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ANNO VII NUMERO 1

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Editoriale

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Il primo numero del 2026 della *CSI Review* ha invitato a riflettere su una delle categorie concettuali e fenomenologiche più pervasive dell'era contemporanea: la sicurezza. Nelle scienze politiche e sociali, la sicurezza ha progressivamente superato i tradizionali confini statocentrici e militari, configurandosi come un fenomeno multidimensionale che interseca i livelli micro, meso e macro della struttura sociale.

La sicurezza attraversa trasversalmente ogni ambito della vita politica e sociale: in una prospettiva sociologica e postmoderna, è possibile evidenziare come le istanze di sicurezza sollevino interrogativi urgenti in merito alla qualità del lavoro, alle forme della convivenza, alla tutela della salute e al mantenimento della coesione sociale; in una prospettiva politico-istituzionale, la sicurezza è strettamente correlata alla capacità — percepita o reale — degli attori collettivi di prepararsi, adattarsi, resistere e riprendersi di fronte a pericoli e crisi innescati da atti umani intenzionali e dolosi, quali terrorismo, criminalità organizzata, sabotaggio e minacce informatiche.

I contributi teorici ed empirici sollecitati dalla *call for paper 1/2026* sul tema hanno inteso mapparne la rilevanza rispetto a un panorama globale segnato da molteplici linee di frattura: l'insorgenza di instabilità, conflitti asimmetrici e minacce ibride; le vulnerabilità derivanti dal rapido sviluppo tecnologico e dalla digitalizzazione; la gestione del rischio legato a eventi climatici estremi e catastrofi di origine umana o naturale; infine, fenomeni di polarizzazione sociale, erosione della fiducia istituzionale e diffusione della disinformazione. I saggi raccolti in questo numero interpretano e approfondiscono la natura poliedrica della sicurezza, offrendo analisi teoriche e studi di caso che attraversano diversi ambiti d'indagine dell'Area 14.

Nel saggio *Energia nucleare e sicurezza nella transizione energetica: evoluzione e limiti del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare*, Germana Rezzuto (Università Vanvitelli) affronta il riposizionamento strategico del nucleare civile nell'ambito delle attuali politiche energetiche globali. L'autrice ricostruisce l'evoluzione storica del regime internazionale di regolamentazione della tecnologia nucleare alla luce dei principali incidenti del passato, distinguendo e analizzando le due direttrici fondamentali del settore: la *nuclear safety* (nelle sue componenti preventive e reattive) e la *nuclear security* (relativa alla protezione fisica dei materiali e degli impianti). Il contributo evidenzia i punti di forza, le criticità e le prospettive di sviluppo di una architettura di sicurezza internazionale di fronte alle sfide della transizione energetica.

Il contributo di Alessandro Mariani (Università di Pavia), intitolato *The Republic of Yemen: A Contemporary History of Persistent Crisis and State Fragility (1990-2026)*, offre un'analisi storico-politica sulla persistente instabilità della Repubblica dello Yemen. L'autore esamina i limiti intrinseci di un processo di unificazione affrettato, l'impatto di un sistema clientelare e patrimoniale e le conseguenze della cattiva gestione della cosa pubblica. L'articolo evidenzia come l'intersezione tra le opposizioni interne e le ingerenze di attori esterni per ragioni geopolitiche abbia alimentato una violenza politica prolungata, compromettendo gravemente la sicurezza e il benessere della popolazione yemenita.

In *From Human Security to Regime Security: Libya, Syria and the Pluralist Turn in UN Peace Operations*, Angelo Maria Rivolta (Università di Bologna) adotta le categorie della Scuola Inglese per interpretare la ridefinizione teorica e operativa della sicurezza nello scenario globale. L'autore sostiene che il consenso solidarista, focalizzato sulla *human security* e sulla protezione degli individui (come emerso dopo la Guerra Fredda) abbia lasciato il passo a un ritorno al pluralismo strutturale. Attraverso l'analisi dei casi studio di Libia e Siria e il confronto tra le missioni MINUSMA (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) e MINUSCA (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic), lo studio dimostra come la sovranità statale, la sopravvivenza dei regimi e il controllo territoriale tendano oggi a prevalere sulle norme di protezione individuale nelle operazioni di pace delle Nazioni Unite.

Il saggio di Greta Pancheri (Università di Torino), *Exploring Information Security: A Theoretical Analysis of the Growing Relevance of Information as a Security Matter*, analizza il ruolo dell'informazione all'interno degli studi di sicurezza contemporanei. Pancheri sostiene che la *information security* non debba essere concettualizzata come un settore isolato, bensì come una condizione strutturale trasversale in grado di riorganizzare la distribuzione delle vulnerabilità sia nei domini statocentrici sia in quelli focalizzati sulla sicurezza umana.

Nel loro insieme, gli articoli che compongono il numero 1/2026 della *CSI Review* dimostrano come il tema della sicurezza debba essere necessariamente osservato da più discipline e certamente evitando approcci riduzionisti. Tra regolamentazione della transizione energetica, dinamiche di crisi e fragilità statale, riconfigurazione del multilateralismo ed eziologia della sicurezza informatica, questo numero offre al dibattito scientifico strumenti analitici essenziali per decodificare le trasformazioni del nostro tempo.

Energia nucleare e sicurezza nella transizione energetica: evoluzione e limiti del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare

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Abstract

Dopo anni di stagnazione e diffidenza, segnati da incidenti dal forte impatto sull'opinione pubblica e da un conseguente intenso dibattito sulla sicurezza degli impianti nucleari, l'energia nucleare sembra essere tornata al centro delle politiche energetiche di un nutrito numero di Stati. Il presente contributo si propone di esaminare il regime internazionale ad oggi regolante il tema della sicurezza nell'uso civile dell'energia nucleare. A tale fine verrà innanzitutto fornita un'analisi dell'evoluzione storica del regime internazionale per la regolazione del nucleare, soffermandosi in particolare sull'impatto che i principali incidenti nucleari hanno prodotto su tale regime. Si procederà dunque ad analizzare il regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare attualmente operante, esaminandone in particolare le due componenti fondamentali, la *nuclear safety*, nella sua dimensione preventiva e reattiva, e la *nuclear security*. Con riferimento alla *nuclear safety* preventiva, verranno esaminate le sue diverse componenti, tra cui la protezione dalle radiazioni, la sicurezza degli impianti nucleari, la gestione dei rifiuti nucleari e del combustibile esaurito, nonché il trasporto dei materiali nucleari. Per quel che concerne invece la *nuclear safety* reattiva, verranno esaminati i relativi profili della notifica tempestiva e dell'assistenza. Si procederà in seguito ad analizzare la dimensione della *nuclear security*, con specifico riferimento alla protezione fisica dei materiali e degli impianti nucleari. Verrà infine condotta una valutazione critica del regime esistente, evidenziandone punti di forza, limiti e possibili prospettive di evoluzione.

Keywords: Uso civile dell'energia nucleare, Sicurezza nucleare, *Nuclear safety*, *Nuclear security*.

Sommario: 1. Introduzione – 2. L'evoluzione del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare – 3. Il regime di sicurezza nucleare internazionale: tra *nuclear safety* e *nuclear security* – 3.1 La *nuclear safety* nel regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare – 3.1.1 La dimensione preventiva della *nuclear safety* – 3.1.2 La dimensione reattiva della *nuclear safety* – 3.2 La *nuclear security* nel regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare – 4. Conclusioni.

1. Introduzione

Nel quadro delle recenti politiche globali orientate alla decarbonizzazione e alla progressiva transizione verso sistemi energetici a basse emissioni, l'energia nucleare sembra aver riacquisito centralità nel dibattito internazionale quale viabile alternativa alle fonti energetiche fossili. La recente Dichiarazione per triplicare l'energia nucleare[1], attraverso la quale oltre trenta Stati si sono impegnati a collaborare per conseguire l'obiettivo di triplicare la capacità nucleare globale entro il 2050, ne costituisce un esempio evidente. Tale rinnovato interesse, descritto da diversi osservatori come un vero e proprio "rinascimento nucleare", emerge dopo anni di stagnazione del dibattito internazionale sul tema, principalmente causata dal forte impatto che incidenti come Chernobyl e Fukushima hanno prodotto sull'opinione pubblica mondiale e dalle conseguenti riflessioni relative alla sicurezza del nucleare come fonte energetica. L'uso civile dell'energia nucleare, in quanto caratterizzato da un'intrinseca pericolosità potenziale e in grado di produrre danni transfrontalieri importanti, porta infatti indubbiamente con sé determinati rischi che necessitano di essere gestiti tramite adeguate misure di sicurezza. Sebbene la gestione della sicurezza nel quadro del nucleare a scopo civile sia stata originariamente rivendicata dagli Stati come materia di dominio interno, le summenzionate potenziali implicazioni transfrontaliere connesse a tale tipo di attività, resesi ancor più evidenti a seguito dell'incidente di Chernobyl, hanno spinto la comunità internazionale ad istituire un quadro giuridico internazionale per la sicurezza nucleare. Tale regime, ad oggi composto da convenzioni internazionali così come da standard, codici di condotta e linee guida di natura raccomandatoria che integrano e attuano suddetto quadro convenzionale, regola l'intero ciclo di vita dell'energia nucleare con l'obiettivo di garantire che il suo sfruttamento per fini civili avvenga in piena sicurezza e secondo regole e standard condivisi.

Il presente contributo si propone di offrire una sintetica panoramica del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare, esaminandone innanzitutto brevemente l'evoluzione su impulso soprattutto degli incidenti di Three Mile Island, Chernobyl e Fukushima. Successivamente, si procederà all'esame del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare attualmente vigente, soffermandosi in particolare sulle due componenti fondamentali della *nuclear safety*, nella sua dimensione preventiva e reattiva, e della *nuclear security*. Verrà infine condotta una valutazione critica del regime esistente, evidenziandone punti di forza, limiti e possibili prospettive di evoluzione.

[1] La *Declaration to Triple Nuclear Energy*, adottata nel 2023 in occasione della 28esima Conferenza delle Parti della Convenzione quadro delle Nazioni Unite sui cambiamenti climatici (UNFCCC) tenutasi a Dubai, conta ad oggi 33 firmatari, https://world-nuclear.org/images/articles/Declaration-to-Triple-Nuclear-Energy-_-COP28-_-28-November-2023-FINAL.pdf.

2. L'evoluzione del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare

Le origini del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare sono imprescindibilmente legate alla nascita dell'Agenzia internazionale per l'energia atomica (AIEA)[2], agenzia intergovernativa istituita nel 1957 al fine di promuovere l'uso pacifico, sicuro e responsabile dell'energia nucleare, assicurando al contempo che questa non venisse utilizzata per scopi militari. L'AIEA, dal momento della sua istituzione, ha svolto un ruolo cruciale nello sviluppo delle normative e degli standard di sicurezza nel campo dell'uso civile dell'energia nucleare, contribuendo a definire e consolidare il regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare nella forma in cui si presenta oggi. Altrettanto determinanti per lo sviluppo e l'evoluzione del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare sono stati altresì tre grandi incidenti nucleari verificatisi negli ultimi cinquant'anni, nello specifico l'incidente di Three Mile Island del 1979, l'incidente di Chernobyl del 1986 e l'incidente di Fukushima Daiichi del 2011[3]. Ciascuno di essi, in misura diversa, ha di fatti plasmato e contribuito a modellare la regolamentazione internazionale della sicurezza nell'uso civile dell'energia nucleare, incidendo peraltro sul ruolo e sulle funzioni della stessa AIEA nel settore.

Primo tra essi, l'incidente di Three Mile Island, verificatosi negli Stati Uniti nel 1979, contribuì ad aprire un forte dibattito sul tema della notifica e dell'assistenza in caso di emergenze radiologiche. Pur non avendo condotto formalmente all'adozione di convenzioni internazionali, tale incidente spinse l'AIEA a nominare un gruppo di esperti incaricato di studiare i mezzi per notificare e prestare assistenza in caso di emergenze nucleari. Il risultato di tali lavori si sostanziò nelle *Guidelines for Mutual Emergency Assistance Arrangements in Connection with a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency*[4] e nelle *Guidelines on Reportable Events, Integrated Planning and Information Exchange in a Transboundary Release of Radioactive Materials*[5], strumenti che posero le basi per la futura disciplina in materia.

Fu però l'incidente di Chernobyl, verificatosi in Unione Sovietica nel 1986, ad avviare il processo che avrebbe portato allo sviluppo dei principali strumenti giuridici fondanti l'odierno regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare. Tale incidente, che provocò il più grande rilascio incontrollato di materiale radioattivo mai verificatosi da un impianto nucleare civile, ebbe di fatti un enorme

[2] Per un'analisi più approfondita si rimanda a P. L. Johnson, "The law of the International Atomic Energy Agency", in K. Sexton Nick, S. G. Burns (eds.), *Principles and Practice of International Nuclear Law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 21-47.

[3] Si v. S. G. Burns, "The impact of the major nuclear power plant accidents on the international legal framework for nuclear power", in K. Sexton Nick, S. G. Burns (eds.), *Principles and Practice of International Nuclear Law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 83-105.

[4] *Guidelines for Mutual Emergency Assistance Arrangements in Connection with a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency*, INFCIRC/310, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 1984.

[5] *Guidelines on Reportable Events, Integrated Planning and Information Exchange in a Transboundary Release of Radioactive Materials*, INFCIRC/32, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 1986.

impatto sull'opinione pubblica dimostrando "l'esistenza di lacune nel sistema"[6] fino a quel momento operante in materia di sicurezza. Prima di Chernobyl, infatti, la sicurezza nucleare era considerata una materia di dominio interno, rientrante nella sovranità statale, limitata solo in minima parte da obblighi internazionali vincolanti. Le implicazioni transfrontaliere di tale incidente, resero tuttavia evidente come la sicurezza degli impianti e delle attività ed essi connesse non potessero continuare ad essere considerate esclusivamente una questione nazionale.

Tale consapevolezza indusse dunque la comunità internazionale a sviluppare nuovi strumenti giuridici internazionali in materia e ad istituire l'odierno quadro giuridico internazionale per la sicurezza nucleare. In particolare, per quel che concerne la notifica e l'assistenza in caso di incidenti, occorre sottolineare come la *Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident*[7] e la *Convention on Assistance in case of Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency*[8] vennero negoziate entro pochi mesi dall'incidente ed entrarono in vigore nello stesso anno. Con riferimento invece alla sicurezza degli impianti nucleari, Chernobyl ebbe un ruolo determinante nell'avvio delle negoziazioni della *Convention on Nuclear Safety* (CNS)[9] adottata nel 1994, così come in quelle della *Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management*[10], adottata invece nel 1997.

L'incidente di Chernobyl funse altresì da catalizzatore per una espansione del ruolo dell'AIEA nel quadro del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare. Fino a quel momento, infatti, l'Agenzia veniva utilizzata principalmente come veicolo per lo sviluppo di standard di sicurezza giuridicamente non vincolanti. A seguito di Chernobyl, venne messa in atto un'espansione del programma di sicurezza dell'IAEA, come riflesso non da ultimo nelle convenzioni in materia di sicurezza previamente citate, che vennero adottate tutte sotto i suoi auspici.

Infine, l'incidente di Fukushima Daiichi, verificatosi in Giappone nel 2011, riportò il tema della sicurezza nucleare al centro del dibattito internazionale, contribuendo al rafforzamento e consolidamento del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare fino a quel momento esistente. La circostanza che l'incidente avesse avuto luogo in un Paese tecnologicamente avanzato, nonostante la piena operatività del quadro giuridico internazionale di sicurezza nucleare, aprì la strada a numerose

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[6] N. Pelzer, "The impact of the Chernobyl accident on international nuclear energy law", *Archiv des Völkerrechts*, 25 (1987), 3, p. 295.

[7] *Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident*, 26 September 1986, 1439 UNTS 275.

[8] *Convention on Assistance in Case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency*, 26 September 1986, 1457 UNTS 133.

[9] *Convention on Nuclear Safety*, 17 June 1994, 1963 UNTS 293.

[10] *Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management*, 5 September 1997, 2153 UNTS 303. A tal proposito si v. W. Tonhauser, O. Jankowitsch, "The Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management", *Nuclear Law Bulletin* 60 (1997), 2, p. 9-22; A. de Kagenek, C. Pinel, "The Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management", *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 47 (1998), 2, p. 409-425.

contestazioni in merito all'adeguatezza di suddetto regime. In risposta a tali contestazioni, l'IAEA decise, nonostante non fossero mancate proposte di revisione, di non apportare modifiche formali alle convenzioni internazionali sulla sicurezza, ma bensì di migliorare l'efficacia degli strumenti esistenti, adottando a tal fine un *Action Plan on Nuclear Safety*. Quest'ultimo individuò dodici azioni in diverse aree chiave del settore che avrebbero dovuto guidare il processo di rafforzamento del regime di sicurezza, tra di esse in particolare emergevano il miglioramento delle valutazioni di sicurezza degli impianti, il rafforzamento dei meccanismi di *peer review*, il miglioramento della preparazione alle emergenze, l'affinamento degli standard di sicurezza, il rafforzamento degli strumenti normativi esistenti, un maggiore sviluppo delle infrastrutture e delle competenze, un focus maggiore sulla protezione di persone e ambiente, così come una maggiore trasparenza nei procedimenti. Nel quadro del rafforzamento degli strumenti normativi esistenti in materia di sicurezza nucleare post-Fukushima, venne infine adottata nel 2015 la Dichiarazione di Vienna sulla sicurezza nucleare, un atto politico di impegno volto a rafforzare l'obiettivo della CNS nel prevenire incidenti con conseguenze radiologiche e mitigarne gli eventuali effetti.

3. Il regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare: tra *nuclear safety* e *nuclear security*

Il regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare si sostanzia nell'insieme di convenzioni, standard, codici di condotta, linee guida e pratiche istituzionali sviluppati a livello internazionale, volti a prevenire, gestire e rispondere ai rischi derivanti dall'uso civile dell'energia nucleare, con il fine ultimo di garantire la protezione degli individui, della società e dell'ambiente dai pericoli connessi alle radiazioni ionizzanti lungo l'intero ciclo di vita dell'energia nucleare.

Nel quadro di tale regime, la nozione di sicurezza nucleare si articola in due dimensioni fondamentali, la *nuclear safety* e la *nuclear security*. Queste afferiscono, rispettivamente, alla prevenzione e gestione dei rischi di natura accidentale (quali possono essere malfunzionamenti tecnici, errori umani non intenzionali o eventi naturali) da un lato, e alla prevenzione e gestione dei rischi derivanti da atti intenzionali (quali terrorismo, sabotaggio o furto di materiale nucleare) dall'altro. Pur concernendo tipologie differenti di rischi nucleari, le due dimensioni tendono a convergere verso un obiettivo comune, ossia la protezione degli individui, della società e dell'ambiente dai rischi derivanti dall'uso civile del nucleare, in altre parole la piena garanzia di sicurezza nucleare.

La distinzione tra i due concetti dal punto di vista teorico risulta evidente, ciò nonostante, quest'ultima tende ad assumere contorni meno definiti quando si opera sul piano concreto. Un atto doloso rivolto verso una centrale nucleare potrebbe di fatti provocare un incidente nucleare in grado di generare conseguenti problematiche in materia di *safety*, ciò implica che a sua volta un sistema progettato per

garantire la *safety* nucleare non possa non tener conto di possibili attacchi terroristici o sabotaggi, dovendo dunque integrare al suo interno elementi di *security*. *Nuclear safety* e *nuclear security* sono dunque due dimensioni complementari che si rafforzano a vicenda, entrambe facenti parte del più ampio concetto di sicurezza nucleare. Sebbene gli strumenti giuridici internazionali afferenti a ciascuna delle due dimensioni siano stati oggetto di uno sviluppo separato, negli ultimi anni, nel quadro dell'IAEA, sembra essersi affermata una logica di integrazione. Ciò trova conferma nel testo del *Safety Glossary* del 2018 laddove la stessa Agenzia riconosce come "[t]here is not an exact distinction between the general terms safety and security"[11], così come nella recente scelta di adottare per il 2022 un glossario comune per *safety* e *security*[12]. L'AIEA sembra dunque aver riconosciuto come la separazione dei due concetti non sia sostenibile a livello operativo e come sia necessario integrarli al fine ultimo di garantire la più completa sicurezza nucleare.

3.1 La *nuclear safety* nel regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare

La *safety* nucleare viene definita dall'AIEA come il conseguimento di adeguate condizioni operative, la prevenzione degli incidenti e la mitigazione delle conseguenze, con conseguente protezione dei lavoratori, della popolazione e dell'ambiente da indebiti rischi derivanti dall'esposizione alle radiazioni[13]. Nel corso del tempo, al fine di raggiungere tale obiettivo, l'Agenzia ha contribuito alla conclusione di diverse convenzioni internazionali in materia, nonché elaborato numerosi standard, codici di condotta e linee guida, finalizzati a disciplinare il tema della *safety* nucleare. Con riferimento alle prime, come si avrà modo di approfondire, fondamentali sono la *Convention on Safety* del 1994 e la *Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management* del 1997, nonché la *Early Notification Convention* e la *Assistance Convention* del 1986. Per quel che concerne invece gli standard elaborati dall'AIEA, occorre evidenziare come sia lo stesso Statuto dell'Agenzia ad attribuire espressamente alla stessa il potere di stabilire o adottare norme di sicurezza volte alla tutela della salute e alla riduzione al minimo dei pericoli per la vita e per i beni[14]. In virtù di ciò l'AIEA, nel corso degli ultimi 86 anni, ha svolto un importante lavoro di elaborazione di standard in materia di *safety* nucleare, i quali, pur essendo atti tecnici non vincolanti, sono stati tuttavia in grado di orientare notevolmente la prassi degli Stati in tale ambito. Ad oggi, in particolare,

[11] *IAEA Safety Glossary: Terminology Used in Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection*, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2018, p. 155.
[12] *IAEA Nuclear Safety and Security Glossary: Terminology Used in Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Security, Radiation Protection and Emergency Preparedness and Response*, 2022 *Interim Edition*, *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*, Vienna, 2022.
[13] *IAEA Nuclear Safety and Security Glossary: Terminology Used in Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Security, Radiation Protection and Emergency Preparedness and Response*, 2022 *Interim Edition*, *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*, Vienna, 2022, p. 139.
[14] *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*, *Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency*, adopted 26 October 1956, entered into force 29 July 1957, art. III.A.6.

l'AIEA sviluppa e mantiene in essere una *Safety Standards Series*, ossia una serie organica di standard di sicurezza articolata in tre categorie di pubblicazioni funzionalmente distinte, i *Safety Fundamentals*, i *Safety Requirements* e le *Safety Guides*. I primi, enunciano i principi fondamentali che informano l'intero sistema normativo dell'IAEA, mentre i secondi contengono requisiti di tipo tecnico-normativo da soddisfare al fine di raggiungere gli obiettivi espressi nei Fondamenti. Infine, le Guide sono oltre cinquanta e si occupano di fornire indicazioni operative e tecniche sulla concreta attuazione di quanto fissato nei Requisiti. Sia i Requisiti che le Guide si distinguono in Generali e Specifici, a seconda che siano applicabili trasversalmente a più settori e attività oppure che concernano specifiche installazioni o attività.

Gli strumenti indicati, convenzionali e non, sono stati elaborati con l'intento di regolare quanto più possibile l'intero ciclo di vita dell'energia nucleare, partendo dalla sicurezza nel trattamento dei materiali radioattivi, passando per la sicurezza degli impianti nucleari, nonché per il trasporto di materiali radioattivi e la gestione dei rifiuti specifici, arrivando infine al tema della gestione e delle misure da adottare in caso di incidenti. Come espresso chiaramente nella definizione formulata dall'IAEA, al fine di garantire la *safety* nucleare occorre operare su due binari fondamentali, da un lato la prevenzione di incidenti, da ottenere attraverso il rispetto di standard e disposizioni definite in materia, dall'altro la preparazione e la risposta nel caso in cui tali incidenti si dovessero verificare. Per tale motivo si procederà ad un'analisi delle disposizioni, convenzionali e non, attualmente esistenti in materia di *safety* nucleare, nei due profili della prevenzione degli incidenti e della risposta agli stessi.

3.1.1 La dimensione preventiva della *nuclear safety*

Considerata la portata dei rischi associati ad una gestione impropria dei processi legati all'uso pacifico dell'energia nucleare, è inevitabile che nel contesto del diritto internazionale nucleare sia stata dedicata grande attenzione al profilo della prevenzione di danni ed incidenti nucleari. In particolare, da un punto di vista normativo, possono essere individuati quattro ambiti specifici ricompresi nel quadro della prevenzione: la protezione radiologica; la sicurezza degli impianti nucleari; la gestione dei rifiuti nucleari e del combustibile esaurito; il trasporto dei materiali nucleari.

La protezione radiologica costituisce ad oggi un punto di partenza imprescindibile per qualsivoglia ragionamento sulla sicurezza nucleare, tanto da essere definita in dottrina come uno "*chapeau*", ossia un requisito base per l'intera legislazione nucleare oggi esistente[15]. Ciò è motivato dal fatto che la *safety* nucleare altro non è che l'insieme delle misure atte a governare il rischio di esposizione alle radiazioni ionizzanti, rappresentando dunque la protezione radiologica il vero nucleo sostanziale del

[15] C. Stoiber, A. Baer, N. Pelzer, W. Tonhauser, *Handbook on Nuclear Law*, Vienna, IAEA, 2003, p. 47.

rischio che la *safety* nucleare mira a gestire. Il sistema internazionale per la protezione radiologica trova oggi fondamento in un insieme di dati scientifici, principi guida, standard e regolamenti internazionali specifici elaborati da diversi organismi internazionali nel quadro del proprio mandato. Tra di essi in particolare rilevano i *Radiation Protection and Safety of Radiation Sources: International Basic Safety Standards* (BSS)[16], elaborati nel 1962 dall'IAEA, rientranti nei già visti *Safety Requirements* di carattere generale della *IAEA Safety Standards Series*, ed aggiornati progressivamente nel 1967, 1982, 1996 e, in ultimo, nel 2014.

Con riferimento invece alla sicurezza degli impianti nucleari, questa costituisce senz'altro uno degli aspetti maggiormente rilevanti della *safety* nucleare e risulta essere in quanto tale oggetto di numerosi strumenti adottati nel quadro dell'IAEA. In particolare, non solo numerosi gruppi di *Requirements* sono dedicati al tema[17], ma un ruolo cardine in materia viene svolto dalla *Convention on Nuclear Safety* (CNS), adottata nel 1994 nel quadro dell'IAEA e ratificata ad oggi da 98 Stati. La CNS ha come obiettivo centrale il garantire un alto livello di sicurezza nei reattori nucleari civili e negli impianti correlati, tramite l'adozione e il mantenimento di strumenti di difesa efficaci che consentano di prevenire o mitigare possibili incidenti all'interno degli impianti, con il fine ultimo di proteggere le persone e l'ambiente da potenziali radiazioni nocive. Tale scopo viene perseguito dalla Convenzione tramite un impegno all'applicazione di principi fondamentali di sicurezza per le installazioni nucleari piuttosto che di standard di sicurezza dettagliati, previsione che secondo parte della dottrina ne indebolirebbe il valore normativo[18]. Ciò nonostante, la CNS sembra riconoscere un ruolo di rilievo agli standard dettagliati di sicurezza adottati a livello internazionale, laddove afferma che le "internationally formulated safety guidelines […] can provide guidance on contemporary means of achieving a high level of safety", chiarendo quindi come questi ultimi possano in ogni caso costituire uno strumento utile per gli Stati all'atto di adempiere agli obblighi della Convenzione[19]. Quest'ultima trova applicazione tanto agli impianti nucleari preesistenti quanto a quelli di nuova costruzione, richiedendo in particolare con riferimento ai primi l'adozione di tutti i miglioramenti "ragionevolmente praticabili" al fine di rafforzarne la sicurezza, dovendo invece procedere alla dismissione dell'impianto, non appena sia "concretamente possibile", qualora il miglioramento non

[16] *Radiation Protection and Safety of Radiation Sources: International Basic Safety Standards, IAEA Safety Standards Series*, *General Safety Requirements Part 3*, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2014.

[17] In particolare il *Governmental, Legal and Regulatory Framework for Safety*, il *Safety of Research Reactors*, il *Decommissioning of Facilities*, il *Leadership and Management for Safety*, il *Site Evaluation for Nuclear Installations*, il *Safety Assessment for Facilities and Activities*, il *Safety of Nuclear Power Plants: Design*, il *Safety of Nuclear Power Plants: Commissioning and Operation* e il *Safety of Nuclear Fuel Cycle Facilities*.

[18] A. Anastassov, "Some Aspects of the Effectiveness of the International Regulatory Framework to Ensure Nuclear Safety", in J. L. Black-Branch, D. Fleck (eds.), *Nuclear Non-Proliferation in International Law – Volume III*, *Legal Aspects of the Use of Nuclear Energy for Peaceful Purposes*, The Hague, T.M.C. Asser Press, 2016, p. 223.

[19] L'AIEA stessa ritiene che i propri standard di sicurezza rappresentino "un mezzo coerente e affidabile per garantire l'effettivo adempimento degli obblighi degli Stati ai sensi delle Convenzioni", in particolare si v. M. El Baradei, "Foreword", in *Fundamental Safety Principles: Safety Fundamentals*, *IAEA Safety Series SF-1,* Vienna, IAEA, 2006.

fosse praticabile. Tali formule sono state ampiamente criticate in dottrina in quanto ritenute eccessivamente elastiche e difficilmente riconducibili a parametri uniformi di applicazione[20].

La CNS impone in generale agli Stati parte due obblighi fondamentali, da un lato l'adozione di misure di attuazione dei principi in essa prescritti, da documentare tramite specifici rapporti periodici, dall'altro la partecipazione ad un meccanismo di *peer review*.

Per quel che concerne il primo impegno, gli Stati parte sono tenuti ad adottare, nell'ambito del proprio diritto interno, le misure legislative, regolamentari ed amministrative e le altre disposizioni necessarie all'adempimento dei propri obblighi ai sensi della Convenzione. Ciascuna Parte contraente è nello specifico tenuta ad adottare "misure adeguate" in modo da garantire che la sicurezza nelle installazioni nucleari sia considerata dagli operatori che le gestiscono come una assoluta priorità, che il personale sia adeguatamente formato in materia, che siano istituiti programmi di garanzia della qualità, che vengano svolte valutazioni di sicurezza periodiche e sistematiche, che venga mantenuta l'esposizione alle radiazioni al livello più basso ragionevolmente raggiungibile ed infine che vengano predisposti piani di emergenza periodicamente collaudati. Ai sensi della Convenzione, misure adeguate devono altresì essere adottate con riferimento alla localizzazione, alla progettazione e alla costruzione nonché all'utilizzo degli impianti nucleari civili. Quel che può considerarsi "adeguato" in ciascun caso dipende dalle circostanze specifiche e può cambiare con l'evoluzione degli standard di sicurezza, rendendo piuttosto complesso, come sottolineato in dottrina, determinare con certezza quali misure soddisfino tale requisito[21].

Con riferimento al secondo obbligo, la CNS richiede che gli Stati prendano parte ad un meccanismo di *peer review*, ossia che si riuniscano periodicamente al fine di esaminare i rapporti da essi elaborati in merito alle misure intraprese nell'adempiere ai propri obblighi internazionali di sicurezza. In occasione di tali riunioni, ciascuna Parte dispone della "ragionevole opportunità" di discutere i rapporti presentati dalle altre Parti contraenti e di richiedere chiarimenti in merito agli stessi. Alla base di tale meccanismo vi è l'idea di creare uno strumento di supervisione collettiva della sicurezza nucleare, fondato sulla convinzione, spesso criticata in dottrina, che la pressione degli altri Stati parte sia di per sé sufficiente ad assicurare il rispetto generalizzato degli standard in materia di sicurezza.

Altrettanto importante nel contesto della *safety* nucleare è il tema della gestione dei rifiuti radioattivi derivanti dalle attività connesse allo sfruttamento di tale tipo di energia. Anche in questo caso, la regolamentazione in materia vede da un lato standard e codici di condotta sviluppati nel tempo nel quadro IAEA, dall'altro una convenzione internazionale adottata nel medesimo ambito, la *Joint*

[20] A. Anastassov, "Some Aspects of the Effectiveness of the International Regulatory Framework to Ensure Nuclear Safety", cit., p. 223.

[21] Vedasi al riguardo A. Anastassov, "Some Aspects of the Effectiveness of the International Regulatory Framework to Ensure Nuclear Safety", cit., p. 223; A. Boyle, C. Redgwell, *International Law and the Environment*, 4th ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, p. 419.

Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management del 1997, che spesso riprende e rafforza le prescrizioni elaborate in detti strumenti.

Con riferimento ai primi, occorre senz'altro menzionare il *Code of Practice on the International Transboundary Movement of Radioactive Waste*[22], adottato dall'IAEA nel 1990 e finalizzato a fornire principi guida e *best practices* in materia in modo da prevenire movimentazioni non controllate e pericolose di rifiuti radioattivi tra Stati. Di particolare rilevanza sono altresì i *Principles of Radioactive Waste Management* del 1995[23], aggiornati nel 2006 e fatti confluire nella *IAEA Safety Standards Series*, in particolare nella categoria dei *Safety Fundamentals*, finalizzati alla individuazione di principi cardine in materia, quali la protezione della salute umana, dell'ambiente e delle generazioni future, nonché la minimizzazione della produzione di rifiuti radioattivi. I principi così individuati sono stati poi incorporati e sviluppati nei successivi *Safety Requirements*, in particolare nel *Predisposal Management of Radioactive Waste*[24] e nel *Safety of Radioactive Waste Disposal Facilities*[25], che li hanno tradotti in obblighi tecnici e prescrizioni operative, fornendo requisiti dettagliati per la gestione in sicurezza dei rifiuti radioattivi prima e dopo lo smaltimento finale. Infine, vi è la già menzionata *Joint Convention* del 1997[26], considerata ad oggi lo strumento principale e maggiormente rilevante in materia di gestione delle risultanze dell'attività nucleare.

La Convenzione conta 92 Stati parte e viene spesso definita in dottrina come la convenzione "sorella" della CNS[27] poiché condivide con quest'ultima l'obiettivo di conseguire e mantenere un elevato livello di sicurezza e di prevenzione degli incidenti, nonché un simile meccanismo di revisione tra pari. La Convenzione congiunta trova applicazione sia allo smaltimento dei rifiuti radioattivi che alla gestione del combustibile esaurito, fatte salve due specifiche eccezioni. In primo luogo, il combustibile esaurito detenuto per il riprocessamento rientra nell'ambito di applicazione della Convenzione solo nel caso in cui la parte contraente interessata esprima una dichiarazione affermativa in tal senso[28]. In secondo luogo, i rifiuti radioattivi ed il combustibile esaurito derivanti da programmi militari o di difesa, rientrano nell'ambito di applicazione della Convenzione solo se trasferiti e gestiti

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[22] *Code of Practice on the International Transboundary Movement of Radioactive Waste*, INFCIRC/386, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 1990.

[23] *The Principles of Radioactive Waste Management,* Safety Series No. 111-F, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 1995.

[24] *Predisposal Management of Radioactive Waste*, *IAEA Safety Standards Series* No. GSR Part 5, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2009.

[25] *Safety of Radioactive Waste Disposal Facilities*, *IAEA Safety Standards Series* No. SSR-5, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2011.

[26] *Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management*, 5 September 1997, 2153 UNTS 303.

[27] P. L. Johnson, "The Law of the International Atomic Energy Agency", cit., p. 36.

[28] Tale limitazione è stata tuttavia in parte attenuata dalla scelta dei principali Stati industrializzati che effettuano riprocessamenti su larga scala, in particolare Francia, Giappone e Regno Unito, di presentare dichiarazioni volontarie di inclusione già durante i negoziati della Convenzione. A tal proposito si v. *Summary Record of the 4th Plenary Meeting*, RWSC/DC/SR 4, paras. 93–5, in IAEA/GOV/INF/821-GC(41)/INF/12, 1997.

permanentemente nel quadro di "programmi civili" o alternativamente se la parte interessata dichiari di volerli far rientrare nel quadro convenzionale.

Come visto per la CNS, anche la Convenzione congiunta trova applicazione sia ad impianti nucleari nuovi che ad impianti nucleari preesistenti, tuttavia, per questi ultimi, l'adeguamento agli standard di sicurezza in materia di gestione dei rifiuti sembra essere formulato in maniera più attenuata, giacché non impone un adattamento retroattivo automatico agli stessi, richiedendo piuttosto allo Stato contraente, qualora fosse necessario, l'adozione di "tutti i miglioramenti ragionevolmente praticabili". La Convenzione del 1997 peraltro richiede agli Stati il rispetto di un requisito generale di diligenza, invitando questi ultimi a prendere tutte le "misure appropriate" per garantire che in ogni fase della gestione del combustibile esaurito e dei rifiuti radioattivi gli individui, esseri umani e ambiente siano adeguatamente protetti dai rischi radiologici e da altri rischi, provvedendo altresì alla definizione di norme specifiche concernenti la localizzazione, progettazione e costruzione degli impianti di gestione dei rifiuti, la valutazione della sicurezza e il funzionamento degli stessi, nonché lo smaltimento e la chiusura di questi ultimi. Anche in questo caso il ricorso a formule elastiche quali "ragionevolmente praticabile" o "appropriato" ha sollevato diverse perplessità in dottrina. Analogamente a quanto previsto dalla CNS, il rispetto della Convenzione congiunta viene garantito attraverso un obbligo di rendicontazione nazionale degli Stati, maggiormente oneroso rispetto a quello della CNS, nonché tramite un meccanismo di *peer review*.

Infine, la Convenzione del 1997 prevede che i rifiuti o il combustibile esaurito possano essere esportati esclusivamente se lo Stato di destinazione possegga la capacità necessaria per gestire tali materiali in modo conforme alla Convenzione e se abbia espresso il proprio previo consenso informato. Il regime invece dalla Convenzione per gli Stati di transito si limita a prevedere che "transboundary movement through States of transit shall be subject to those international obligations which are relevant to the particular modes of transport utilized", senza chiarire di che obblighi si tratti.

Anche il trasporto di materiale radioattivo costituisce senza dubbio una componente importante della *safety* nucleare. A rilevare sono in particolare i rischi in termini di sicurezza del trasporto, che devono essere, per quanto possibile, gestiti in modo da evitare incidenti che possano provocare danni alle persone o all'ambiente. Pur non esistendo attualmente una convenzione internazionale specifica sul tema, la maggior parte degli strumenti internazionali adottati in ambito nucleare trova attualmente applicazione, direttamente o indirettamente, alle attività di trasporto, con la sola eccezione della CNS. Con riferimento invece a standard e principi non vincolanti adottati nel quadro dell'IAEA, a rilevare sono in particolare le *Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Materials*[29], elaborate

[29] *Regulations for the Safe Transport of Radioactive Material*, *IAEA Safety Standards Series* No. SSR-6 (Rev. 2), *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2025.

originariamente nel 1961, riviste poi in più occasioni, da ultimo nel 2018, successivamente fatte confluire nella *IAEA Safety Standards Series*, in particolare nei *Safety Requirements*. Le *Regulations* stabiliscono controlli e requisiti atti a garantire la protezione e la sicurezza delle persone e dell'ambiente dagli effetti nocivi dei materiali radioattivi e dalle radiazioni ionizzanti durante il trasporto degli stessi. Quest'ultimo viene qualificato come comprendente tutte le operazioni e le condizioni associate e connesse al movimento di materiale radioattivo, condotte via terra, via mare o per via aerea, intra-nazionali così come inter-nazionali. Nello specifico, le *Regulations* sul trasporto stabiliscono controlli e requisiti tecnici concernenti in particolare la progettazione, la fabbricazione, la manutenzione e la riparazione degli imballaggi, nonché la preparazione, la spedizione, il carico, il trasporto, inclusa la sosta in transito, la spedizione successiva allo stoccaggio, lo scarico e la ricezione presso la destinazione finale di materiale radioattivo.

3.1.2 La dimensione reattiva della *nuclear safety*

La preparazione e la risposta ad eventuali incidenti nucleari costituiscono una componente altrettanto fondamentale del regime internazionale atto a garantire la *safety* nucleare. Come si ha avuto modo di constatare in precedenza, il quadro giuridico internazionale inerente alle misure di risposta in caso di emergenze nucleari conobbe uno sviluppo progressivo a seguito degli incidenti di Three Mile Island e Chernobyl, ciascuno dei quali diede impulso all'adozione di specifiche regolamentazioni in materia. Se da un lato infatti il primo contribuì all'adozione delle già menzionate *Guidelines for Mutual Emergency Assistance Arrangements* e *Guidelines on Reportable Events*, il secondo fu determinante ai fini della conclusione della *Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident* e della *Convention on Assistance in case of Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency* del 1986. Con riferimento alla Convenzione sulla notifica tempestiva, questa trova applicazione nel caso di incidenti nucleari che coinvolgano impianti o attività di una Parte contraente dai quali si verifichi, o sia probabile che si verifichi, un rilascio di materiale radioattivo che abbia causato, o sia in grado di causare, un rilascio transfrontaliero internazionale potenzialmente rilevante, sotto il profilo della sicurezza radiologica, per un altro Stato. Il testo convenzionale, tuttavia, come rilevato criticamente in dottrina[30], non fornisce alcuna indicazione in merito all'entità del rilascio di materiale radioattivo idonea a rilevare ai fini della sicurezza radiologica, rimettendo dunque tale valutazione alla discrezionalità degli Stati. Dal suo ambito di applicazione sono peraltro esclusi gli incidenti che riguardino strutture ed impianti militari.

[30] A. Anastassov, "Some Aspects of the Effectiveness of the International Regulatory Framework to Ensure Nuclear Safety", cit., p. 222.

La Convenzione configura diversi obblighi a carico degli Stati parte, tra di essi in particolare rientrano l'obbligo di notificare tempestivamente, direttamente o tramite l'AIEA, gli Stati che siano stati o possano essere fisicamente colpiti dall'incidente, nonché l'obbligo di fornire tempestivamente tutte le informazioni pertinenti che possano consentire una minimizzazione delle conseguenze radiologiche. Al fine di facilitare il processo di notifica regolato dalla Convenzione, viene altresì prevista la necessaria istituzione di un punto di contatto nazionale che agisca prontamente in tali circostanze. Nel 2007 l'AIEA ha provveduto ad elaborare un manuale apposito, *l'Emergency Notification and Assistance Technical Operations Manual* (ENATOM)[31], volto ad assistere le autorità nazionali nella corretta attuazione delle disposizioni della Convenzione. Ad esso è stato aggiunto, a seguito dell'incidente di Fukushima Daiichi del 2011, l'*Operations Manual for Incident and Emergency Communication*[32], aggiornato poi nel 2019, finalizzato a disciplinare più nel dettaglio le procedure operative da seguire per le notifiche e lo scambio di informazioni in caso di emergenze nucleari.

Con riferimento invece alla Convenzione sull'assistenza, quest'ultima istituisce un sistema fondato sulla cooperazione tra Stati parte in caso di incidente nucleare o emergenza radiologica, al fine di minimizzarne le possibili conseguenze nocive. Ai sensi della Convenzione, uno Stato parte che necessiti di assistenza in caso di incidente nucleare o di emergenza radiologica, indipendentemente dal fatto che tale incidente o emergenza abbia avuto origine o meno nel proprio territorio, può richiedere supporto a qualsiasi altro Stato parte, sia direttamente che tramite l'AIEA, o altresì all'Agenzia stessa così come ad altre organizzazioni intergovernative internazionali. Occorre sottolineare come, ai sensi della Convenzione, non sussista alcun obbligo da parte degli Stati di prestare assistenza, neppure nel caso in cui a causare il danno sia un impianto presente nel loro territorio. L'intensità e il genere di assistenza devono essere specificati dallo Stato richiedente o in ogni caso concordati con esso, giacché quest'ultimo mantiene in ogni caso la direzione ed il controllo complessivi delle operazioni nel proprio territorio, potendo decidere in qualsiasi momento di porvi fine. Anche nel caso della Convenzione sull'assistenza viene prevista l'istituzione di punti di contatto nazionali, finalizzati al coordinamento e alla prestazione del supporto. Al fine di assistere le autorità nazionali nella corretta messa in opera delle disposizioni della Convenzione, l'AIEA ha istituito un *Response and Assistance Network* (RANET), una rete internazionale coordinata dalla stessa agenzia che ha l'obiettivo di fornire assistenza rapida e qualificata in caso di gravi incidenti nucleari.

[31] *Emergency Notification and Assistance Technical Operations Manual*, EPR-ENATOM, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2007.
[32] *Operations Manual for Incident and Emergency Communication*, EPR-IEComm, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), 2012 e 2019.

3.2 La *nuclear security* nel regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare

Altra dimensione fondamentale del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare è la *nuclear security*, distinta, come menzionato in precedenza, dalla *nuclear safety*, in quanto non finalizzata alla protezione da incidenti o guasti involontari degli impianti nucleari, ma bensì alla prevenzione e protezione di questi ultimi da atti criminali internazionali riconducibili ad attori non statali. La *nuclear security*, come definita dall'IAEA, consiste infatti nel complesso di norme, sistemi e misure finalizzate alla prevenzione, l'individuazione e la risposta ad atti criminali o ad atti intenzionali non autorizzati che coinvolgano o siano diretti contro materiale nucleare, altri materiali radioattivi, impianti associati o attività connesse[33]. Tale dimensione, nel quadro dell'IAEA, viene principalmente affrontata sotto il profilo della "protezione fisica" degli impianti nucleari e del materiale nucleare dalla loro rimozione non autorizzata o altresì dal loro sabotaggio, in quanto passibili di produrre conseguenze radiologiche[34]. A tale riguardo, nel 1972, l'AIEA ha elaborato le *Nuclear Security Recommendations on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear Facilities*[35]. Tali Raccomandazioni si concentrano principalmente su tre tipologie di rischi, per l'appunto la rimozione non autorizzata di materiale nucleare, il sabotaggio di installazioni nucleari e di materiale nucleare ed infine la rimozione non autorizzata e il sabotaggio di materiale nucleare durante il trasporto. Per ciascuno di essi le raccomandazioni adottano un approccio proporzionato al rischio, individuando livelli di minaccia diversi, ai quali corrispondono misure di protezione più o meno rigorose, a seconda della gravità del rischio considerato.

La "protezione fisica" nucleare è stata altresì oggetto di una Convenzione elaborata nel quadro dell'AIEA, la *Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material*[36] del 1979. Originariamente limitata alla sola protezione dei materiali nucleari durante il trasporto internazionale, la Convenzione venne emendata a seguito degli attentati terroristici dell'11 settembre del 2001[37], finendo così per ricomprendere i materiali nucleari in generale, senza esclusivo riferimento al trasporto, nonché le installazioni nucleari utilizzate per scopi pacifici. Gli obiettivi della Convenzione, così emendata, sono il conseguimento ed il mantenimento di un'efficace protezione del materiale nucleare e degli impianti nucleari utilizzati a fini pacifici, così come la prevenzione e il contrasto dei

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[33] *IAEA Nuclear Safety and Security Glossary: Terminology Used in Nuclear Safety, Nuclear Security, Radiation Protection and Emergency Preparedness and Response*, 2022 *Interim Edition*, *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)*, Vienna, 2022, p. 140.

[34] *Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear Facilities* (*Implementation of* INFCIRC/225/Revision 5*), IAEA Nuclear Security Series, No. 27-G, International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna*,* 2018, p. 4, n. 1.

[35] *Nuclear Security Recommendations on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and Nuclear Facilities* (INFCIRC/225/Revision 5), *IAEA Nuclear Security Series No. 13*, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2011.

[36] *Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material*, 26 October 1979, 1456 UNTS 101.

[37] *Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material*, INFCIRC/274/Rev.1/Mod.1, *International Atomic Energy Agency* (IAEA), Vienna, 2005.

reati relativi a tali materiali ed impianti, ed infine il facilitare la cooperazione tra Stati in tale ambito. L'emendamento alla Convenzione peraltro ha introdotto dodici "Principi fondamentali di protezione fisica del materiale nucleare e delle installazioni nucleari" che gli Stati parte sono tenuti ad applicare nei limiti di quanto ragionevole e praticabile. Tali principi sanciscono la responsabilità dello Stato parte per la protezione fisica del materiale nucleare e delle installazioni sul proprio territorio, richiedendo allo stesso che tale responsabilità sia chiaramente attribuita e definita e che venga adottato un quadro legislativo e regolatorio dettagliato in materia, includente l'individuazione di specifici reati e sanzioni corrispondenti alle condotte contrarie alla Convenzione. Nei suddetti principi viene altresì richiesto agli Stati parte di identificare e valutare le potenziali minacce alla sicurezza nucleare nel proprio territorio, individuando gli obiettivi più critici e le potenziali conseguenze di un loro attacco, nonché di predisporre sistemi di rilevamento di eventi rilevanti sul piano della sicurezza nucleare e di pianificazione, preparazione e risposta ad essi. Il processo innescato dagli eventi dell'11 settembre ha condotto peraltro ad un rafforzamento della criminalizzazione del terrorismo nucleare, altro aspetto particolarmente rilevante nel quadro della sicurezza fisica nucleare, in particolare tramite l'adozione, sempre nel 2005, della *International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism*[38].

4. Conclusioni

Dall'analisi condotta emerge chiaramente come la sicurezza nucleare abbia rivestito, sin dalle fasi iniziali di sviluppo della tecnologia nucleare, un ruolo senza dubbio fondamentale nel quadro della regolamentazione dell'uso pacifico dell'energia nucleare e come questa permanga oggi al primo posto tra le priorità dell'IAEA così come degli Stati della comunità internazionale. La centralità del tema della sicurezza trova espressa manifestazione nell'articolato *corpus* di strumenti giuridici che, negli ultimi sessant'anni, ha contribuito a definire e consolidare il regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare nella forma in cui si presenta oggi. Tale centralità risulta oggi ulteriormente rafforzata alla luce del rinnovato interesse verso l'energia nucleare dettato dalle recenti politiche globali orientate alla transizione verso sistemi energetici a basse emissioni, nell'ambito delle quali la sicurezza nucleare assume un ruolo centrale ai fini del rilancio dell'energia nucleare come viabile e, soprattutto, sicura alternativa alle fonti energetiche fossili.

Come si ha avuto modo di constatare, pur presentando senza dubbio numerosi e preponderanti elementi di forza, il regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare attualmente vigente manifesta alcuni limiti e criticità. Un aspetto che indubbiamente genera perplessità è la natura sostanzialmente non vincolante di buona parte degli strumenti normativi adottati nel quadro della sicurezza nucleare

[38] *International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism*, 13 April 2005, 2445 UNTS 89.

internazionale, che tendono ad assumere la forma di standard, codici di condotta e linee guida non costitutivi di obblighi diretti in capo agli Stati, a meno che questi non vengano poi espressamente inseriti in convenzioni specifiche.

D'altro canto anche le convenzioni internazionali alla base del regime internazionale di sicurezza nucleare non sono esenti da profili di problematicità, tra questi anzitutto la presenza di obblighi formulati in termini spesso eccessivamente generali o flessibili, i quali, garantendo considerevole discrezionalità agli Stati parte, tendono a favorire l'adozione di misure spesso inadeguate e tendenzialmente disomogenee da Stato a Stato. Peraltro, come si è potuto constatare previamente, suddette convenzioni prevedono, quali strumenti di verifica dell'adempimento degli obblighi in esse sanciti, meccanismi di *peer review*, la cui concreta e reale efficacia ai fini di una precisa osservanza delle norme convenzionali rimane ad oggi ampiamente dibattuta.

A mancare sono altresì efficaci meccanismi di *enforcement* che garantiscano il rispetto delle disposizioni sancite nei trattati, non essendo da questi ultimi previsti strumenti coercitivi o sanzionatori ai quali ricorrere in caso di violazione delle norme pattizie. Dette criticità sono tendenzialmente il risultato di una generale ritrosia degli Stati ad accettare vincoli e meccanismi di controllo internazionali in un settore, quale quello nucleare, storicamente rivendicato come materia di sovranità interna. Negli ultimi anni sono tuttavia state avanzate in dottrina diverse proposte di riforma del sistema, finalizzate a garantire un generale miglioramento del regime, senza pregiudicare necessariamente l'equilibrio tra sovranità nazionale e sicurezza globale. Tra le prospettive di riforma emerge, in particolare, l'ipotesi di adottare alcuni standard di sicurezza vincolanti, da affiancare agli standard preesistenti. Sono altresì state prospettate diverse soluzioni finalizzate a rafforzare l'efficacia dei meccanismi di *peer review* e dei relativi obblighi di *reporting*, focalizzate principalmente sull'obbligatorietà della partecipazione agli stessi, la maggiore trasparenza e pubblicità dei rapporti, così come la vincolatività dei successivi *follow-up*. Peraltro, al fine di assicurare una maggiore aderenza alle disposizioni fissate nelle convenzioni, è stata frequentemente prospettata la possibilità di conferire all'AIEA un potere di ispezione, ovviamente su base consensuale, modellato su quello già previsto in materia di salvaguardie.

Negli ultimi anni sembra infine essere sempre più avvertita la generale esigenza di introdurre un quadro convenzionale unitario in materia di sicurezza nucleare, che consenta di superare la frammentazione normativa attualmente esistente, caratterizzata dalla coesistenza di strumenti eterogenei che danno luogo, non di rado, a sovrapposizioni o lacune. Una riforma del regime attualmente esistente sarebbe auspicabile e donerebbe senza dubbio nuova forza e legittimazione all'uso pacifico dell'energia nucleare, quanto più necessaria nell'attuale quadro di transizione energetica, dato il ruolo chiave che questa potrebbe essere chiamata a svolgere in tale contesto.

The Republic of Yemen: A Contemporary History of Persistent Crisis and State Fragility (1990-2026)

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Abstract

The political history of the Republic of Yemen has been marked by persistent instability. The downsides of a hurried unification process, the weight of a corrupt patronage system and the mismanagement of public finances have generated enduring grievances across multiple segments of the population. Since its establishment in 1990, the Yemeni state has consequently faced recurrent and often violent opposition from a range of domestic actors. These internal dynamics have been further exacerbated by the intervention of external powers pursuing their geopolitical interests, contributing to the protracted nature of political violence in the country. Together, these factors have severely undermined the security of the Yemeni population.

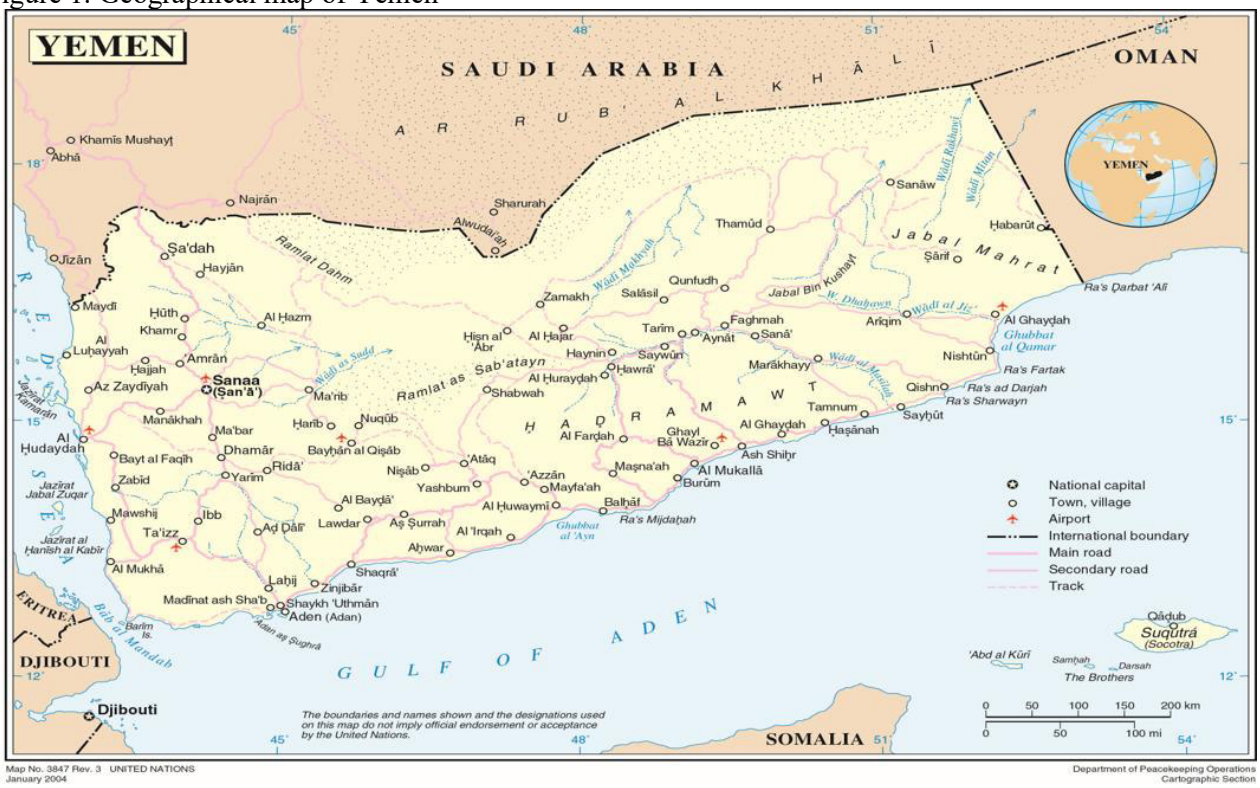
Keywords: Civil War, Foreign Influence, Rivalry, Security, Sovereignty.

Sommario: 1. Introduction – 2. Research Problem and Methodology – 3. Theoretical Framework – 4. Yemen's Political History in the Literature: 4.1. Internal Dynamics Before the ROY: the YAR (1962-1990) and the PDRY (1967-1990); 4.2. Internal Dynamics After Unification: From 1990 to the Civil War; 4.3. External Influences: the KSA, Iran, and the UAE – 5. Conclusion

1. Introduction

The Republic of Yemen (hereafter ROY) is an Arab country located in the south-western part of the Arabian Peninsula, bordering Saudi Arabia (KSA) to the north and Oman to the east. It is bordered to the south by the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, and to the west by the Red Sea. Yemen shares the Bab el-Mandeb Strait—a crucial geopolitical and economic chokepoint—with the African states of Djibouti and Eritrea.

Figure 1. Geographical map of Yemen



Source: https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/yemen

In 2024, the Fragile State Index ranked Yemen as the sixth most fragile country in the world out of the 179 analysed.[1] In 2025, the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) *Human Development Report* ranked Yemen 184th out of 193 countries.[2] Moreover, according to the 2025 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report, *Yemen: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan*, an estimated 19.5 million people across Yemeni require humanitarian assistance; roughly 30% of them are children under five years of age.[3] The same report notes that approximately 3.2 million Yemeni children are not attending school, 4.8 million people are

[1] Fragile State Index 2024, Global Data, The Fund For Peace, https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/.
[2] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Human Development Report 2025: A Matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI", UNDP, 2025, file:///C:/Users/Utente/Downloads/hdr2025reporten.pdf.
[3] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Yemen: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025", OCHA, https://yemen.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/HNRP_2025_Yemen_EN.pdf.

internally displaced—making Yemen the world's fifth-largest internal displacement crisis—around 17.1 million people are food insecure, five million people are on the brink of famine, and around 40% of the country's healthcare facilities are partially functioning or completely out of service.[4]

How did Yemen reach this point? One premise should be noted regarding the ROY: throughout its troubled history, the state has consistently been both politically and military weak. It has never been able to extend a monopoly on the legitimate use of force across its entire territory—especially across large rural areas—due either to strong tribal resistance to central authority in the north-west or to widespread hostility toward the government in the south.[5] This persistent weakness has enabled non-state actors to challenge state sovereignty, especially after the 2011 protests and the following crisis that ended Ali Abdullah Saleh's 21-year rule.

Recent Yemeni history has been shaped by the civil war that began in September 2014, when the armed movement Ansar Allah took over the capital, Sana'a.[6] Although the intensity of the conflict decreased following the April 2022 truce, and peace discussions between the KSA and Ansar Allah took place in 2023, the political process needed to achieve an official peace agreement remains stalled.[7] The civil war—driven by rivalries among Yemeni factions and exacerbated by foreign powers such as the KSA, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Iran—has produced not only the major humanitarian crisis described above but also a severe economic collapse: Yemen's real GDP has contracted by 43% and its per-capita real GDP has declined by 58% compared with pre-war levels.[8] Politically, the country faces an unprecedented governance crisis, as there is currently no unified government whose authority is broadly recognised across Yemen. In 2018, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen warned that "The authority of the legitimate Government of Yemen has now eroded to the point that it is doubtful whether it will ever be able to reunite Yemen as a single country".[9]

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[4] *Ibid.*; USA for UNHCR, "Yemen Crisis Explained", USA for UNHCR, 27/03/2025, https://www.unrefugees.org/news/yemen-crisis-explained/.

[5] T. Juneau, "Yemen: Prospects for State Failure – Implications and Remedies", Middle East Policy, 17 (2010), 3, pp. 134-5; J. E. Peterson, "Tribes and Politics in Yemen", Arabian Peninsula Background Note, APBN-007 (2008), p. 9.

[6] BBC News, "How Yemen's capital Sanaa was seized by Houthi rebels", BBC, 27/09/2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-29380668.

[7] Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, "Saudi-Houthi Talks Stall", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 15/05/2023, https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/april-2023/20164; A. Al-Jabrani, "The Houthi Delegates to Riyad", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 23/11/2023, https://sanaacenter.org/files/The_Houthi_Delegates_to_Riyadh_en.pdf.

[8] The World Bank, "Yemen Economic Monitor: Persistent Fragility amid Rising Risks" (2025), https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099822505292530706/pdf/IDU-7009880b-d070-472d-9bf2-5cc72a3fc75d.pdf.

[9] United Nations Security Council (UNSC), "Letter dated 26 January 2018 from the Panel of Experts on Yemen mandated by Security Council resolution 2342 (2017) addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC, 2018, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1639536?v=pdf.

2. Research Problem and Methodology

This paper analyses the political history of the ROY from 1990to the present day, preceded by an examination of the two Yemeni states that existed before unification: the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The paper is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the main rivalries among Yemen's internal actors since the 1960s; the second examines three important regional actors—the KSA, Iran, and the UAE—that have been involved in Yemen's political and military affairs in more recent times, with the KSA having a longer history of influence in the country. "Fragility" has been a defining feature of the ROY for decades.[10] Therefore, I found compelling to investigate this topic in order to understand the principal dynamics leading to the severe insecurity the country has experienced since 2014.

The research question (R. Q.) of this paper is: *In what ways have internal political dynamics and foreign interference affected ROY's sovereignty and security since its establishment in 1990?*

The aim of this paper is to investigate the reasons why the ROY has been a state prone to instability throughout its history. This assumption will be evaluated by:

1. Identifying the main rivalries within Yemen's national politics and the primary drivers of competition. For reasons of conciseness, this paper does not cover the Hirak (the Southern Secessionist Movement, established in 2007) or Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) as non-state actors;[11]
2. Identifying the main foreign states that have influenced ROY's politics, both in recent and earlier periods, and outlining their respective interests;
3. Assessing whether these internal and external rivalries have contributed to undermining the country's political stability, and therefore its security and sovereignty.

The research hypothesis (R. H.) is that the greater the number of national and international actors involved in a country's internal affairs, the more that country's political stability and sovereignty are likely to erode, resulting in greater insecurity for its civilian population. To address the purpose of this study, I have used both primary and secondary sources, including official documents by international organisations, translated documents, books, scholarly articles, research papers, reports by international organisations, online magazines, and newspaper articles.

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[10] Fragile States Index, Country Dashboard: Yemen (2006-2024), The Fund for Peace, https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/.

[11] For further information on the development and role of AQAP in Yemen, see M. S. Siyech, "Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's Rise in Yemen: An Examination", chapter 2 in M. Ebrahimi and K. Yusoff (eds.), *The Middle East Arc of Crisis: Political Spinoff and Developmental Outcome*, Johor Bahru, IND, Penerbit UTM Press, 2018, pp. 25-45;
For further information on the genesis of the Hirak movement, see S.W. Day, "The Role of Hirak and the Southern Transitional Council", chapter 16 in S.W. Day and N. Brehony (eds.), *Global, Regional, and Local Dynamics in the Yemeni Crisis*, Cham, CH, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 253-70.

3. Theoretical Framework

'Sovereignty' is generally defined as the "supreme authority in a state".[12] Núñez (2024), distinguishes between *de facto* sovereignty, which pertains to "the actual control a population or their representatives have over a territory", and *de jure* sovereignty, which implies both "[…] the existence of a set of law-making and law-applying authorities (government) within a territory and in respect of a population", and "[…] recognition by peers as sole lawmakers and law interpreters with regard to a defined population and territory".[13]

Mackinda (1998), in his definition of *internal* sovereignty, argues that it is "a principle which legitimizes internal political organization and control".[14] Internal sovereignty revolves around population, territory, and recognised authority; it is predicated on the principle that every state is free to pursue its domestic affairs without interference, and refers both to the right and the capacity to exercise control.[15] In the same work, Mackinda defines 'security' as "the preservation of the norms, rules, institutions and values of society", a definition that includes the preservation of the states system, the protection of people from military and non-military threats, and the guarantee of basic needs and fundamental freedoms.[16]

Similarly, Baldwin (1997), defines 'security' as "a low probability of damage to acquired values", and argues that security, in its most general sense, can be understood through two guiding questions: 1) Security for whom? and 2) Security for which values?[17] In the former case, he refers to the security of individuals, states, and international systems; in the latter, he refers to values such as physical safety, economic welfare, personal autonomy, psychological well-being of individuals, and the political independence and territorial integrity of states.[18]

Orji and Nwagbara (2024), define 'political instability' as "the innate propensity of a government to fall, either as a result of developing hostilities or disputes between different political groups, which can occasionally turn violent".[19] They also describe political instability as the "reverse of political stability", meaning that while political stability fosters social, economic, and political development—and includes national security, good governance, and social peace—political instability reflects the absence of these elements.[20] According to the authors, political instability

[12] E. A. Martin (ed.), *A Dictionary of Law*, 5th ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 469.
[13] J. E. Núñez, "State Sovereignty: Concept and Conceptions", Int J Semiot Law, 37 (2024), p. 2139.
[14] S.M. Makinda, "Sovereignty and Global Security", Security Dialogue, 29 (1998), 3, pp. 281-2.
[15] *Ibid.*.
[16] S.M. Makinda, "Sovereignty and Global Security", cit., p. 282.
[17] D.A. Baldwin, "The concept of security", Review of International Studies, 23 (1997), p. 13.
[18] *Ibid.*.
[19] C. P. Orji and R.G. Nwagbara, "Examination of the causes of political instability and the implications in modern society", Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities, 10 (2024), 2, p. 68.
[20] C. P. Orji and R.G. Nwagbara, "Examination of the causes of political instability and the implications in modern society", cit., p. 69.

generally leads affected societies to grow less politically and economically, which is why such societies are often classified as least developed.[21]

Political instability can lead to state failure. Rotberg (2002) argues that failure for a nation-state "looms when violence cascades into all-out internal war, when standards of living massively deteriorate, when the infrastructure of ordinary life decays, and when the greed of rulers overwhelms their responsibilities to better their people and their surroundings".[22] He maintains that state failure can be attributed primarily to the state's inability to control its borders and extend its authority beyond the capital city and one or more ethnically specific zones.[23] Carment (2003) adds that other major indicators of state failure are: economic weakness; non-existence of education and healthcare; physical infrastructure's breakdown; out-of-control escalation of crime and violence.[24]

Similarly, Gros (2010) notes that failed states' lack of amplitude of power "is usually experienced first in the periphery, because states behave like discriminating monopolists and do not spread their assets evenly throughout their territory".[25] According to him, nearly all contemporary failed states "have been misled by putative strongmen who mistook their country for their household, treated the national treasury as though it were their personal piggy bank, considered elite members as either their "boys" or enemies, and in the process alienated the very people they needed to govern".[26] Gros also highlights one of the paradoxes of failed states—namely, that they tend to be heavily militarised—and argues that the link between militarisation and state failure is actually straightforward: "in the face of declining revenue, rising demand for services, and intra-elite division, state makers deploy resources toward the acquisition of the means of violence and the paying off of armed supporters".[27] However, he adds, an increase in military spending does not necessarily improve a failed state's capacity to maintain order or wage war, "as much of the spending goes toward the buying of loyalty, the acquisition of frivolous hardware intended to intimidate the population, or simply into the ruler's foreign bank accounts".[28]

Finally, Stedman (1999), argues that almost every civil war is characterised by some purposeful effects from foreign agents' actions—the so called "external component", or "bad neighbours": these include external actors' support for internal factions and governments through weapons supply,

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[21]C. P. Orji and R. G. Nwagbara, "Examination of the causes of political instability and the implications in modern society", cit., p. 74.
[22]R. I. Rotberg, "The New Nature of Nation-State Failure", The Washington Quarterly, 25 (2002), 3, p. 86.
[23]*Ibid.*.
[24]D. Carment, "Assessing state failure: implications for theory and policy", Third World Quarterly, 24 (2003), 3, p. 409.
[25]J.-G. Gros, "Failed States in Theoretical, Historical, and Policy Perspectives", chapter 23 in W. Heitmeyer, H.-G. Haupt, S. Malthaner, A. Kirschner (eds.),*Control of Violence*, New York, NY, Springer, 2010, p. 539.
[26] J.-G. Gros, "Failed States in Theoretical, Historical, and Policy Perspectives", cit., p. 545.
[27] J.-G. Gros, "Failed States in Theoretical, Historical, and Policy Perspectives", cit., p. 548.
[28]*Ibid.*.

military training, and financial, logistical, or military assistance.[29] Stedman argues that interstate wars are more likely to end through negotiation than civil conflicts for different reasons: 1) parties in civil wars face a severe security dilemma, since negotiated settlements often require disbanding their armies to form a new national force, creating fears that adversaries may exploit the settlement to eliminate them; 2) parties in civil wars often fight over principles for which compromise is difficult; 3) parties often use total-war rhetoric and pledge to eliminate their rivals if they come to power.[30]

4. Internal Dynamics Before the ROY: the YAR (1962-1990) and the PDRY (1967-1990)

Before 22 May 1990,Yemen's territory was divided into two states: the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), or "North Yemen", and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), or "South Yemen". The YAR was established in 1962 following a coup led by a group of Republican army officers headed by Abdullah al-Sallal, who overthrew the theocratic regime of the Zayidi[31] Shi'a Imamate—officially the "Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen"—that had ruled over northern Yemen intermittently for a thousand years, and continuously since 1918, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I.[32] The "September Revolution" was followed by an eight-year civil conflict between the Royalist supporters of the Imamate, backed by Saudi Arabia, and the Republicans, who—supported until 1967 by the Egyptian army—managed to formally take control of northern Yemen beginning in 1970.[33] Egypt's withdrawal from North Yemen, following the August 1967 Arab League Summit held in Khartoum, facilitated the toppling of President al-Sallal and the reconciliation between the two warring parties; the reconciliation produced a settlement that formally assigned political power to the Republicans while granting senior state office to major tribal

[29]S. J. Stedman, "International Actors and Internal Conflicts", New York, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, 1999, pp. 5, 7.
[30]S. J. Stedman, "International Actors and Internal Conflicts", cit., p. 16.
[31]Zaydism is one of the branches of Shi'a Islam and is primarily concentrated in the northern Yemeni province of Sa'dah, whose capital, Sa'dah, served as the capital of Yemen's first Zaydi Imamate from the ninth to the seventeenth century. State authority in this region has historically been weak, which helps to explain why the Believing Youth (Houthi) rebellion against the government emerged there in the 1990s. Zaydism is named after Zayd ibn 'Ali, a grandson of Husayn—and thus a great-grandson of the Prophet Muhammad—who led an unsuccessful rebellion against the Umayyad caliph Hisham in 740. Followers of this tradition regard Zayd as the fifth Imam and are therefore known as "Fivers". See L. Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", Middle East Policy, 18 (2011), 1, pp. 103-5; A. Salmoni, B. Loidolt, and M. Wellspp, "Appendix B:Zaydism: Overview and Comparison to Other Versions of Shi'ism", in *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation, 2010, pp. 286, 291.
[32] K. Fattah, "A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen", Alternative Politics, Special Issue I (2010), p. 28; P. Salisbury, "Yemen: Stemming the Rise of a Chaos State", Chatham House (2016), https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2016-05-25-yemen-stemming-rise-of-chaos-state-salisbury.pdf; J. M. Dostal, "From Fragile to Collapsed Statehood: The Case of the Republic of Yemen (1990-2020)", Korean Journal of Policy Studies, 36 (2021), 1, p. 70.
[33] K. Fattah, "A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen", cit., p. 32; M. Al-Saidi, "Legacies of state-building and political fragility in conflict-ridden Yemen: Understanding civil service change and contemporary challenges", Cogent Social Sciences, 6 (2020), 1, p. 4;

leaders (sheikhs) in exchange for their loyalty to the regime.[34] These patterns of power relations would become a defining feature of YAR politics—and later, of the ROY as well. After a period marked by internal struggles and by the political assassinations of two Presidents, Ibrahim al-Hamdi and Ahmad al-Ghashmi, Ali Abdullah Saleh—future President of the unified Yemen—became head of state of the YAR in 1978.[35]

In southern Yemen, a movement called the National Liberation Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (NLF), launched an armed struggle to obtain independence from the United Kingdom (UK) in 1963 and managed to control most of the territory by 1967.[36] The NLF officially renamed southern Yemen the "People's Democratic Republic of Yemen" in 1970, and governed it until 1978, when the party was reorganised and renamed the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP).[37] After adopting a Marxist-Leninist system of governance, the PDRY became the only socialist state in the Arab World and developed a close relationship with the USSR.[38] The 1970s in Yemen were marked by two border conflicts between PDRY and YAR, in 1972 and 1979, both of which ended with formal unification agreements between the two states.[39] Although less corrupt than its northern counterpart, PDRY still experienced episodes of major political tension.[40] The history of the southern Yemeni state was irreversibly shaped by the YSP intra-party struggle in January 1986, when, at the height of a severe internal crisis, PDRY President and YSP Secretary-General Ali Nasir Muhammad ordered his armed guards to open fire on members of the rival faction prior to a Politburo meeting in Aden.[41] YSP Deputy Secretary-General Ali Ahmad Nasir Antar, Defense Minister Salih Muslih Qasim, and former YSP Secretary-General/PDRY President Abd al-Fattah Ismail—revolutionaries of the 1960s who were critical of Muhammad's economic opening to the West in the 1980s—were all killed on 13 January.[42] This event triggered a brief civil war between the two rival factions of the YSP and ended

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[34] Y. Meital, "The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War: A Reexamination", Middle East Journal, 54 (2000), 1, p. 75; R. D. Burrowes, "Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic, 1962-1990", International Journal of Middle East Studies, 23 (1991), 4, p. 486.

[35] M. Al-Saidi, "Legacies of state-building and political fragility in conflict-ridden Yemen", cit., p. 4;

[36] H. Lackner, "Yemen's Socialist Experiment Was a Political Landmark for the Arab World", Jacobin, 04/08/2022, https://jacobin.com/2022/08/socialism-arab-world-peoples-democratic-republic-of-yemen-history;

[37] N. Brehony, "Yemen and the Huthis: Genesis of the 2015 crisis", Asian Affairs, 46 (2015), 2, p. 233; T. Al-Ganad, "A history of Yemen political parties: from armed struggle to armed repression", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies 07/02/2022, https://sanaacenter.org/files/A_History_of_Yemeni_Political_Parties_From_Armed_Struggle_to_Armed_Repression_en.pdf.

[38] H. Lackner, "The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Unique socialist experiment in the Arab world at a time of world revolutionary fervour", Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 0 (2017), 0, p. 2; For further information on the USSR-PDRY political, economic, and military relations, see N. Cigar, "South Yemen and the USSR: Prospects for the Relationship", Middle East Journal, 39 (1985), 4, pp. 775-95.

[39] H. Lackner, "The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen", cit., p. 6.

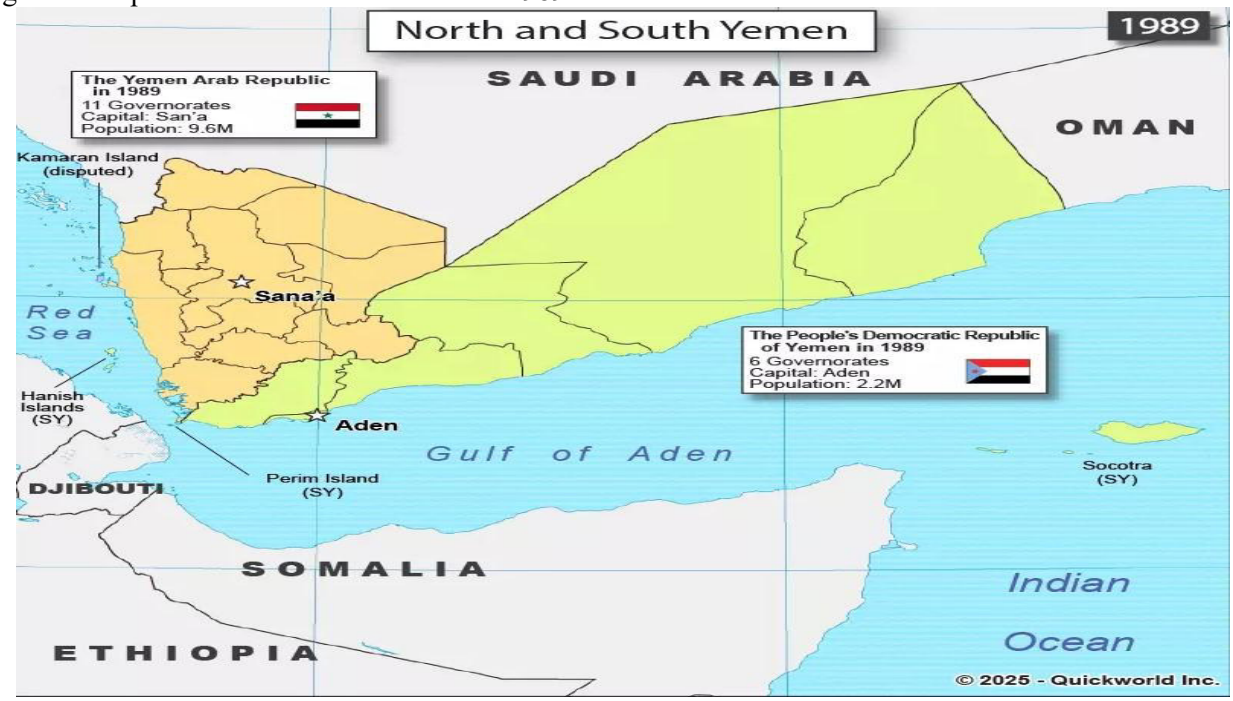
[40] *Ibid.*.

[41] R. D. Burrowes, "Oil Strike and Leadership Struggle in South Yemen: 1986 and Beyond", Middle East Journal, 43 (1989), 3, p. 442.

[42] *Ibid.;* M. N. Katz, "Civil Conflict in South Yemen", Middle East Review, 19 (1986), 1, p. 9.

with the takeover of Aden by Ali Nasir Muhammad's opponents and the subsequent exile of the President to North Yemen, along with about 60,000 of his military and civilian supporters.[43] Ali Salim al-Baydh, who survived the 13 January attack, became the new YSP Secretary-General and PDRY President, and Salim Salih Muhammad became Deputy Secretary-General.[44]

Figure 2. Map of North and South Yemen in 1989



Source: https://en.quickworld.com/map/north-and-south-yemen-1989

5. Internal Dynamics After Unification: From 1990 to the Civil War

In the following years, under the leadership of al-Baydh, the PDRY agreed to a full merger with the YAR, and on 30 November 1989 he signed an agreement for the unification of the two countries with YAR President Ali Abdullah Saleh in the PDRY capital, Aden.[45] On 22 April 1990, a second unification agreement was signed in the YAR capital, Sana'a, and a month later, on 22 May, the new unified state was officially established.[46] Although the YSP leaders supported the idea of unification, most of them favoured a more gradual process, beginning with a federal system in which only foreign

[43] H. Lackner, "The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen", cit., p. 10; M. N. Katz, "Civil Conflict in South Yemen", cit., p. 10.
[44] M. N. Katz, "Civil Conflict in South Yemen", cit., p.11.
[45] G. Nonneman, "The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond", chapter 4 in H. A. Jawad (ed.), *The Middle East in the New World Order*, 2nd ed., Basingstoke, MacMillan Press, p. 61.
[46] Agreement Establishing a Union between the State of the Yemen Arab Republic and the State of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, English translation, Sana'a, 22 April 1990, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/ye900422agreementestablishingunionyemen.pdf.

and diplomatic affairs should have been unified initially.[47] Saleh and al-Baydh became, respectively, President and Vice President of the ROY.

Unification was a matter of reciprocal convenience. It was encouraged by several factors, namely: 1) the 1984 discovery of oil fields in Marib, whose area bordered both states and convinced the two Yemeni Presidents to launch a joint oil exploration project in 1988; 2) South Yemen's severe payment crisis and the collapse of USSR starting in 1989—its main source of financial and technical support—as well as the PDRY's need for an estimated $120-150 million to cover the losses causes by the 1986 civil war; 3) the YAR's economic crisis beginning in 1979 and President Saleh's need to benefit from cooperation in the oil sector with the south—which was rumoured to possess larger oil reserves than the north—in order to reduce public dissatisfaction arising from the contrast between his optimistic claims about YAR oil resources and the reality on the ground.[48] As a symbol of the new national unity, there was an exchange of military deployments across the country, with southern troops moving to northern governorates and northern troops moving south.[49] This would later become a significant factor in the events of 1994.

The story of the newly born ROY was soon shaken by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. The ROY, which inherited from the YAR the membership in a Saddam Hussein-sponsored economic union—the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC)—was immediately affected by the Saudi and American decision to punish President Saleh's reluctance to condemn the war waged by the Iraqi President.[50] The KSA suspended all official transfers to the Yemeni government and expelled some 800,000 Yemeni workers who had been employed in the country since the 1970s—a decision that cost Yemen around $1.5 billion in remittances and caused a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate, up to 25%.[51] The U.S. administration, meanwhile, decided to suspend the annual $70 million development aid package to Yemen.[52]

In addition to this major economic crisis, the transition to a stable unified state was further complicated by internal issues. The unification was a hasty process that sought to bypass the major differences between the two previous regimes—first and foremost ideological ones, with the PDRY embracing socialist ideology and the YAR adopting a conservative "pseudo-republicanism" based on

[47] H. Lackner, "The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen", cit., p. 10; M. N. Katz, "Civil Conflict in South Yemen", cit., p. 11.
[48] G. Nonneman, "The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond", cit., pp. 64, 66-7; N. Brehony, "Yemen and the Huthis: Genesis of the 2015 crisis", cit., p. 236; A. B. Al-Saqqaf, "Problèmes de l'Unité Yéménite", Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée, 67 (1993), p. 96; S. Dingli, "The Politics of (Re)Unification: Lessons from Yemen to Cyprus", The Cyprus Review, 24 (2012), 2, p. 34.
[49] K. Fattah, "A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen", cit., p. 37.
[50] V. Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010, p. 132.
[51] V. Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes*, cit., p. 136; G. Nonneman, "The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond", cit., p. 73.
[52] V. Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes*, cit., p. 137.

the centrality of tribal elites and family linkages.[53] As a result, despite the union, national integration remained weak, as social identity continued to be defined by belonging to a clan, a tribe, and a region.[54] Two other major reasons discouraged national integration: 1) the coexistence of what was basically a two-state apparatus—as only few of the governmental agencies of the two former regimes were merged, and many continued to operate simultaneously and manage national resources; 2) President Saleh and his northern Zaydi elites allies' control over the finance, defence, and oil sectors, which made southerners suspicious of the true intentions of northern elites regarding power-sharing.[55] In 1992, Saleh's party, the General People's Congress (GPC), complained that political associations based in the south wanted to retain parity of representation in the parliament and the Presidential Council, despite having a far smaller population than the former North Yemen.[56] In the same year, the President faced the first significant protests in Aden, as the southern population felt excluded from the patronage system that Saleh had established in the YAR and maintained after unification: it relied on a network of mutual dependency between state authority, tribes, and political actors related to the regime, in which northern Zayidi sheikhs were required to pledge allegiance to Saleh's government in order to obtain access to financial subsidies, state employment, participation in the military sector, and the enrolment in political parties (primarily the GPC), and conversely, the regime—unable to overcome the power of tribes but eager to maintain its rule—needed to buy their fidelity by paying sheikhs monthly stipends, ensuring them access to the public and private sectors, and granting them vehicles and houses; this mechanism led to a significant transformation in the status of tribal elites, shifted from being the traditional "armed wings" of the ruler during the Imamate to a group of people deeply involved in politics, business, and the military.[57]

After Yemen's first free elections in April 1993, in which the GPC won 123 parliamentary seats and the YSP 57—the latter performed better in the south confirming its historical influence there—the country's main three parties, namely the GPC, the YSP, and the Islah (Reform) Party, formed a

[53] S. Dingli, "The Politics of (Re)Unification: Lessons from Yemen to Cyprus", cit., p. 37.
[54] A. B. Al-Saqqaf, "Problèmes de l'Unité Yéménite", cit., p. 102.
[55] I. Blumi, "Unique Authoritarianism: Shifting Fortunes and the Malleability of the Salih Regime in Yemen, 1990-Present", European University Institute (EUI) Working Papers, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS), 2009, pp. 8-9; V. Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes*, cit., pp. 138-9.
[56] S. Carapico, "Pluralism, Polarization, and Popular Politics in Yemen", chapter 11 in B. Korany, R. Brynen, and Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 1998, p. 252.
[57] V. Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes*, cit., p. 140; H. Lackner, "Understanding the Yemeni Crisis: The Transformation of Tribal Roles in Recent Decades", Durham Middle East Papers, Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper, 17 (2016), pp. 8, 11; C. Schmitz, "Understanding the Role of the Tribes in Yemen", Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC) Sentinel, 4 (2011), 10, p. 20; A. L. Alley, "The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen", The Middle East Journal, 64 (2010), 3, p. 387; K. Fattah, "A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen", cit., pp. 40-1; Yemen's two main tribal confederations are the Hashid and the Bakil, both of which are located in the northern part of the country. Until the 1962 revolution in North Yemen, these tribes played a major role in maintaining regional security, as the Zaydi Imamate lacked a standing national army until the 1950s. Both the Hashid and the Bakil nevertheless supported the Republicans forces during the 1960s civil war. See: J.E. Peterson, "Tribes and Politics in Yemen", cit., pp. 4, 7-8.

coalition government led by Haidar Abu Bakr al-Attas, which soon proved weak, as major differences emerged between the GPC and Islah—both northern party—on one side, and the YSP on the other, especially on matters relating to religion—Islah demanded a constitutional amendment to make Islam the sole source of legislation within Yemen.[58] At the end of a highly turbulent political period—during which many YSP figures were killed by late 1993—an armed conflict broke out in May 1994, when the northern and southern armed forces, which had been stationed in each other's regions since unification, began bombing Sana'a and Aden and attacking the rival side's airports, ports, power plants and oil facilities.[59] On 21 May, Vice President al-Baydh declared secession from the north and established a new southern state, the Democratic Republic of Yemen (DRY), but President Saleh portrayed the situation as an assault to Yemen's unity by a group of southern Marxist unbelievers, which enabled him to rally additional support from northern Yemenis—who were, and remain, the majority of the country's population—including from the Islah party.[60] Less than two months later, in July, the northern forces led by the former exiled PDRY general and future ROY President, Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi, captured Aden, and the Socialist leaders fled to Djibouti and the KSA.[61] Northern victory in the civil war was also facilitated by: 1) the regime's ability to corrupt southern unit commanders and officers, enabling the northern army's advance; 2) the lack of support from southern tribes to Socialist secessionists—tribes had instead a crucial role in the northern counterpart's success; 3) the government's deployment of Islamist Fighters, the so called "Arab Afghans".[62]

After the end of the armed clashes, Blumi (2009) argues that "post-war reconciliation in general was by all accounts actually stymied by the northern elite basically plundering the south both materially and psychologically", with the Saleh regime establishing a kind of colonial rule that exploited the resources of the south for the benefit of a growing number of northerners.[63] After the civil war, the YSP—and southerners in general—were marginalised from decision-making in the ROY, although Saleh worked to reorganise southern tribal networks in order to incorporate southern tribal elites in his patronage system.[64] Saleh maintained his power through the preservation of this patronage system

[58]G. Nonneman, "The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond", cit., pp. 78- 9; S. Carapico, "Pluralism, Polarization, and Popular Politics in Yemen", cit., p. 246.
[59]G. Nonneman, "The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond", cit., pp. 79, 81; K. Fattah, "A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen", cit., p. 39.
[60] V . Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes*, cit., pp. 142-3; T. Al-Ganad, "A history of Yemen political parties: from armed struggle to armed repression", cit., 10.
[61]G. Nonneman, "The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond", cit., p. 82; V. Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes*, cit., p. 144.
[62] K. Fattah, "A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen", cit., p. 40.
[63] I. Blumi, "Unique Authoritarianism: Shifting Fortunes and the Malleability of the Salih Regime in Yemen, 1990-Present", cit., p. 19.
[64] N. Adra, "Social Exclusion Analysis – Yemen", prepared for the Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank (2006), p. 17; J. M. Dostal, "From Fragile to Collapsed Statehood: The Case of the Republic of Yemen (1990-2020)", cit., p. 11.

and the security apparatus—from which he gradually excluded Islah, which by the late 1990s had become the main opposition party and therefore the main threat to its rule—which depended, as Peterson (2008) claims, on three "concentric rings of support": 1) Saleh's close relatives; 2) the President's Bayt al-Ahmar clan; 3) two tribes belonging to the Hashed confederation, the Sanhan (Saleh's own tribe) and the Hamdan Sana'a—the members of these three "concentric rings" occupied both GPC seats in parliament and major military-security posts, including some that were directly responsible for administering the south.[65] It was the loyalty of this elite, rather than that of the broader Yemeni tribal society, that enabled Saleh to preserve his power until 2011. The government consistently failed to improve social services or promote development for the tribes, who, in turn, felt increasingly detached from their own sheikhs, many of whom were now living in the capital and engaged in national politics and business.[66] This situation in northern tribal Yemen would later provide fertile ground for the rise of the Houthi movement and its resistance to the regime in the 2000s.[67]

The functioning of President Saleh's patronage system and security apparatus, as well as the regime's legitimacy crisis that triggered major political instability during the 2011 "Arab Spring" protests, can be interpreted trough Gros's theory about failed states, in which strongmen often govern irresponsibly, and their behaviour becomes one of the reasons of state failure. In Yemen's case, the mechanism that Saleh established to retain power—which also included religious leaders, and, to a lesser extent, merchants and technocrats—created an exclusive elite circle that was extremely costly to be maintain through the state budget. This contributed to the alienation of large segments of Yemen's population, those who were excluded from the patronage system.[68] Furthermore, as Gros also shows the paradox that failed states tend to be heavily militarised, yet not necessarily secure—because rulers devote large portions of the national budget to buy the loyalty of armed supporters in order to maintain their monopoly on violence, even if revenues decline, social demands rise, and intra-elite division deepen—in Saleh's Yemen this assumption was borne out, given that the President, as Alley (2010) notes, "always placed a premium on loyalty, especially among military/security officers": he was aware that before he came to power in 1978, the YAR's history was marked by military coups and political assassinations.[69]

[65]H. Lackner, "Understanding the Yemeni Crisis: The Transformation of Tribal Roles in Recent Decades", cit., p. 3; J.E. Peterson, "Tribes and Politics in Yemen", cit., pp. 10-1, 15; A. L. Alley, "The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen, cit., p. 405.
[66]J.E. Peterson, "Tribes and Politics in Yemen", cit., pp. 16, 19-20.
[67] M. Brandt, "The War in Yemen, Bottom Up: Tribal Politics in Depth and in Motion", British-Yemeni Journal, 27 (2019), p. 13.
[68]A. L. Alley, "The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen", cit., pp. 390, 393, 396.
[69]A. L. Alley, "The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen", cit., p. 397.

During the 2000s, Yemen experienced six rounds of armed conflict (2004-2010) between the government and the so called "Houthi" rebels in the north-western Sa'dah governorate. The "Houthis" are a Zaydi revivalist political and military movement whose origins trace back to this very same north-western governorate during the 1990s. The leaders of the movements, the al-Houthi family, originally come from the area of Huth in the neighbouring Amran province.[70] They belong to the Sayyid social stratum of North Yemen's non-tribal groups, and given their claim of direct descent from the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, Zaydism ascribes the Sayyid a divine right to rule over Yemen.[71] Beginning in the 1800s Zaydism has experienced a significant decline in North Yemen, and two major events during the second half of the twentieth century further contributed to this process: 1) the September revolution and the establishment of the YAR in 1962; 2) the spread of Salafism and Wahhabism—fostered by the KSA—into traditionally Zaydi regions during the early 1980s.[72]

In 1990, Zaydi leaders established the Zaydi revivalist Hizb al-Haqq party, and one year later the Houthi-family-member Muhammad Badr al-Din al-Huthi created a movement of Zaydi students, called the "Believing Youth", whose purpose was to counter what its founders viewed as a betrayal of Zaydism under Saleh's rule—which favoured the influx of Salafi and Wahhabi doctrine from the KSA—as well as their marginalisation in the country's socio-economic sphere.[73] Muhammad's brother, Husayn, was a member of parliament with Hizb al-Aqq from 1993 to 1997, and after his mandate expired, he became seriously involved in the activities of the Believing Youth and succeeded in channelling northern Yemeni's resentment over the severe underdevelopment of their areas and the regime's corruption.[74] In 2003, the movement adopted the slogan "Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse the Jews! Victory for Islam!", and was condemned by the government, whose armed forces in June 2004 launched a military campaign against the group, that resulted in the death of Husayn al-Houthi, but it also reinforced the perception that the regime was brutally oppressive,

[70]L. Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", cit., p. 104.

[71] M. Brandt, "The War in Yemen, Bottom Up: Tribal Politics in Depth and in Motion", cit., p. 12; M. S. Sarhan, M. I. S. Saidin, and Z. Othman, "The Religious-Political Ideology of Houthis' Rebellion in Yemen: Theoretical Perspective of the Divine Right to Rule", Islamiyyat, 44 (2022), 1, p. 234.

[72]L. Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", cit., p. 105; Salafism in the Sa'dah governorate expanded following the establishment of the Dar al-Hadith institute by the Salafi scholar Muqbil al-Wadi. President Saleh, himself a Zaydi, sought to diminish Zaydism influence in the northern Yemen by encouraging the settlement of Salafi and Wahhabi Muslims in traditional Zaydi area, out of concern that the Zaydi groups might attempt to re-establish the Imamate in northern Yemen. See L. Bonnefoy, "Violence in Contemporary Yemen: State, Society, and Salafis", The Muslim World, 101 (2011), 2, p. 338; M. Bano, "Clash of Ideologies, Civil War and the Rise of Houthis in Yemen: the Implications of Regional and International Actors", Near East University (NEU) Journal, 17 (2024), 1, pp. 87-8.

[73]N. Brehony, "Yemen and the Huthis: Genesis of the 2015 crisis", cit., p. 237; L. Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", cit., p. 106.

[74]L. Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", cit., pp. 106-7; M. Brandt, "The War in Yemen, Bottom Up: Tribal Politics in Depth and in Motion", cit., p. 14.

leading more and more people—even those unrelated to the al-Houthi family or the Believing Youth—to join the resistance.[75] Leadership of the movement was assumed by Husayn's father, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, a Zaydi scholar, and by Husayn's brother, Abdul Malik.[76] Although at one stage the Saleh's regime was spending an estimated $200 million of foreign currency reserves per month to sustain the war—and although the President sought tribal support to defeat the Houthis—by 2009 the group had gained control over several districts in the Sa'dah governorate, and even KSA's direct intervention later that year failed to put an end to the rebel groups' resistance.[77]

At the end of January 2011, more than 15,000 people took to the streets of major Yemeni cities to protest their deteriorating economic situation and the corruption of Saleh's regime.[78] The Houthi movement joined the uprisings in February. The "Arab Spring" protests came after a harsh decade for Yemen, during which the country suffered a severe water crisis, a significant reduction in oil production, a fiscal crisis—which led the government to cut all ministerial expenditures by 50%—rising food prices, the devaluation of the Yemeni Riyal, and a one-third reduction in the World Bank's loan package, partially motivated by elite corruption and mismanagement of aid funds.[79] The protests turned violent in March, when more than 50 people were killed by forces affiliated with the government; the event triggered a major shift in the foundations of Saleh's rule, as numerous figures—including diplomats, GPC members, military commanders and key tribal leaders—defected from the President, who was then presented with a proposal, drafted by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in April 2011, requiring him to relinquish power to his vice president, Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi, in exchange for immunity for himself and his family.[80] The opposition to Saleh—comprising the al-Hamar family (leader of the Hashed tribal confederation); Major General Ali Muhsen al-Ahmar and its armed forces; the Joint Meeting Parties (JMPs, a coalition of six opposition parties); youth movements and civil society organizations; the Houthis; the Hirak; and AQAP—intensified in June, when the President was wounded in an attack when a bomb exploded inside a mosque, forcing him to flee to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment.[81]

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[75] L . Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", cit., p. 107; M. Brandt, "The War in Yemen, Bottom Up: Tribal Politics in Depth and in Motion", cit., pp. 14-15.

[76] C. Boucek, "War in Saada: From Local Insurrection to National Challenge", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Middle East Program, 110 (2010), https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/war_in_saada.pdf ; V. Clark, "Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of the Snakes", cit., p. 250.

[77] L. Winter, "Conflict in Yemen: Simple People, Complicated Circumstances", cit., pp. 110-1; M. Makovsky, B. Misztal, and J. Ruhe, "Fragility and Extremism in Yemen: A Case Study of the Stabilizing Fragile States Project", Bipartisan Policy Center (2011), https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Yemen-Final-Report.pdf.

[78] M. Bano, "Clash of Ideologies, Civil War and the Rise of Houthis in Yemen: the Implications of Regional and International Actors", cit., p. 90.

[79] T. Juneau, "Yemen: Prospects for State Failure – Implications and Remedies", cit., pp. 135-7.

[80] T. Juneau, "Yemen and the Arab Spring: Elite Struggles, State Collapse and Regional Security", Orbis, 57 (2013), 3, p. 410.

[81] T. Juneau, "Yemen and the Arab Spring: Elite Struggles, State Collapse and Regional Security", cit., pp. 410-3.

In November, the GPC and the JMPs signed the GCC-proposed agreement (GCC Initiative) in Riyadh, formally ending the 21-year rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh—33 years, including his tenure as President of the YAR—and leading to the appointment of Hadi as the new ROY President in February 2012, for a transitional period of two years.[82] After the formation of a government in which the GPC and the JMPs members shared positions equally, the GCC Initiative called for the establishment of a Yemeni National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in March 2013.[83] The NDC, composed by 565 members—more than half of whom were southerners, and also included 35 representatives of the Houthi movement—concluded its work in January 2014.[84] One of the main proposed outcomes of the NDC was the division of the country in six federal regions—two in the former YAR, and four in the former PDRY—but the proposal was rejected both by the Houthi delegates, as their northern highland region was reduced to a single region without access to the sea, and by the southerners, who wanted the south to form one unified region.[85] Lackner (2016) argues that the NDC failed primarily because: 1) the reform of the military and security sector should have been treated as the top priority in the transition; 2) the expected two-year timetable for a transition toward a federal system—expected mainly by the GCC—was unrealistic; 3) the NDC's nature as a decision-making process, rather than a consultative and debating one—its responsibilities were too great both for its duration and its large and heterogeneous membership; 4) Saleh's continued leadership of the GPC and his control over elite security forces; 5) the corruption of the "national unity" government—along with the fifty-fifty power-sharing formula between the GPC and the opposition—fostered political inefficiency, as individuals prioritised personal and party interests over citizens' needs.[86]

In the meantime, starting in 2011, the Houthis, now officially known as *Ansar Allah* (Partisans of God) managed to conquer several districts and governorates in north-western Yemen, as they, presenting themselves as an alternative to the state, secured the support of the powerful Bakil tribal

[82] K. Al-Eriani, "Mourning the death of a state to enliven it: Notes on the weak Yemeni state", International Journal of Cultural Studies, 23 (2020), 2, p. 229; J. M. Dostal, "From Fragile to Collapsed Statehood: The Case of the Republic of Yemen (1990-2020)", cit., p. 11; For further information on the GCC Initiative, see "Agreement on the implementation mechanism for the transition process in Yemen in accordance with the initiative of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)", Translated from Arabic, 2011, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/ye111205agreement20on20the20implementation20mechanism20for20the20transition.pdf.

[83] N. Brehony, "Yemen and the Huthis: Genesis of the 2015 crisis", cit., p. 238; K. Al-Eriani, "Mourning the death of a state to enliven it: Notes on the weak Yemeni state", cit., p. 230.

[84] H. Lackner, "Yemen's 'Peaceful' Transition from Autocracy: Could it have succeeded?", International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2016), https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/yemens-peaceful-transition-from-autocracy.pdf.

[85] *Ibid.*; J. M. Dostal, "From Fragile to Collapsed Statehood: The Case of the Republic of Yemen (1990-2020)", cit., p. 12.

[86] H. Lackner, "Yemen's 'Peaceful' Transition from Autocracy: Could it have succeeded?", cit..

confederation.[87] Dissatisfied with the NDC process and motivated by President Hadi's decision to lift fuel subsides, the Houthis—who had by then formed a unexpected alliance with former President Saleh and his military-security forces, due to their shared hostility toward Hadi and the Islah party, which they believed had benefited most from the 2011-2014 transitional period—seized the government headquarters in Sana'a on 21 September 2014.[88] On 22 January 2015, Houthi-Saleh coalition forces took control of the Presidential palace in Sana'a.[89] Hadi resigned and fled to Aden in February—where he later withdrew his resignation and declared Aden Yemen's temporary capital—but was forced to flee to the KSA in March after the coalition advanced southward.[90] On 6 February, the Houthis dissolved the Parliament and established a parallel interim authority known as the Supreme Revolutionary Committee, which was replaced one year later by the Supreme Political Council (SPC).[91] The legitimacy of Hadi's government was reaffirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (2015), which simultaneously demanded that the Houthis withdraw from the territories they had seized and comply with the outcomes of the NDC.[92]

The conflict subsequently became internationalised after Hadi formally requested intervention from the GCC to restore his government. In response, a coalition of ten countries led by the KSA and the UAE—including Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco and Sudan—and supported logistically and through intelligence by the United States (U.S.), United Kingdom (UK), and France, launched Operation *Decisive Storm,* later renamed Operation *Restoring Hope*, on 26 March 2015.[93] The

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[87] M. Bano, "Clash of Ideologies, Civil War and the Rise of Houthis in Yemen: the Implications of Regional and International Actors", cit., p. 91; M. Saif, "Ansar Allah: The Formation of a Political Ideology and the Transformation of their Cultural Capital in Yemen", Ismaha, Georgetown University Qatar, 21/01/2021, https://ismaha.qatar.georgetown.edu/voices-from-the-community/an%E1%B9%A3ar-allah-the-formation-of-a-political-ideology-and-the-transformation-of-their-cultural-capital-in-yemen/; A. Dashela, "Northern Yemen Tribes During the Eras of Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthi Movement: A Comparative Study", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 16/02/2022, https://sanaacenter.org/files/Northern_Yemeni_Tribes_during_the_Eras_of_Ali_Abdullah_Saleh_and_he_Houthi_Movement_A_Comparative_Study_en.pdf.

[88] M. Bano, "Clash of Ideologies, Civil War and the Rise of Houthis in Yemen: the Implications of Regional and International Actors", cit., p. 92; C.C. Eze, "The Impact of Regional Powers in International Conflict: The Yemen Experience", Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development, 7 (2024), 5, p. 86; L. Bonnefoy, "Yémen: Comprendre la Guerre",Études – Revue de culture contemporaine, 4246 (2018), pp. 19-20.

[89] J. M. Dostal, "From Fragile to Collapsed Statehood: The Case of the Republic of Yemen (1990-2020)", cit., p. 12.

[90] T. Juneau, "Iran's Policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: a limited return on a modest investment", International Affairs, 92:3 (2016), pp. 653-4;

[91] Constitutional Declaration to organize the foundations of governance during the transitional period in Yemen, issued by the Revolutionary Committee of the 21 September Revolution, unofficial English translation,https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/constitutional_declaration_of_houthis_6_feb_2015_-_english.pdf; J. Ali, "Yemen: Ansar Allah signs agreement with Saleh's party creating supreme political council", Middle East Confidential,29 July 2016,https://me-confidential.com/13256-yemen-ansar-allah-signs-agreement-with-salehs-party-creating-supreme-political-council.html.

[92] United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Resolution 2216 (2015), Adopted by the Security Council at its 7426th meeting, on 14 April 2015, https://docs.un.org/en/S/RES/2216%20(2015).

[93] BBC News, "Saudi Arabia launches air strikes in Yemen", 26/03/2015, BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-32061632; B.S. Watol, "The Post-2011 Yemen Internationalized Civil War: Its National Regional and Global Implications", European Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 1 (2024), 4, p. 11.

operation involved approximately 100 aircraft and around 150.000 troops, combining an aerial campaign against Houthi targets with air and naval blockades of north-western Yemeni territory to prevent supplies from reaching the group.[94] In July 2015, the forces of the Internationally Recognised Government of Yemen (IRGY), with military assistance from Emirati ground troops, managed to retake Aden from the Houthi-Saleh alliance.[95]

The year 2017 marked a turning point in the civil war. It witnessed both the establishment of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the rupture between Saleh and Ansar Allah; the former President attempted to realign himself with the Saudi-backed coalition, a move that ultimately led to his killing on 4 December.[96] These two developments were particularly significant, as both contributed to reshaping Yemen's political landscape. In the case of the Ansar Allah-Saleh split, it demonstrated that the former President's network had weakened to the point that the Houthis were able to kill him, definitively dismantle his patronage network and establish unilateral control over the northern highlands.[97] In the case of the STC's establishment, it revealed that the unity of the Saudi-led coalition supporting the IRGY had begun to be erode.

The STC, led by former Aden governor, Aidarous al-Zubaidi—who had been dismissed by President Hadi—was founded with the aim of leading the former PDRY territory toward independence, and with Emirati military support, it managed to capture Aden from IRGY forces in a series of clashes between January 2018 and August 2019—the same year in which the UAE announced a reduction of its military presence in Yemen.[98] In November 2019, President Hadi and the STC leadership signed the Riyadh Agreement, representing the first major attempt to reconcile the anti-Houthi front; the agreement provided for the formation of a new government that would include STC participation.[99] Meanwhile, in the southern areas under its influence, the STC has established de facto ministries that often compete with official state institutions, and its military wing, the Security Belt Forces (SBF)—

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[94] J. Kadri, "The collapse of Yemen's Sovereignty by Permanent Violence: A Means of Both Production and Consumption of Value", Arab Studies Quartetly, 43 (2021), 2, p. 100.

[95] H. Lackner, "Yemen's 'Peaceful' Transition from Autocracy: Could it have succeeded?", cit..

[96] Al Jazeera, "Yemen: Ex-President Ali Abdullah Saleh killed", Al Jazeera, 10/12/2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/10/yemen-ex-president-ali-abdullah-saleh-killed.

[97] G. D. Johnsen, "Foreign Actors in Yemen: the History, the Politics and the Future", cit.,.

[98] J. Heibach, "The Future of South Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council", German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA) Focus – Middle East, 2 (2021), p. 1; C.C. Eze, "The Impact of Regional Powers in International Conflict: The Yemeni Experience", cit., p. 85; ACLED data, Aden, Yemen Conflict Monitor, ACLED data, https://acleddata.com/region-profile/aden#:~:text=Regional%20Context,-Aden%20is%20home&text=Although%20direct%20confrontations%20between%20rival,infighting%2C%20particularly%20over%20land%20disputes.&text=UN%20Habitat%2C%20%27A; T. Yoshida, "The Duality of the Saudi-Emirati Relations: Competition over Nation-Building Policies and the Yemeni Civil War", Security and Strategy, 5 (2025), originally published in Security and Strategy, 4 (2024), 2, p. 56.

[99] Riyadh Agreement: Full Text, English Translation, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/riyadh20agreement.pdf.

funded and trained by the UAE—operates in parallel to the Ministry of Interior and conducts security patrols in urban areas.[100]

After seven years of conflict—during which the Saudi-led coalition deployed troops and mercenaries and financed allied forces to fight in southern Yemen, while Ansar Allah conducted cross-border missile and drone attacks against targets in the KSA and the UAE, and retained control over northern Yemen by exploiting the region's mountainous terrain to shelter from coalition airstrikes—a two-month UN-brokered truce was announced on 1 April 2022.[101] Shortly thereafter, on 7 April, President Hadi resigned and transferred his powers to an eight-member Presidential Leadership Council (PLC)—which includes STC leader, Aidarous al-Zubaidi—chaired by former Interior Minister Rashad al-Alimi.[102]

The PLC has shown a weak performance during its three years in power in the areas of Yemen under its control. This has occurred mainly because of corruption and the Council's fragmented nature; its members are bound together only by a shared anti-Houthi stance, while deep internal divisions persist: some members support national unity, whereas others aim for southern secession.[103] These divisions are particularly evident in the management of Yemen's largest and most resource-rich governorate, Hadhramawt: the STC considers it crucial to include Hadhramawt in its secessionist project for a future South Yemen state, but the establishment of the Hadhramawt National Council (HNC) in June 2023—whose primary objective is either autonomy within a unified Yemen or a federal arrangement—challenges the STC's secessionist project and further complicates prospects for peace; many Hadhramis remain sceptical of the STC's secessionist project due to their mistrust stemming from the violence, marginalisation, and asset nationalization that occurred during the PDRY era, which failed to address both local and national grievances.[104]

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[100] M. Elayah, "The Empty State: Governing the Voids in a Projected Conflict-Torn Yemen", Politics & Policy, 53 (2025), 5, pp. 6-7.

[101] J. M. Dostal, "From Fragile to Collapsed Statehood: The Case of the Republic of Yemen (1990-2020)", cit., p. 12; L. Nevola, "Beyond Riyadh: Houthi Cross-Border Aerial Warfare (2015-2022)", ACLED data, 17/01/2023, https://acleddata.com/report/beyond-riyadh-houthi-cross-border-aerial-warfare-2015-2022; A. Berry, "UN announces 2-month truce in Yemen", 01/04/2022, Deutsche Welle (DW), https://www.dw.com/en/yemen-un-announces-2-month-truce-between-warring-sides/a-61335609.

[102] C. Coombs, "Presidential Council Replaces Hadi", The Yemen Review, Sana'a Center For Strategic Studies, 03/05/2022, https://sanaacenter.org/the-yemen-review/april-2022/17707.

[103] ACLED data, "Internationally Recognised Government (Yemen)", Yemen Conflict Monitor, ACLED data, 20/11/2023,https://acleddata.com/profile/internationally-recognized-government-yemen; M. Rubin, "Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council Failed. Dissolve It", American Enterprise Institute (AEI), 20/07/2025,https://www.aei.org/op-eds/yemens-presidential-leadership-council-failed-dissolve-it/.

[104] B. Mahli, "Yemen's Path to Stability: Evaluating the Presidential Leadership Council's Role and Impact", Policy Center for the New South (2024), https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2024-10/PP_16-24_Bilal%20Mahli%20_0.pdf; I. Jalal, Saudi-Emirati Divergences Lead Hadhramawt to a Crossroad", Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center (2024), https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Jalal_Hadramawt.pdf.

In December 2025, STC officials claimed that all southern Yemeni governorates—including Aden and large parts of Hadhramawt—were "under the protection of the Southern Armed Forces"; Operation *Promising Future* was launched to secure these territories following the failure of other pro-government factions to conduct any serious campaign to liberate northern Yemen from Houthi control.[105] However, in January 2026, IRGY forces managed to recapture southern Yemen through an offensive—backed by Saudi Arabia—that ousted STC forces from Hadhramawt, the presidential palace in Aden and military camps in al-Mahra.[106] This operation followed the UAE's decision to withdraw completely from Yemen in late December 2025.[107] Al-Zubaidi soon fled the country, was removed from the PLC, and it was announced that the STC would dissolve[108]. Notwithstanding the decision to dissolve it, STC spokesman Anwar al-Tamimi, rejected the announcement, which he labelled "ridiculous", and declared that the STC would "continue its positive and constructive engagement with all political initiatives in a manner that enables the people of the South to determine their future".[109] The STC's status therefore remains uncertain, but in any case, it is unlikely that the movement's core aspiration—the long-cherished desire for South Yemen independence—will disappear.[110] On 6 February 2026, following consultations being held in Riyadh, a new 34-member Yemeni government was formed, with the incumbent Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shaya Mohsen al-Zindani, being appointed Prime Minister.[111] The STC was excluded from the government as a political entity, yet certain individuals affiliated with it who had participated in announcing its dissolution from Riyadh are part of the cabinet: grievances among southerners soon emerged, with critics arguing that the cabinet has moved away from the 2019 Riyadh Agreement and

[105] Reuters, Separatists claim broad control of southern Yemen, Reuters, 08/12/2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/separatists-claim-broad-control-southern-yemen-2025-12-08/; The National, Deep rifts in Yemen's ruling body as STC says it now controls entire south, The National, 08/12/2025,https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2025/12/08/deep-rifts-in-yemens-ruling-body-as-stc-says-it-now-controls-entire-south/.

[106] Al-Jazeera, Yemen's government says southern areas retaken from secessionist STC forces, Al-Jazeera, 10/01/2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/10/thousands-of-supporters-of-yemens-separatist-stc-rally-in-aden.

[107] D. Gritten, UAE says it will withdraw from Yemen after Saudi strike on separatist-held port, BBC, 30/12/2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8xdxz48l7yo.

[108] The Associated Press, Southern Yemen separatist group says it will dissolve after its head fled to the UAE, Associated Press, 09/01/2026, https://www.npr.org/2026/01/09/nx-s1-5672397/yemen-southern-transitional-council-dissolution-leader-uae.

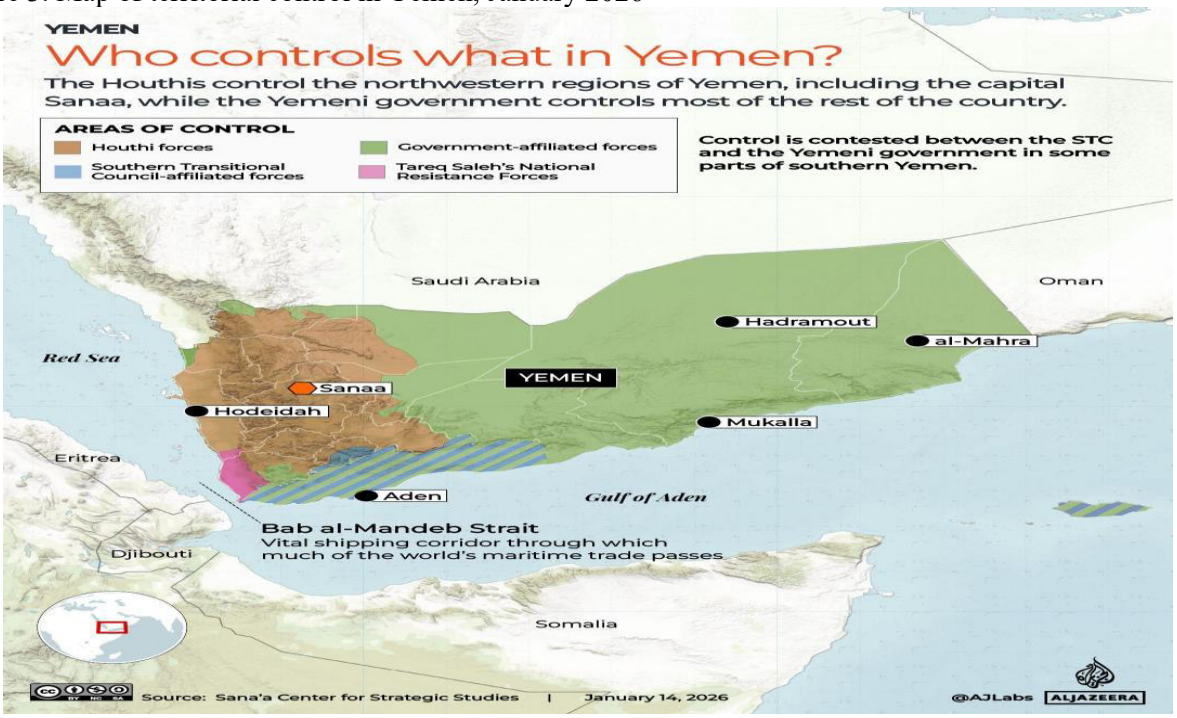
[109] Al-Jazeera, Yemeni southern separatists in Riyadh announce disputed disbanding of STC, Al-Jazeera, 09/01/2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/9/yemens-separatist-southern-transitional-council-announces-its-dissolution.

[110] G. Cafiero, Why Yemen's Southern Transitional Council is unlikely to fade away, Amwaj.media, 22/01/2026, https://amwaj.media/en/article/why-yemen-s-southern-transitional-council-is-unlikely-to-fade-away.

[111] Z. Sabah, New Yemen government formed with Shaya Mohsin al-Zindani as prime minister, Al-Jazeera, 06/02/2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/2/6/new-yemen-government-formed-with-shaya-mohsin-al-zindani-as-prime-minister.

does not properly represent the Southern population.[112] These recent developments are likely to fuel the longstanding rivalry between northerners and southerners, thereby weakening the PLC and the government's ability to counter Ansar Allah and retake Sana'a.

Figure 3. Map of territorial control in Yemen, January 2026



Source: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/14/mapping-who-controls-what-in-yemen-in-2026

Baltrop (2025) argues that the internationally sponsored 2014-2024 peace process aimed at ending Yemen's civil war produced only "meagre results", and this outcome can be explained by four main factors: 1) the persistent underestimation of Ansar Allah's actual power and governance capacity in Sana'a by UN, Western, and Arab narratives, which have largely referred to the group merely as the "Houthis" or as a "militia", thereby ignoring the fact that their rule encompasses central, provincial and local governance structures; 2) the weakened legitimacy of the IRGY, resulting from its limited territorial control and prolonged absence of the President and ministries abroad—particularly in the KSA, where they maintained offices for official meetings; 3) the failure to identify and address key issues of contention, including military activity by all parties, aerial and maritime blockades, oil-sector revenues, the existence of two national currencies with different value, and the presence of foreign military forces across the country; 4) the absence, within the prevailing UN-led framework, of recognition that direct talks between the KSA and the Ansar Allah administration—which nonetheless took place between December 2022 and September 2023— were a necessary component

[112] A. Al-Shadli, The New Yemeni Government: Composition and Prospects, South24.net, 01/03/2026, https://south24.net/news/newse.php?nid=5348.

of any viable peace process; this was compounded by the KSA's reluctance to be formally acknowledged as a party to the conflict, a point repeatedly emphasised by Ansar Allah an done that further hindered negotiations.[113] Another important factor obstructing efforts to achieve peace in Yemen is the Houthis' attempt to dismantle tribal structures, a policy that has weakened the historically significant role of tribes in conflict mediation and resolution: most tribal leaders are now either in voluntary exile in the IRGY-controlled areas or under house arrest Ansar Allah-controlled territory, while tribal movements are subject to strict oversight by the Houthis.[114]

To conclude this section of the work, I would like to quote a passage from Elham Manea's book *The Yemeni Civil War* (2024) on governance in Yemen. While analysing Yemen's historical political landscape, the author concludes:

> "Stability has been rare in Yemeni history. Some are quick to blame the tribal composition, and the sectarian and regional dividing lines. But […] What matters is how the state has been treating its diverse societal segments. Throughout Yemen's history, the state—North, South, or United—has never been just or fair. It has consistently catered to the interests of a few to the exclusion of others. It has played on ethnic divisions, cemented them, and extracted resources in a manner that engrained regional/group inequality and plundered the country's resources. […] The state was cunning and its role made the difference between stability and instability, unity and division, and peace and civil wars".[115]

6. External Influences: the KSA, Iran, and the UAE

To transition from this discussion on domestic actors, this section will focus on the influence of the KSA, Iran, and the UAE in shaping both Yemen's recent and more remote political developments. According to Al-Eriani (2020; 2022), the KSA—together with the U.S.—has historically fostered an apprehensive "weak state" narrative about Yemen: this narrative has been rhetorically employed since the 1960-70s to preserve a stable regional security order—initially an anti-Arab nationalism (Nasserism) one until the late 1960s, then an anti-communist one until 1990, and finally an anti-terrorism one in the 2000s—in order to serve Saudi, U.S., and the other Gulf monarchies' geopolitical interests; within this logic, Yemen has consistently been portrayed as incapable of securing itself and

[113] R. Baltrop, "Yemen's peace process: the need to change the international vision and framework", International Affairs, 101(2025), 3, pp. 1122-8.
[114] S. A. Salako and A.O. Adenuga, "Assess the Political and Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen: Causes and Consequences", Islamic University Journal of Social Sciences, 4 (2025), 5, p. 84; A. Dashela, "Saudi Arabia's New Approach Toward Yemen's Northern Tribes", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 25/05/2025, https://sanaacenter.org/files/Saudi_Arabias_New_Approach_Toward_Yemens_Northern_Tribes_en.pdf.
[115] E. Manea, *The Yemeni Civil War: The Arab Spring, State Formation and Internal Instability*, Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2024, p. 144.

therefore in need of external intervention—effectively legitimising outside domination of Yemen's politics and restriction on its sovereignty.[116]

The KSA shares a long history of involvement in Yemen's affairs, driven primarily by the Saudi monarchy's interest in keeping Yemen divided until 1990 and at least "weak" after the unification. Tense relations between the two countries date back to 1934, when the Treaty of Taif transferred the Yemeni provinces of Asir, Jizan and Najran to Saudi territory for twenty years; the treaty was renewed every twenty years until 2000, when a new agreement permanently assigned these territories to Saudi sovereignty.[117] Following the 1934 treaty agreement, relations between the YAR and the KSA deteriorated further during the 1960s civil war: as the Kingdom perceived the Egypt-backed Republican opposition to North Yemen's monarchy as a threat both to its influence in Yemen and to its own monarchical rule, the Saudi provided military assistance to the Royalists.[118]

After the civil war, the KSA ended its support for the Royalist and, at U.S. urging, launched a strategy of military and economic aid in favour of YAR government in Sana'a, fearing that the Socialist PDRY might expand its influence over North Yemen.[119] At the same time, the KSA provided personal financial assistance to key figures in YAR politics—including tribal leaders, military officers, and government officials—in order to keep the regime sufficiently fragmented and thus more easily manageable.[120] As Katz (1992) observes, "While Saudi Arabia wanted North Yemen to be strong enough to defend itself against South Yemen, Riyadh did not want North Yemen […] to become strong enough to threaten the kingdom".[121]

Saudi openness toward Yemeni unification increased after the beginning of the Soviet crisis that culminated in the USSR's dissolution in 1991. However, relations again deteriorated following Yemen's refusal to condemn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. During the 1994 civil war, the KSA supported southern secessionists, simultaneously seeking to secure a corridor to the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean via Hadhramawt and to counter the rise of Shi'a movements—such as the Believing

[116]The same rhetorical narrative has been exploited by Yemeni governments in order to secure international protection from these two more powerful countries. SeeK. Al-Eriani, "The Ghostly Politics Haunting Yemen", Current History, 121 (2022), 839, p. 339; K. Al-Eriani, "Mourning the death of a state to enliven it: Notes on the weak Yemeni state", cit., p. 234, 239; K. Al-Eriani, "Secularism, Security and the Weak State: De-democratizing the 2011 Yemeni Uprising", Interventions – International Journal of Postcolonial Studies, 23(2021), 8, pp. 1140-65.

[117] I. Kironov, "Saudi Arabia's Involvement in the Yemeni Conflict: A Strategic Analysis", St Petersburg University, 2018, pp. 1, 2.

[118] M.N. Katz, "Yemeni Unity and Saudi Security", Middle East Policy, 1 (1992), 1, p. 119.

[119] M.N. Katz, "Yemeni Unity and Saudi Security", cit., p. 120; M. Al-Jbarat, "The Contemporary Yemen Unity (1990-2019): the Foregrounds and Aftermaths, (Historical Perspective)", Global Journal of Human-Social Sciences, 31 (2021), 1, p. 33.

[120] M.N. Katz, "Yemeni Unity and Saudi Security", cit., p. 120; K. Fattah, "A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen", cit., p. 34.

[121] M.N. Katz, "Yemeni Unity and Saudi Security", cit., p. 121.

Youth—in northern Yemen, which opposed the spread of Saudi-backed Salafism and Wahhabism.[122] Saudi support for forces located in the south during the current civil war can be similarly explained by the fact that south Yemen lies farther from the Saudi border than the Houthis-controlled north and therefore poses a lesser security threat to the Kingdom.[123]

The role of the KSA in Yemeni affairs expanded significantly from the late 2000s onward, particularly through the 2009 and 2015 military interventions, aimed at countering Houthi activity. Neither intervention proved effective, as demonstrated by the fact Ansar Allah has retained control over much of the former YAR territory for more than a decade. As Barrett (2024) argues, the 2015 Saudi-led intervention was driven by fears of increasing Iranian involvement in Yemen—through support for Ansar Allah—and reflected the Kingdom's long-standing security preference for a divided and unstable Yemen.[124] By contrast, Darwich (2018) contends that the Saudi-led coalition's campaign was primarily motivated by the Kingdom's "will for status" in the Middle East, and that Iranian involvement has been strategically exaggerated by the KSA to legitimise its military intervention.[125] In her view, the KSA gained confidence in its regional ambitions following its successful suppression of the 2011 protests in Bahrain, and its indirect support for the 2013 coup in Egypt that removed the Muslim Brotherhood and restored military rule: consequently, "Yemen—a weak failed state—seemed a perfect target to implement the Saudi status policy".[126] Valbjørn (2018) states that although the roots of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry lie primarily in geopolitical rather than religious, competition, the Sunni-Shi'a divide—symbolically embodied by these two countries—has contributed to the "sectarianisation" of the Yemeni conflict, as sectarian rhetoric and practises have increasingly emerged among the warring parties.[127]

Iran's role in Yemen's affairs has historically been limited. Juneau (2016) argues that Iran was not significantly involved in the 1962-1967 civil war in northern Yemen and that, after the Republicans' victory, the government of the YAR did not engage in substantial relations with monarchical Iran; similarly, there is no evidence of Iranian support for the Houthis prior to the outbreak of the first Sa'dah war in 2004.[128] Iran also did not play a political role during Yemen's 2011-2014 transitional

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[122] G. D. Johnsen, "Foreign Actors in Yemen: the History, the Politics, and the Future", Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, 31/01/2021, https://sanaacenter.org/files/The_History_the_Politics_and_the_Future_en.pdf; I. Kironov, "Saudi Arabia's Involvement in the Yemeni Conflict: A Strategic Analysis", cit., p. 2; V. Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Head of the Snakes*, cit., p. 215.

[123] I. Kironov, "Saudi Arabia's Involvement in the Yemeni Conflict: A Strategic Analysis", cit., p. 3.

[124] R.C. Barrett, "Yemen 2024: Interests, Ethics, and Ideology in a Fractured Tribal Society", Northern Plains Ethics Journal, 12 (2024), 2, p.16.

[125] M. Darwich, "The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status", Insight Turkey, 20 (2018), 2, pp. 126-7, 129.

[126] M. Darwich, "The Saudi Intervention in Yemen: Struggling for Status", cit., pp. 133, 135, 136.

[127] M. Valbjørn, "Unpacking a puzzling case: On how the Yemeni conflict became sectarianised", Orient - German Journal for Politics, Economics and Culture of the Middle East, 59 (2018), 2, pp. 68-71; For a broader understanding of the "sectarianisation" of the current Yemen civil war, see V. Rebok, "Sectarianisation of Yemen: Effects and Implications", The Grimshaw Review of International Affairs, 1 (2024), 2, pp. 1-35.

[128] T. Juneau, "Iran's Policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: a limited return on a modest investment", cit., pp. 655, 657.

phase.[129] However, a 2015 report by the UN Security Council Panel of Experts stated that investigations into arms found on board the vessel *Jihan* by Yemeni and United States authorities on 23 January 2013 suggests that the case "follows a pattern of arms shipments to Yemen by sea which can be traced back to at least 2009", and that the analysis further indicates that the Islamic Republic of Iran "was the origin of these shipments, and that the intended recipients were the Houthis in Yemen or possibly in some cases further recipients in neighbouring countries".[130] Moreover, a 2024 report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) claims that since at least 2015, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) have provided Ansar Allah with short- and medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, enabling the group to strike targets on land and in the Red Sea—this capability has been demonstrated by Ansar Allah's attacks on international shipping in the Red Sea since the start of Israel's military operations in Gaza in November 2023.[131] In addition, between 2015 and 2023, the U.S. and its partners interdicted at least eighteen Iranian smuggling shipments, seizing ballistic missile components, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), antitank guided missiles, and thousands of assault rifles, rocket components, and other weapons destined for Ansar Allah and allegedly supplied by the IRGC.[132]

According to Juneau (2024), 2015—the year the Saudi-led coalition launched its intervention in Yemen—marked the point at which Iran significantly intensified its involvement in the country: since then, Iranian and Houthi leaders have increasingly spoken publicly about the importance of their partnership, and Iran has become the only state to formally recognise Ansar Allah's government in north-western Yemen.[133] Juneau argues that Iran has gained a considerable influence in Yemen because the regime in Tehran understood that supporting Ansar Allah offered a relatively low-cost opportunity to pursue its indirect regional rivalry with the KSA, whose war in Yemen had quickly become costly and likely unwinnable.[134] Although Ansar Allah is not dependent on Iranian support and there is no evidence it takes direct orders from Tehran—indeed, scholarly debate generally rejects the characterisation of the movement as an Iranian "proxy"—the group has nevertheless been eager to expand its relations with Iran, which has been the only state willing to provide sustained assistance

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[129] G. M. Feierstein, "Yemen: The 60-Year War", Middle East Institute (2019), https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2019-02/Yemen%20The%2060%20Year%20War.pdf

[130] United Nations Security Council (UNSC), "Letter dated 1 June 2015 from the Panel of Experts established pursuant to Security Council resolution 1929 (2010) addressed to the President of the Security Council", UNSC, 2015, p. 14, https://docs.un.org/en/s/2015/401.

[131] Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), "Iran: Enabling Houthi Attacks Throughout the Middle East", DIA, February 2024, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Documents/News/Military_Power_Publications/Iran_Houthi_Final2.pdf; S. Vij, "From Sea Lines to Fault Lines: Managing the Economic Fallout of the Houthi Shipping Attacks", Observer Research Foundation (ORF) Middle East (2025), https://orfme.org/expert-speak/from-sea-lines-to-fault-lines-managing-the-economic-fallout-of-the-houthi-shipping-attacks/.

[132] Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), "Iran: Enabling Houthi Attacks Throughout the Middle East", cit..

[133] T. Juneau, "How War in Yemen Transformed the Iran-Houthi Partnership", Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 47 (2024), 3, pp. 281-2.

[134] T. Juneau, "How War in Yemen Transformed the Iran-Houthi Partnership", cit., pp. 278-9, 290.

in its war with militarily superior adversaries.[135] Over the past decade, Iran has provided Ansar Allah with financial support, oil supplies, military hardware, military advisers, and training assistance, both directly and through the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah.[136]

Iran does not oppose the idea of a peace agreement in Yemen, but it is likely to resist any settlement that would limit Ansar Allah's role in a post-war political order—even though such scenario appears unrealistic given the military power the Houthis have accumulated. Iran's strategy will likely continue to be shaped by opposition to the KSA, and as long as Yemen remains unstable, Tehran can exploit Saudi difficulties in extricating itself from the conflict.[137] At the same time, as long as Iran continues to support Ansar Allah—and, like other external actors, contributes to fuelling hostilities among Yemen's main political actors—Yemen is likely to remain politically unstable, with enduring consequences for the population's security.

Similarly to Iran's case, the UAE's intervention in Yemeni affairs occurred later than that of the KSA. However, the Emirates have rapidly become a key player in the current Yemeni civil war. The UAE's main objectives in Yemen are: 1) to combat terrorism (particularly AQAP); 2) to counter Iranian influence by opposing Ansar Allah; 3) to safeguard the activities of the logistics company Dubai Ports World; 4) to secure critical maritime trade routes and control strategic areas of the Red Sea—especially around the Bab-el Mandeb strait—in order to project its power toward eastern Africa.[138] The UAE's financial and material support—including heavy weapons, long-range guided missiles, and drones—to the STC and its allied militias in the south can likewise be explained by Abu Dhabi's interest in extending its influence over the port city of Aden, and more broadly, southern Yemen, thereby projecting power over the Arabian Sea.[139] The Emirates have undertaken highly repressive actions against groups deemed as a threat to their interests— particularly AQAP and Islah operatives—and, as a result, the country has been accused of torture, targeted killings, and the operation of secret detention facilities in south Yemen.[140]

The Emirati policy approach in Yemen has generated significant tensions with the KSA on several fronts. First, the UAE support for the STC has caused major frictions within the anti-Houthi camp

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[135] T. Juneau, "How War in Yemen Transformed the Iran-Houthi Partnership", cit., p. 291; A. Minor, "The Danger of Calling the Houthis an Iranian Proxy", Brookings, 03/09/2024, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-danger-of-calling-the-houthis-an-iranian-proxy/.

[136] The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), "Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East", IISS (2019), pp. 164, 171-2, https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/publications---free-files/strategic-dossier/iran-dossier/irans-networks-of-influence-in-the-middle-east.pdf; T. Juneau, "How War in Yemen Transformed the Iran-Houthi Partnership", cit., p. 291.

[137] T. Juneau, "How War in Yemen Transformed the Iran-Houthi Partnership", cit., p. 294.

[138] B. S. Watol, "The Post-2011 Yemen Internationalized Civil War: Its National Regional and Global Implications", cit., p. 10; J. Heiback, "The Future of South Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council", cit., p. 6.

[139] B.S. Watol, "The Post-2011 Yemen Internationalized Civil War: Its National Regional and Global Implications", cit., p. 11; J. Heiback, "The Future of South Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council", cit., p. 7.

[140] J. Heiback, "The Future of South Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council", cit., p. 6.

and prompted Saudi Arabia to establish and back new local militias, such as the National Shield Forces (NSF) in Aden and the Amajid Brigade in Abyan, in order to counter Emirati influence; second, the UAE and the STC share a strongly anti-Islamist stance toward Islah, a party that has historically enjoyed Saudi support; third, the two countries compete for control over Yemen's coastline, which would enable the creation of alternative shipping routes linking the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, thereby by passing the Iranian-patrolled Strait of Hormuz; fourth, rivalry has emerged over control of the oil-rich governorate of Hadhramawt, which the KSA also views as a potential outlet to the Arabian Sea: as the UAE began counterterrorism and security operations in Mukalla—Hadhramawt's main coastal city—in 2016, establishing the Hadhrami Elite Forces (HEF) to expel AQAP and expand their influence along the Arabian Sea coast, Saudi concerns intensified—as Riyadh consider it as a part of its national security sphere— and thus sought to contain Emirati influence in the south by supporting the HNC and the NSF, the latter formed under the authority of the PLC chairman Rashad al-Alimi.[141] Despite the UAE's decision to withdraw from Yemen in late December 2025 and its subsequent loss of influence over key port cities such as Aden and Mukalla following the STC's defeat in January 2026, Abu Dhabi's regional economic competition with the KSA still persists, especially along Yemen's western coast, while on the political side, the UAE will likely continue to monitor developments within the anti-Houthi front.[142]

According to a 2021 UNDP report, the civil war in Yemen has led to the deaths of an estimated 377,000 people—a figure that has certainly increased over the subsequent four years.[143] Of these deaths, approximately 154,000 resulted directly from armed conflict, while an estimated 223,000 were caused by indirect factors such as disease, hunger, and bad medical conditions.[144] Among the total fatalities, around 60% of the roughly 15.000 civilians killed after hospitals, schools, farms, and markets became targets died as result of coalition's airstrikes; the civilian death toll is even higher when accounting for casualties caused by attacks on military sites located close to populated areas.[145]

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[141] T. Yoshida, "The Duality of the Saudi-Emirati Relations: Competition over Nation-Building Policies and the Yemeni Civil War", cit., pp. 55-6; A. Baabood, "Seas, Checks, and Guns: Emirati and Saudi Maritime Interests in the Yemen Conflict", cit.,; I. Jalal, "Saudi-Emirati Divergences Lead Hadhramawt to a Crossroad", cit.,.

[142] L. Nevola, Q&A: Southern Yemen: How did we get here, and what happens next?, ACLED Data, 15/01/2026, https://acleddata.com/qa/qa-southern-yemen-how-did-we-get-here-and-what-happens-next.

[143]T. Hanna, D. K. Bohl, and J. D. Moyer, "Assessing the Impact of War in Yemen: Pathways for recovery", United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2021), file:///C:/Users/Utente/Downloads/Impact%20of%20War%20Report%203%20-%20QR_0.pdf.

[144]Campaign Against Arms Trade, "A Humanitarian Crisis, Created By War", Campaign Against Arms Trade, Last updated 08/09/2025, https://caat.org.uk/data/countries/saudi-arabia/yemens-humanitarian-catastrophe/.

[145]Campaign Against Arms Trade, "The War On Yemen's Civilians", Campaign Against Arms Trade, Last updated 08/09/2025, https://caat.org.uk/data/countries/saudi-arabia/the-war-on-yemens-civilians/#:~:text=Over%20150%2C000%20of%20these%20deaths,by%20the%20Saudi-led%20Coalition; ACLED Data, Yemen Conflict Monitor: Actor Profile: Saudi-led Coalition, ACLED Data, https://acleddata.com/profile/saudi-led-coalition; J. L. Sowers and E. Weinthal, "Humanitarian challenges and the targeting of civilian infrastructure in the Yemen War", International Affairs, 97 (2021), 1, p. 163.

The Saudi-led coalition also played a significant role in exacerbating the humanitarian crisis by periodically closing airports and ports, thereby restricting imports of food, fuel, and medical supplies.[146]

Similarly, a 2021 report by the Yemeni NGO *Mwatana for Human Rights* and the international law foundation, *Global Rights Compliance* (GRC), called *Starvation Makers*, highlights that Ansar Allah has also contributed to the obstruction of humanitarian access: this has included the arrest and intimidation of humanitarian workers, the blocking of aid convoys, and the illegal seizure of the property of humanitarian organisations and workers in Sa'dah governorate and elsewhere—these impediments were so severe that the World Food Programme (WFP) suspended humanitarian operations in Ansar Allah-controlled areas in 2019, affecting an estimated 850,000 beneficiaries, and again in 2020.[147] The report concludes that "members of the Saudi/UAE-led coalition and Ansar Allah were aware of the virtual certainty that starvation would occur in the ordinary course of events, that is, without humanitarian intervention, or intended to use starvation as a method of warfare".[148] *Starvation Makers* also documents numerous additional violations, including unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, sexual and gender-based violence, torture, and the recruitment and use of children by parties to the conflict.[149] Moreover, the civil war began in 2014 has led to the partial or complete destruction of more than 45% of Yemen's water supply networks and related infrastructure and has set back human development by over 20 years.[150]

The Yemen's civil war appears to confirm Stedman's argument regarding the destabilising influence of "bad neighbours" in civil conflicts. Since 2015, the war has been heavily shaped by the actions of the KSA, Iran, and the UAE, all of which have tried to exploit Yemen's fragility to pursue their regional and domestic interests by politically and militarily supporting rival factions. The case also supports Stedman's claim that the peace settlements are less likely to be achieved in civil wars than in interstate wars: after more than a decade of hostilities, no comprehensive peace agreement has yet been reached. Sectarian rhetoric has increasingly characterised interactions among the warring

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[146]J. L. Sowers and E. Weinthal, "Humanitarian challenges and the targeting of civilian infrastructure in the Yemen War", cit., p. 163.

[147]Mwatana for Human Rights and Global Rights Compliance, "Starvation Makers: the use of starvation by warring parties in Yemen", Mwatana for Human Rights and Global Rights Compliance (2021), pp. 20-1, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/680e3db2ba5a3deea9f1f0a6/680e3db2ba5a3deea9f201ad_Starvation-Makers1.pdf.

[148]Mwatana for Human Rights and Global Rights Compliance, "Starvation Makers: the use of starvation by warring parties in Yemen", cit., pp. 22-3.

[149]Mwatana for Human Rights and Global Rights Compliance, "Starvation Makers: the use of starvation by warring parties in Yemen", cit., p. 22.

[150] A. Omar, "Struggling Over Every Drop: Yemen's Crisis of Aridity and Political Collapse", Sada, Carnegie Endowment Middle East Program, 29/04/2025, https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2025/04/struggling-over-every-drop-yemens-crisis-of-aridity-and-political-collapse?lang=en; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "A Roadmap to recovery: addressing poverty in Yemen's ongoing conflict", UNDP (2024), https://www.undp.org/arab-states/news/roadmap-recovery-addressing-poverty-yemens-ongoing-conflict.

parties, and there is little prospect that a future peace deal would allow for the integration of Ansar Allah's armed forces into the IRGY's military structures army.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I decided to investigate Yemen's modern political history because I believe this topic is deeply linked to the issue of security, which is the central theme of this issue of *CSI Review*. According to the definitions of security adopted in this paper, the ROY has, since its establishment, experienced a troubled political trajectory that ultimately led to the outbreak the civil war in 2014. Since then, the preservation of norms, rules, institutions, and values—such as the physical safety of individuals form military and non-military threat, economic welfare, political independence, territorial integrity and the guarantee of basic needs—has been systematically violated by a brutal conflict driven by internal warring parties and externally fuelled by major regional powers pursuing their foreign policy agendas.

The causes for such painful political history can be traced back to the hurried unification process of 1989-1990, which was an elite-driven political project that failed to adequately take into account the socio-cultural diversity of two fundamentally distinct Yemeni societies: a predominantly tribal-centred one in the YAR, and a Socialist one in the PDRY. Moreover, the post-1990 integration process has consistently been hindered by President Saleh's patronage system, which was based on a network of alliances rooted in political-economic favouritism and political-military protection among an inner circle close to the former President. This mechanism generated persistent social discontent—particularly in the south and the north-west—as evidenced by the 1994 civil war, the six rounds of conflict in Sa'dah during the 2000s, and the 2011 "Arab Spring" uprisings. The country's economic crisis during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the corruption of Saleh's patronage system (a clear example of bad governance), the violent political struggle that started in 1990s and continued through the 2000s and the 2010s—which severely hampered social peace—as well as Yemen's persistently low levels of human development[151] over the past three decades can all be considered indicators of what Orji and Nwagbara define as "political instability".

The data presented in the introduction to this work and in the final section seem to confirm Carment's "requirements" for state failure, such as economic weakness; the absence of education and healthcare services; the physical infrastructure's breakdown; the out-of-control escalation of crime and violence. More generally, ROY's historical political trajectory seem to satisfy both Rotberg's and Gros' notion of "state failure", since throughout the 35 years following its establishment ROY's government has

[151] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Human Development Index Trends, 1990-2019", UNDP, https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/2020statisticalannextable2.pdf;

never been able to extend its authority beyond areas immediately surrounding the capital, Sana'a. Indeed, former President Saleh had to confront two major wars—one against southern secessionists in 1994 and another against the Houthi movement between 2004 and 2010—which provide evidence both of proof widespread discontent with what can be described as the "greed of rulers" and their "discriminatory monopolist-like" behaviour, as well as of the government's overall weak political and military control over large parts of the country. Former President Hadi ultimately lost control of the capital city itself in 2014.

All these armed conflicts have been phenomena related to the rejection of the government's supreme authority within the state (its sovereignty) by a number of different domestic actors. The crisis Yemen has been experiencing since 2014 has led to a situation in which the distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* sovereignty is clearly visible. Although the IRGY, now formally represented by the PLC, remains the *de jure* sovereign over the national territory, it is not the actual (*de facto*) ruler of all parts of the country. Indeed, most of the former YAR territory—which hosts approximately 70% percent of Yemen's population[152]—has been under the control of Ansar Allah since 2011, while parts of the country's south, are under the military and of forces affiliated to the STC.

ROY's recent history also provides a clear example of the erosion of Mackinda's concept of "internal sovereignty". Over the past ten to fifteen years, Yemen's internal sovereignty—and thus its government's "freedom to pursue its domestic affairs without interference"—has been significantly constrained by the actions of three regional powers in particular, the KSA, Iran, and the UAE. All of them have funded rival factions in the civil war, and, in the case of Saudi and Emirati, have exercised decisive influence over the functioning of the PLC. The fact that the IRGY is backed by these two competing external actors within Yemen's political, economic, and military spheres has therefore substantially undermined the PLC's capacity to govern. The logic of political competition and geopolitics appears to clash with the principle of sovereignty—especially in unstable countries—as the case study of Yemen demonstrates that external actors are willing to violate this principle, while internal actors are simultaneously willing to allow such violations, in order to defend their political objectives and the geopolitical interests of their patrons.

Ultimately, recent events in ROY's history tend to confirm the R. H. that the greater the number of national and international actors involved in a country's internal affairs, the more its political stability and sovereignty are likely to erode, resulting in increased insecurity for the civilian population. The presentation of all these political developments over 36 years of ROY's history is intended to answer

[152] S. P. Yadav, "Consolidation through Crackdown: Understanding Houthi Rule in Yemen", Brandeis University, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, 161 (2024), p. 3.

the R. Q. about the ways in which internal political dynamics and foreign interference have affected the country's sovereignty and security since its establishment.

From Human Security to Regime Security: Libya, Syria and the Pluralist Turn in UN Peace Operations

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Abstract

The shifting global order is reshaping how security is conceptualised and operationalised, and who its primary referent is. Drawing on the English School, this article argues that the solidarist commitments to individual protection that briefly defined the post-Cold War moment have given way to a structural reassertion of pluralism, in which state sovereignty, regime survival, and territorial control prevail over human protection. The internal hollowing of liberal institutions and the external contestation of protection norms by rising authoritarian powers have accelerated this shift. Libya and Syria illustrate the breakdown of solidarist consensus at the Security Council; MINUSMA, read against MINUSCA, shows that whether protection survives the pragmatic turn in UN peace operations is conditioned by the extent to which protective practice must pass through the host state.

Keywords: Human Protection, Regime Security, Pluralism, Solidarism, International Interventions.

Sommario: 1. Introduction – 2. Security Practices: From Human to Regime Security – 3. Reordering International Society: From Solidarism to Pluralism – 4. Libya and Syria: Breaking Solidarist Consensus – 5. Regime Security in UN Practices: The Case of MINUSMA in Mali – 6. Conclusion

1. Introduction

The meaning and practice of security are never fixed, but shaped by the normative architecture of international society and the political contexts in which states, institutions, and people operate.[1] This article examines how the current shifting global order – marked by the internal hollowing of liberal institutions[2] and growing contestation of human protection norms[3] – is producing a tangible re-prioritization of regime security over human security.[4] It argues that this shift reflects a structural realignment in international society: from the solidarist commitments to individual protection that briefly defined the post-Cold War moment, toward a reassertion of pluralist principles centred on sovereignty, non-interference, and the primacy of state authority.

To analyse this transformation, the article employs the English School (ES) framework – specifically its tension between pluralism and solidarism – which connects security practices to the normative structure of international society, with direct consequences for how security is defined and operationalised across the international system.[5] Its scope is to trace the conditions under which a shift in the normative structure of international society reshapes what multilateral security action can plausibly attempt. The cases of Libya and Syria are the Security Council-level episodes in which the solidarist consensus was tested and broke, while MINUSMA, a mission designed in the aftermath, is the most likely place to observe whether that breakdown registers in operational practice.

The analysis focuses on the liberal international order (LIO) as its main site of contestation, whose institutional frameworks constituted the primary architecture for post-Cold War security practices and their subsequent contestation. Internally, democratic backsliding, multilateral fatigue, and the erosion of consensus around universalist norms have driven Western actors to recalibrate interventions toward stabilisation and counterterrorism, sidelining democratization in favour of host-state military capacities;[6] externally, rising authoritarian powers – most notably Russia and China – actively promote a sovereignty-first vision of international order, framing human protection norms as

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[1] B. Buzan, "The English School: A neglected approach to International Security Studies", *Security Dialogue*, 46 (2015), 2, pp. 126–143.

[2] T. A. Börzel, M. Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism", *International Organization*, 75 (2021), 2, pp. 282–305; see also: L. Fawcett, "The changing regional faces of peace: Toward a new multilateralism?", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 46 (2025), 2, pp. 372–401; O. P. Richmond, "Peace in an authoritarian international order versus peace in the liberal international order", *International Affairs*, 101 (2025), 4, pp. 1381–1401.

[3] G. Bettiza, D. Lewis, "Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation in the Liberal International Order: Theorizing the Power Politics of Ideas and Identity", *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 5 (2020), 4, pp. 559–577.

[4] L. W. Moe, A. Geis, "From liberal interventionism to stabilisation: A new consensus on norm-downsizing in interventions in Africa", *Global Constitutionalism*, 9 (2020), 2, pp. 387–412; J. Karlsrud, "From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilisation and Counterterrorism", *International Peacekeeping*, 26 (2019), 1, pp. 1–21; Richmond, "Peace in an authoritarian international order", cit., pp. 1381–1401.

[5] Buzan, "The English School", cit., pp. 126–143.

[6] Börzel, Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order", cit., pp. 282–305; C. Dunton, M. Laurence, G. Vlavonou, "Pragmatic Peacekeeping in a Multipolar Era: Liberal Norms, Practices and the Future of UN Peace Operations", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 17 (2023), 3, pp. 215–234.

instruments of Western hegemony and interference.[7] The result is a normative environment in which regime security is increasingly treated as synonymous with security itself, providing illiberal regimes a pretext to securitise civil society and political opposition as threats to the state.[8] Great-power rivalry and renewed Security Council deadlock have further constrained the space for justice-driven protection action, reinforcing a pluralist logic that privileges stability and non-intervention over the protection of populations.[9]

After establishing the conceptual distinction between human and regime security within the ES framework, the argument turns to three case studies. Libya and Syria illustrate the rapid retreat from solidarist protection norms; MINUSMA demonstrates how UN peace operations have recalibrated their practices toward pluralist priorities – sovereignty, non-intervention, and regime stability – at the expense of civilian protection.

2. Security Practices: From Human to Regime Security

The post-Cold War era produced a profound normative redefinition of security,[10] shifting its primary referent object from the survival of the sovereign state to the lives and dignity of individual human beings.[11] Viewed through the ES, this represented the apex of a solidarist international society – one that privileges universal human rights and shared cosmopolitan values over strict adherence to the Westphalian principle of non-intervention.[12] Human security debates revolve around the question of which rights and responsibilities fall on international actors when states fail to protect their own populations, linking its normative foundations to the concept of conditional sovereignty – the idea that a state's sovereign prerogatives are contingent upon its capacity and willingness to protect its population.[13]

International law historically maintained a strict domestic-international boundary that rendered the UN largely a passive bystander to mass atrocities during the Cold War.[14] In the aftermath of the

[7] Bettiza, Lewis, "Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation", cit., pp. 559–577.
[8] N. Ibrahimi, H. Abdelhameed, A. Farasoo, "The Securitization of Civil Society in Conflict Zones: A Comparative Study of Iraq and Afghanistan", *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 10 (2025), 3, pp. 1–18; D. Lewis, J. Heathershaw, N. Megoran, "Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management", *Cooperation and Conflict*, 53 (2018), 4, pp. 486–506.
[9] S. Hellmüller, "Peacemaking in a shifting world order: A macro-level analysis of UN mediation in Syria", *Review of International Studies*, 48 (2022), 3, pp. 543–559.
[10] See B. Buzan, "Rethinking Security after the Cold War", *Cooperation and Conflict*, 32 (1997), 1, pp. 5–28.
[11] S. Fukuda-Parr, C. Messineo, "Human Security: A Critical Review of the Literature," CRPD Working Paper No. 11, Leuven, Centre for Research on Peace and Development (2012), pp. 1–19; M. Peter, R. Wang, "China's Approach to Human Security within and outside UN Peacekeeping: Drawing Lessons from South Sudan", *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 27 (2024), 1, pp. 85–114.
[12] Bettiza, Lewis, "Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation", cit., pp. 563–565; Buzan, "The English School", cit., pp. 126–143.
[13] Fukuda-Parr, Messineo, "Human Security", cit., pp. 1–19.
[14] J. Morris, "Libya and Syria: R2P and the spectre of the swinging pendulum", *International Affairs*, 89 (2013), 5, pp. 1265–1283.

genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, however, the international community increasingly embraced the principle of responsible sovereignty.[15] Formally endorsed through the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm at the 2005 UN World Summit, it affirmed the state's primary protective duty and codified the international community's responsibility to act under Chapter VII when a state manifestly fails to protect its citizens from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.[16] These norms were most visibly translated into practice through the integration of Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandates into UN peace operations. From Security Council Resolution 1270 for UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone – the first mandate explicitly authorizing peacekeepers to use force to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence – PoC evolved into a central doctrinal commitment, with over 95 percent of contemporary peacekeepers deployed under protection mandates.[17] Peacekeeping expanded accordingly: from passive ceasefire monitoring to a proactive operational concept encompassing dialogue and engagement, the provision of physical protection, and the establishment of a protective environment.[18] Simultaneously, UN peace operations institutionalised human security within the broader project of liberal peacebuilding – promoting democratization and the rule of law, and expanding mandates to include human rights monitoring and security sector reforms.[19]

Yet, even at its height, this solidarist model was structurally fragile. Liberal peacebuilding proved highly intrusive, generating friction with local realities and posing significant challenges to the foundational peacekeeping principles of impartiality and host-state consent.[20] The 2011 NATO intervention in Libya exposed the inherent tension between civilian protection and regime change, alienating states in the Global South, fracturing the solidarist consensus and stalling the advancement of human-centric security frameworks.[21] Protection had never been reliably institutionalised – it remained selective, politically contingent, and dependent on great-power alignment.

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[15] *Ibidem*.

[16] J. M. Welsh, "The Responsibility to Protect after Libya & Syria", *Daedalus*, 145 (2016), 4, pp. 75–87.

[17] J. Boulden, "The Protection of Civilians and Stabilisation in Peace Operations Mandates: An Analysis of Their Impact on Consent, Impartiality and the Use of Force", *Peace Research*, 50 (2018), 2, pp. 14–17; M. Peter, "Global Fragmentation and Collective Security Instruments: Weakening the Liberal International Order From Within", *Politics and Governance*, 12 (2024), pp. 5–7; P. D. Williams, A. J. Bellamy, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, 3rd ed., Medford (MA), Polity Press, 2021, pp. 324–342.

[18] E. P. Rhoads, "The Future of Protection in UN Peace Operations", *Ethics & International Affairs*, 38 (2024), 4, pp. 418–432.

[19] Boulden, "The Protection of Civilians", cit., pp. 12–14; R. Paris, "The future of UN peace operations: Pragmatism, pluralism or statism?", *International Affairs*, 100 (2024), 5, pp. 2153–2156.

[20] F. Badache, S. Hellmüller, B. Salaymeh, "Conflict management or conflict resolution: How do major powers conceive the role of the United Nations in peacebuilding?", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43 (2022), 4, pp. 547–571; Boulden, "The Protection of Civilians", cit., pp. 15–17.

[21] Morris, "Libya and Syria", cit., pp. 1265–1283; N. Tocci, "On Power and Norms: Libya, Syria and the Responsibility to Protect", *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 8 (2016), 1, pp. 51–75.

The retreat of solidarism consolidated a rival logic organised around regime survival – a concept that, while analytically distinct from state security, is routinely conflated with it. State security traditionally equates to "survival" and "autonomy," prioritizing territorial integrity and institutional continuity. Regime security, by contrast, takes the survival of the incumbent governing elite and the preservation of the existing political order as its primary referent object.[22] Typically, in consolidated democracies the two remain analytically separable, while in weak or authoritarian contexts they are deliberately conflated.[23] Ruling authorities thus routinely "equate the security of their regime with the security of the nation in order to serve their more narrow personal interests of staying in power and protecting their position of wealth and privilege",[24] leveraging Westphalian sovereignty as a shield against international scrutiny and using sovereign independence to repress their populations without external interference.[25] Regime and state security converge where the incumbent's survival and the state's institutional continuity become empirically indistinguishable – under personalist rule in which institutions do not outlive the ruler, under contested territorial control, and where external patronage substitutes for domestic legitimacy; they diverge wherever the strategies by which an incumbent secures itself corrode the institutions on which state security rests. Where institutions lack legitimacy and political membership is severely contested, the alternative to authoritarian rule may prove "more detrimental to the security of citizens than even the most repressive dictatorship".[26] That establishes only that incumbents may sincerely perceive their survival as the state's, not that the perception is warranted.

The internal logic of this conflation is best captured by the insecurity dilemma.[27] Unlike the classical security dilemma, which arises from anarchic interstate competition, the insecurity dilemma is rooted in acute internal vulnerabilities within "fragile" states, where the government itself frequently constitutes the greatest threat to its own population.[28] Krickovic (2015) demonstrates that authoritarian and hybrid leaders perceive internal dissent not as a natural expression of political plurality but as an existential threat, treating vulnerabilities as weaknesses that outside powers might exploit and, in turn, generating a cycle in which state coercion alienates the population and

[22] G. Sørensen, "After the Security Dilemma: The Challenges of Insecurity in Weak States and the Dilemma of Liberal Values", *Security Dialogue*, 38 (2007), 3, pp. 358–362.
[23] A. Krickovic, *From the Security to Insecurity Dilemma: Developing a Theory of Security for Today's Emerging Powers*, HSE Research Paper, Moscow, Higher School of Economics, 2015.
[24] *Ivi,* p. 21.
[25] Sørensen, "After the Security Dilemma", cit., pp. 366–372.
[26] Krickovic, *From the Security to Insecurity Dilemma*, cit., p. 21.
[27] For a detailed account on the insecurity dilemma, see: B. Job, *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1992.
[28] Sørensen, "After the Security Dilemma", cit., pp. 362–366.

necessitates ever-greater repression.[29] The maintenance of ruling authority thus systematically overrides the provision of individual human security.

This domestic logic directly shapes broader international arrangements. On the matter, Lewis et al. (2018) conceptualise the useful notion of authoritarian conflict management (ACM)[30] – a rationale that, as Paris (2024) notes, explicitly "eschew[s] genuine negotiations among parties to the conflict" in favour of "instruments of state coercion and hierarchical structures of power".[31] Richmond (2025) reads these mechanisms as part of a wider authoritarian international order (AIO) that trades the normative constraints of rights and democracy for a victor's peace.[32] The resulting victor's peace revives classical balance-of-power thinking, treating war and violence as legitimate instruments of state preservation where conflict resolution serves regime survival rather than justice or reconciliation, leaving civil society and the conditions for durable peace largely aside.[33] Civil society and political opposition are consequently not recognised as legitimate political actors but securitised as threats: regimes draw on enmity-based securitization to recast independent activism as foreign interference or terrorism, generating the legal and ideological pretext to systematically close civic space.[34]

That process is most visible in the turn to stabilisation operations. Liberal peacebuilding ambitions have given way to mandates that no longer aim to transform conflict societies but to contain them, prioritizing the neutralization of spoilers and the reassertion of host-state control over any broader project of political change.[35] By tasking peacekeepers with extending state authority, stabilisation operations effectively align international presence with incumbent regime survival, enabling autocratic consolidation.[36] As Peter (2024) observes:

> The co-optation of UN peacekeeping into counter-terrorism efforts and the introduction of stabilisation mandates undermined the principled nature and moral authority of the instrument of peacekeeping itself. This, in turn, compromised the implementation of human protection. This development is now accelerated and exposed due to global fragmentation.[37]

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[29] Krickovic, *From the Security to Insecurity Dilemma*, cit., pp. 3–5.
[30] D. Lewis, J. Heathershaw, N. Megoran, "Illiberal Peace? Authoritarian Modes of Conflict Management", *Cooperation and Conflict*, 53 (2018), 4, pp. 486–506.
[31] R. Paris, "The future of UN peace operations: Pragmatism, pluralism or statism?", *International Affairs*, 100 (2024), 5, p. 2170.
[32] Richmond, "Peace in an authoritarian international order", cit., pp. 1381–1401.
[33] I. Costantini, R. Hanau Santini, "Power mediators and the 'illiberal peace' momentum: Ending wars in Libya and Syria", *Third World Quarterly*, 43 (2022), 1, pp. 131–147; Richmond, "Peace in an authoritarian international order", cit., pp. 1390–1391.
[34] Ibrahimi, Abdelhameed, Farasoo, "The Securitization of Civil Society", cit., pp. 1–18.
[35] Karlsrud, "From Liberal Peacebuilding", cit., pp. 1–21.
[36] Paris, "The future of UN peace operations", cit., pp. 2153–2172.
[37] Peter, "Global Fragmentation", cit., p. 3.

This reflects a broader trend of norm downsizing, in which the promotion of human rights and democratic governance is subordinated to the demands of state security and regime consolidation.[38] Within wider counterterrorism and stabilisation campaigns, human protection is steadily relegated to a secondary consideration.[39]

This realignment is entrenched further through the weaponization of host-state consent. Contemporary host governments now routinely leverage the foundational peacekeeping principle of consent to block human rights monitoring and dictate mission priorities – producing a crisis of confidence.[40] Regimes manipulate access, delay visas, and threaten expulsion to keep international forces focused on non-state threats while deflecting scrutiny from state-led abuses: in contexts such as Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the UN's support for ruling states has inadvertently reinforced repressive tendencies and compromised mission impartiality.[41] At the Security Council level, P5 members with economic or security interests in host states actively narrow the scope of human rights provisions in mission mandates, directly diminishing peacekeepers' capacity for protection on the ground.[42] When armed conflict intensifies, host governments grow particularly resistant to any protection activities that might constrain their counterinsurgency strategies, forcing missions to scale back human rights efforts in favour of regime survival.[43]

These dynamics – stabilisation, counterterrorism, weaponised consent, and Security Council constraints – do not weigh equally, but their cumulative effect is a structural reorientation of international security governance: away from the individual and toward the state.

3. Reordering International Society: From Solidarism to Pluralism

The shift in the referent of international security practices coincides with a broader transformation in the normative architecture of international society. According to Buzan (2015), international societies progress along a spectrum ranging from a "pluralist, rather minimal, thin" order concerned primarily with coexistence and sovereign preservation, to a "solidarist, extensive, elaborate and thick" one in which states cooperate in pursuit of shared normative projects.[44] The post-Cold War era can accordingly be tracked along this spectrum: first a "thickening", as international society moved toward a more expansive normative order, and then a crisis – driven simultaneously by the internal

[38] Moe, Geis, "From liberal interventionism to stabilisation", cit., pp. 387–412.
[39] Rhoads, "The Future of Protection", cit., pp. 424–427.
[40] *Ivi*, p. 428.
[41] A. Duursma, "Pinioning the Peacekeepers: Sovereignty, Host-State Resistance Against Peacekeeping Missions and Violence Against Civilians", *International Studies Review*, 23 (2021), pp. 670–695; B. W. Reeder, "The Future of United Nations Peacekeeping in a Fragmenting World", *International Organization*, 79 (2025), 1, pp. S152–S154.
[42] H. Smidt, C. Ruhe, S. Otto, "Many hurdles to take: Explaining peacekeepers' ability to engage in human rights activities", *Journal of Peace Research*, 62 (2025), 4, pp. 1095–1111.
[43] *Ibidem.*
[44] Buzan, "The English School", cit., pp. 129–130.

retrenchment of liberal institutions and the external contestation of norms by rising authoritarian powers[45] – that facilitated a regression from solidarism back toward a pluralist order prioritizing sovereign equality, non-intervention, and the coexistence of diverse, often illiberal, political regimes.[46] While thin pluralist societies operate under the self-interested logic of *raison d'état*, solidarism elevates *raison de système*, orienting institutions around collective responsibility and shared normative projects.[47] As Ralph (2025) observes, solidarist institutions are profoundly shaped by transnational ideologies in ways their pluralist counterparts are not, imposing normative expectations that go well beyond the baseline rules of diplomatic coexistence.[48]

This thickening materialised visibly during the 1990s and early 2000s through a recognizable transformation of global order. Börzel and Zürn (2021) describe it as a shift from consent-based "liberal multilateralism" to "postnational liberalism", in which international institutions assumed binding authority to promote democracy, human rights, and humanitarian protection; as a result, state legitimacy became tied to the enforcement of liberal rights.[49] "Liberal intrusiveness" rose steeply, with institutions assuming unprecedented autonomy and binding authority over domestic policy, enforcing universal values over the claims of popular sovereignty.[50] The normative architecture of international order had expanded, in short, from the facilitation of mutual survival to enforcing shared values through a more intrusive regulatory regime.[51] Universal human rights norms inevitably challenged sovereignty's traditional function in its conception as an absolute shield against external interference.[52] During the post-Cold War solidarist moment, this resolved in favour of human protection, and sovereignty was reframed as conditional upon a state's willingness to safeguard its own population. R2P represents the clearest articulation of this shift – a deliberate challenge to sovereignty's role as what Jarvis (2025) calls a "tyrant's charter".[53]

The solidarist ambition, however, carried its own fragility. Ralph (2025) argues that solidarist systems generate ontological anxiety by imposing expansive normative expectations on domestic arrangements, unsettling states unable or unwilling to conform to universalist standards.[54] This provoked sustained backlash from actors who perceived these interventions as selective and corrosive

[45] T. A. Börzel, M. Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order: From Liberal Multilateralism to Postnational Liberalism", *International Organization*, 75 (2021), 2, pp. 282–305.
[46] Buzan, "The English School", cit., pp. 126–143; J. Ralph, "International society as an ontological security provider: A framework for analysis", *International Theory* (2025), pp. 1–23.
[47] Buzan, "The English School", cit., pp. 128–132.
[48] Ralph, "International society as an ontological security provider", cit., pp. 1–4.
[49] Börzel, Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order", cit., pp. 282–283.
[50] *Ivi*, pp. 286–290.
[51] *Ivi*, pp. 290–294.
[52] Buzan, "The English School", cit., pp. 132–134.
[53] S. Jarvis, "Failure through Consensus Building: Rethinking the Normative Status of the Responsibility to Protect in a Pluralist Global Order", *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 10 (2025), 3, p. 13.
[54] Ralph, "International society as an ontological security provider", cit., pp. 1–4, 10–13.

of popular sovereignty, with efforts to preserve the solidarist project through compromise, often eroding the very norms they sought to protect.[55] In the case of R2P, Jarvis (2025) shows how its "applicatory ambiguity" pushed advocates toward consensus-building practices that favoured non-intrusive measures over enforcement,[56] with states rhetorically embracing the principle while hollowing out its mechanisms in practice.[57]

The structural resilience of pluralism follows from the diffusion of power and the fragmentation of ideological consensus. The transition from liberal hegemony to a "multiplex" or "multi-order" world accommodates multiple modernities, rendering the thick consensus required to sustain a singular global order unviable and a thinner pluralist baseline a structural necessity rather than a choice.[58] That necessity is reinforced by the ontological insecurity solidarist frameworks inflict on authoritarian regimes, which experience the promotion of liberal democracy as the sole standard of legitimacy as an existential threat and respond through veto politics, alignment with like-minded states, and the construction of alternative institutions offering shelter from liberal conditionality.[59] Pluralism resolves these anxieties because it demands no domestic convergence, replacing the "ethics of harmony" of thick solidarist institutions with a restrained "ethic of co-existence" that respects the normative boundaries of diverse actors – and persists because it is the minimal architecture compatible with a multiplex, multi-order world.[60]

This reversion is institutional as well as ideational. The erosion of the LIO signals not a collapse into anarchy but a return to rules that protect state sovereignty ahead of individual protection, as major powers hollow out collective security instruments from within.[61] Where the solidarist paradigm grounded state legitimacy in participatory governance and the protection of civil and political rights, the statist framework rests on "classical sovereignty" – self-determination, external independence, sovereign equality – prioritizing national ownership and hierarchical authority over the horizontal structures of liberal peacebuilding.[62] Authoritarian powers reinforce that framework through "counter-norm entrepreneurship," provincializing liberal norms by recasting them as context-specific

[55] Börzel, Zürn, "Contestations of the Liberal International Order", cit., pp. 286–290.
[56] Jarvis, "Failure through Consensus Building", cit., p. 13.
[57] *Ivi*, pp. 5, 11.
[58] A. Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order", *Ethics & International Affairs*, 31 (2017), 3, pp. 271–285.
[59] T. Flockhart, "Is this the end? Resilience, ontological security, and the crisis of the liberal international order", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41 (2020), 2, pp. 220–224, 228–235; Y. A. Chen, "Organizing for Ontological Security: Rethinking Authoritarian International Organizations", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 30 (2025), 2, pp. 241–265.
[60] Ralph, "International society as an ontological security provider", cit., pp. 1–13.
[61] Peter, "Global Fragmentation", cit., pp. 1–15.
[62] O. Jütersonke, K. Kobayashi, K. Krause, X. Yuan, "Norm Contestation and Normative Transformation in Global Peacebuilding Order(s): The Cases of China, Japan and Russia", *International Studies Quarterly*, 65 (2021), 4, pp. 944–959.

products of Western history rather than objective global standards, and defending a pluralist order grounded in civilizational diversity and strict non-interference.[63]

This macro-level transformation directly shapes the operationalization of conflict management through the consolidation of an authoritarian international order – inherently statist and geopolitically oriented – in which conflict management defaults to the logic of the victor's peace.[64] This logic rejects international legal constraints, pursuing order through the "division of the spoils, territorial and economic power and maintenance of domestic, regional and global interests and power hierarchies".[65] Where international society abandons its solidarist ambitions and reasserts a pluralist baseline of non-interference and state survival, regime security becomes the practical expression of that order – the point where the structural and the operational converge.

4. Libya and Syria: Breaking Solidarist Consensus

The previous sections delineated a normative structure under strain; that strain became manifest in the decisions taken over Libya and Syria, the episodes in which the solidarist consensus over coercive protection was tested and broke. The 2011 intervention in Libya is widely regarded as the most concrete expression of post-Cold War human protection and R2P[66] – and, for the purposes of this analysis, of solidarist ambitions more broadly. Responding to the violence of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, the Security Council passed Resolution 1970, imposing sanctions and referring the situation to the International Criminal Court, before passing Resolution 1973 to authorize "all necessary measures to protect civilians".[67] At the time, this sequence appeared to validate the expectations of liberal internationalism, with UN officials explicitly declaring that R2P had finally "come of age".[68] Yet the authorization of coercive protection soon exposed the fragility it had momentarily concealed – what Morris (2013) captures through the image of a "swinging pendulum".[69]

The operationalization of the Libyan mandate – initially led by the United States, France and the United Kingdom (the P3) and subsequently commanded by NATO – soon drifted beyond the immediate protection of civilians that had secured Council support.[70] As NATO airstrikes extended beyond immediate civilian defence to explicit regime change, the P3 demonstrated a profound "norm

[63] Bettiza, Lewis, "Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation", cit., pp. 559–577.
[64] O. P. Richmond, "Peace in an authoritarian international order versus peace in the liberal international order", *International Affairs*, 101 (2025), 4, pp. 1381–1401.
[65] *Ivi*, pp. 1390–1391.
[66] Morris, "Libya and Syria", cit., pp. 1265–1283; Tocci, "On Power and Norms", cit., pp. 51–75.
[67] T. Dunne, K. Gelber, "Arguing Matters: The Responsibility to Protect and the Case of Libya", *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 6 (2014), 3, pp. 326–349; UN Security Council, Resolution 1970, 26 February 2011; UN Security Council, Resolution 1973, 17 March 2011.
[68] Morris, "Libya and Syria", cit., pp. 1265, 1280–1283.
[69] Ivi, p. 1277.
[70] Tocci, "On Power and Norms", cit., pp. 51–75.

inconsistency" that decisively widened the campaign's objectives.[71] By stretching Resolution 1973 to its limits, the implementing states failed to maintain consistent argumentation around the R2P norm, fatally undermining the very framework that had legitimised their action.[72] A mandate framed around protection came to be widely read as a cover for forcible political transformation – providing R2P sceptics with a ready-made script demonstrating Western insincerity.[73]

This perceived overreach marked a turning point for rising powers. Although Brazil, Russia, India, and China had initially abstained on Resolution 1973 due to strong regional pressure, NATO's subsequent campaign for regime change triggered a sharp normative recalculation among these states.[74] For them, Libya confirmed long-held suspicions that human protection norms were a vehicle for Western interventionism and forced regime change.[75] The result was a normative contraction that hardened the resolve of non-Western powers to defend the pluralist principles of sovereignty and non-intervention in future crises, fracturing the fragile consensus that had underpinned coercive protection and setting the stage for the pluralist consolidation that became fully visible in Syria.[76]

Morris (2013) observes that "the situation in Syria cannot be considered in the Council separately from the Libyan experience":[77] Syria quickly became the arena in which Libya's legacy was invoked to justify caution, retrenchment and, ultimately, inaction. Determined not to be drawn into the same precedent again, Russia and China weaponised the Libyan experience to justify their repeated vetoes of resolutions targeting the regime of Bashar al-Assad – blocking any measure hinting at non-consensual intervention or regime change under the banner of sovereign equality.[78] The resulting P5 disunity stripped UN mediators of leverage.[79] Despite this, the P3 continued to insist that "Assad must go", subordinating the immediate need for civilian protection to maximalist demands for regime change.[80] This intransigence represented a profound failure of "ethical competence" in the context of R2P: by refusing to reconcile the imperative of human protection with the necessity of collective decision-making, Western diplomats alienated other Council members, obstructed pragmatic humanitarian solutions and deepened the deadlock.[81]

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[71] Dunne, Gelber, "Arguing Matters", cit., pp. 345–348; Tocci, "On Power and Norms", cit., pp. 64–71.
[72] Dunne, Gelber, "Arguing Matters", cit., pp. 348–349.
[73] *Ibidem*.
[74] Tocci, "On Power and Norms", cit., pp. 64–71.
[75] Morris, "Libya and Syria", cit., pp. 1280–1283.
[76] Tocci, "On Power and Norms", cit., pp. 71–75.
[77] Morris, "Libya and Syria", cit., p. 1275.
[78] *Ivi*., pp. 1274–1277; Tocci, "On Power and Norms", cit., pp. 64–71.
[79] Hellmüller, "Peacemaking in a shifting world order", cit., pp. 543–559.
[80] J. Ralph, J. Gifkins, "The purpose of United Nations Security Council practice: Contesting competence claims in the normative context created by the Responsibility to Protect", *European Journal of International Relations*, 23 (2017), 3, pp. 643–645.
[81] *Ivi*, pp. 632–633, 639–640.

The resulting vacuum at the UN reflected a broader systemic shift from waning American unipolarity toward a more fragmented and competitive international order, characterised by intensified geopolitical contestation and the erosion of liberal normative authority.[82] As peacemaking was reconfigured, alternative non-Western architectures emerged to fill the void.[83] The most prominent was the Astana process – sponsored by Russia, Turkey, and Iran – which sidelined the UN's liberal approach to democratic transition in favour of military de-escalation and territorial control, facilitating outcomes aligned with regime survival and military advantage.[84] In Syria, as in the later stages of the Libyan conflict, these power mediators disregarded the liberal peacebuilding tenets of power-sharing, inclusion and human rights, advancing instead a model of authoritarian conflict management that privileged military victory, state suppression, and regime survival – "accompanied by the acceptance that international security is better served by containing a crisis rather than radically transforming the conditions that triggered it".[85] This reflects a broader divergence among major powers, whereby non-Western states increasingly reject intrusive, value-laden conflict resolution in favour of state-centric conflict management – one that prioritises order and, with it, the survival of the regime.[86] Syria consolidated pluralist paralysis not only because Russia and China defended sovereignty, but because Security Council practice failed to generate the "ethical competence" required to sustain collective protection-oriented action under conditions of contestation.[87] Through the Syrian crisis, the normative priority decisively shifted from protecting populations to protecting governments.

Libya and Syria thus exposed the limits of solidarist protection and accelerated the reassertion of pluralist constraints on multilateral action. They established the normative and operational context that pushed UN security governance toward highly militarised, regime-supporting missions – of which MINUSMA in Mali stands as the most instructive example, where pluralist constraints and regime-stability logics define what multilateral security action can plausibly do.

5. Regime Security in UN Practices: The Case of MINUSMA in Mali

Whereas Libya and Syria reveal the limits of what the Security Council would authorise, MINUSMA reveals what a mission deployed within those limits came to do on the ground. As peace operations

[82] A. Acharya, A. Estevadeordal, L. W. Goodman, "Multipolar or multiplex? Interaction capacity, global cooperation and world order", *International Affairs*, 99 (2023), 6, pp. 2339–2365.
[83] Hellmüller, "Peacemaking in a shifting world order", cit., pp. 548–550, 557–558.
[84] *Ibidem*.
[85] Costantini, Hanau Santini, "Power mediators", cit., pp. 137–142.
[86] Badache, Hellmüller, Salaymeh, "Conflict management or conflict resolution?", cit., pp. 551–552.
[87] Ralph, Gifkins, "The purpose of United Nations Security Council practice", cit., pp. 630–653.

are "children of their time",[88] UN practice has shifted together with the wider transformation of world politics and the changing expectations attached to multilateral intervention. Since the solidarist paradigm of liberal peacebuilding has weakened, powerful member states pursue "good enough" instrumental policies, relying on regional ad hoc coalitions and UN missions as proxies to manage low-intensity conflict and support more limited security objectives rather than expansive transformative ones.[89] Moe and Geis (2020) describe this as a process of "norm downsizing," wherein international and regional actors converge on a pragmatic, sovereignty-first approach that prioritises the containment of armed non-state actors over the advancement of human rights and democratic governance.[90] Stabilisation, in this sense, narrows the meaning of security and renders frequently repressive host governments largely immune from international pressure regarding their own human rights abuses – protecting the state far more than the individual. Yet this represents a tendency rather than a property: whether stabilisation forecloses protection depends on how far protective practice must pass through the host state.

As Karlsrud (2023) and Gilder (2021) note, pragmatic stabilisation relies on top-down, militarised logics to entrench state authority rather than transform conflict societies, pushing the UN toward support-oriented missions that provide infrastructure to regional enforcement efforts without adhering to traditional principles of impartiality or human rights conditionality.[91] Where earlier imaginaries cast peacekeepers as protectors of individual human rights, the post-liberal turn has progressively reimagined them as "police protectors" of order and stability.[92]

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), deployed from 2013 to 2023 in a highly militarised context, is one of the clearest expressions of this institutional transformation. Established via Resolution 2100, MINUSMA became the first UN peace operation to operate explicitly in a counterterrorism environment. Initially granted an expansive multidimensional mandate that formally retained the vocabulary of a liberal operation, the mission underwent significant institutional drift, reorienting toward the extension of state authority and conflict containment.[93] Crucially, the mandate was to be executed "in support of the transitional authorities,"

[88] S. Hellmüller, F. Badache, "Children of their time: The impact of world politics on United Nations peace operations", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 46 (2025), 2, pp. 177–196.
[89] Karlsrud, "From Liberal Peacebuilding", cit., pp. 15–16.
[90] Moe, Geis, "From liberal interventionism to stabilisation", cit., pp. 406–408.
[91] A. Gilder, "Human Security and the Stabilisation Mandate of MINUSCA", *International Peacekeeping*, 28 (2021), 2, pp. 200–231; J. Karlsrud, "'Pragmatic Peacekeeping' in Practice: Exit Liberal Peacekeeping, Enter UN Support Missions?", *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 17 (2023), 3, pp. 258–272.
[92] A. Prokhorova, "Productive Contestation: R2P and the Images of Protectors in UN Peacekeeping", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 46 (2025), 2, pp. 271–273.
[93] Reeder, "The Future of United Nations Peacekeeping", cit., pp. S148–S161; S. Zimmerman, "Defining State Authority: UN Peace Operations Efforts to Extend State Authority in Mali and the Central African Republic", *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 9 (2020), 1, pp. 1–16.

which, as Zimmerman (2020) notes, presumed a level of state legitimacy that was in fact heavily contested, especially in the north.[94] While UN officials attempted to anchor state authority in inclusive governance and service provision, Malian authorities tied it far more tightly to military dominance, territorial reintegration, and the restoration of central control. Facing intense host-state resistance and the threat of expulsion, UN staff exercised bureaucratic agency under constraint: to preserve access and mission continuity, they adapted by downscaling liberal benchmarks and subordinating impartial human protection to the regime's security demands.[95]

Following the 2015 Algiers Accord, MINUSMA was tasked with supporting the agreement's implementation – yet the mission became embedded in a deteriorating security environment, where the Malian government struggled to execute the accord, "choosing instead to focus on bolstering their military authority".[96] Asymmetric violence escalated, driving the Security Council to adopt an increasingly robust posture. By 2016, Resolution 2295 tasked MINUSMA to take a proactive role in deterring and countering asymmetric threats through "direct operations",[97] drawing it further into cooperation with the Malian Defence and Security Forces, the French Operation Barkhane, and the Group of Five (G5) Sahel Joint Force.[98] Even though MINUSMA did not formally become a counterterrorism mission, it operated in a counterterrorism environment and became closely entangled with parallel security architectures – acting as a logistical "support mission" for regional counterterrorism actors through the provision of fuel, rations, and medical evacuation, effectively compromising its standing as an impartial arbiter.[99] In that setting, the boundary between peacekeeping and counterterrorism became increasingly blurred, thus rendering the supposed division of labour harder and harder to sustain.

Within this militarised context, civilian protection became subordinated to the extension of state authority and the preservation of host-state cooperation, even amid mounting evidence that Malian state forces were targeting civilians, particularly among marginalised Arab and Tuareg populations.[100] Support for Barkhane and the G5, as well as information exchange and logistical cooperation, made the mission part of a wider security architecture that normalised military means as instruments of stabilisation.[101] Emboldened by the fragmentation of international security mechanisms, the Malian government actively weaponised its consent, restricting peacekeepers' freedom of movement and

[94] UNSC, *Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali*, S/2014/403, New York, United Nations, 9 June 2014; Zimmerman, "Defining State Authority", cit., p. 6.
[95] Reeder, "The Future of United Nations Peacekeeping", cit., pp. S148–S161.
[96] Zimmerman, "Defining State Authority", cit., p. 6.
[97] Karlsrud, "From Liberal Peacebuilding", cit., pp. 1–21.
[98] V. Gauthier Vela, "MINUSMA and the Militarization of UN Peacekeeping", *International Peacekeeping*, 28 (2021), 5, pp. 838–863.
[99] Karlsrud, " 'Pragmatic Peacekeeping' in Practice", cit., pp. 258–272.
[100] Zimmerman, "Defining State Authority", cit., pp. 1–15.
[101] Gauthier Vela, "MINUSMA and the Militarization", cit., pp. 838–863.

denying access to areas where state forces were suspected of committing atrocities; it also engaged in "forum shopping" by seeking alternative security partners, such as the Russian Wagner Group, which lacked robust accountability requirements.[102] Under these conditions, the protection of civilians became harder to sustain in practice, especially where state forces themselves were implicated in abuses against marginalised populations. UN officials were frequently reluctant to confront the host government over human rights abuses, fearing that such actions would precipitate the mission's expulsion and thus narrow their willingness and ability to monitor or confront host-state violence.[103]

Although field constraints were severe, this failure was fundamentally shaped by the political dynamics of the Security Council. Smidt, Ruhe, and Otto (2025) show that P5 economic and security interests shape the strength of human rights provisions in peacekeeping mandates, and that weaker human rights language reduces peacekeepers' ability to engage in human rights activities on the ground.[104] In Mali, these broader pluralist constraints intersected with host-state leverage. As the international order fragmented and alternative security partners became available, the Malian authorities gained greater room to contest UN scrutiny and dictate the terms of presence. Crucially, Russia leveraged its veto power and its bilateral security agreements with the Malian junta to oppose "intrusive" human rights language during mandate renewals.[105]

The claim regarding the operationalisation of a pluralist turn can be traced at four points: first, in mandate language, as Resolution 2100's formula of support for the transitional authorities gave way to the "direct operations" of Resolution 2295; second, in the mission's entanglement with Barkhane and the G5 Sahel, which resulted in an impartial presence being transformed into logistical infrastructure for counterterrorism; third, in the host state's weaponization of consent, from restricted movement and denied access to the turn toward Wagner; and lastly, at the Council itself, where Russia's bilateral commitments to the junta resulted in a refusal to endorse any intrusive human rights language at renewal.

This mechanism is not, however, uniform across missions of this type. MINUSCA, deployed in the Central African Republic since 2014 with the protection of civilians as its first mandated priority alongside support to the political transition and the extension of state authority, operated under a comparable stabilisation template and conducted joint operations and patrols with national forces; yet the mission simultaneously supported the reopening of courts, prisons and police stations, the establishment of the Special Criminal Court, mobile courts adjudicating civil cases, and local peace

[102] Rhoads, "The Future of Protection", cit., pp. 418–432.
[103] *Ibidem*.
[104] Smidt, Ruhe, Otto, "Many hurdles to take", cit., pp. 1095–1111.
[105] *Ibidem*.

and reconciliation committees.[106] Nor was it captured by the incumbent: MINUSCA's mandated dialogue efforts fed insurgents' perceptions that peacekeepers "were but an arm of a government that was unwilling to engage in discussions with armed groups", while the government simultaneously judged the mission "not being decisive enough in its support of state extension".[107] Part of what separates the two cases is where protection had to pass. In Mali the protective functions that bore on state-perpetrated abuse were mediated end to end: monitoring required access, reporting required tolerance, and redress required Malian institutions to act – so withholding any single link disabled the chain, which is precisely what restricted movement, denied access to sites of suspected abuse, and the eventual demand for withdrawal accomplished. MINUSMA's Chapter VII authority to use force in defence of civilians was never formally withdrawn; what was withdrawn was every condition under which it could be exercised against the state's own forces.

MINUSCA, by contrast, was granted urgent temporary measures "beyond the normal law enforcement capabilities of peace operations", under which it apprehended suspects directly and supported the Special Criminal Court established to try them.[108] In the Central African Republic, the same protective act did not require the same permission. What the comparison isolates, then, is not stabilisation mandates or entanglement with host-state forces – MINUSCA carried both and protected regardless – but the degree to which protection depends on the incumbent's consent. Where that dependence is partial, obstruction raises the cost of protection; where it is total, as it became in Mali, withholding consent ends it.

MINUSMA nonetheless exemplifies a wider sovereignty-first drift in peacekeeping: alternative powers forced the UN to accommodate host-government interests in order to preserve its own operational relevance.[109] It also illustrates several converging trends in UN practice: pragmatic peacekeeping practices can function as logistical and political cover for regimes to suppress domestic opposition under the guise of counterterrorism, rendering them "largely immune from pressure" regarding their repressive treatment of civilians;[110] the protection of the state has systematically superseded the protection of the individual;[111] and this shift has definitively eroded the impartial "moral authority" of UN peacekeeping.[112] The case of MINUSMA, in short, demonstrates where the

[106] Gilder, "Human Security and the Stabilisation Mandate", cit., pp. 210–212, 215, 220, 227; Zimmerman, "Defining State Authority", cit., p. 11.
[107] J. Welsh, M.-J. Zahar, "What Future for Peace Operations?", *Ethics & International Affairs*, 38 (2024), 4, p. 410.
[108] Gilder, "Human Security and the Stabilisation Mandate", cit., p. 210; Reeder, "The Future of United Nations Peacekeeping", cit., p. S154.
[109] Reeder, "The Future of United Nations Peacekeeping", cit., pp. S148–S161.
[110] Moe, Geis, "From liberal interventionism to stabilisation", cit., pp. 387–412.
[111] Prokhorova, "Productive Contestation", cit., pp. 253–283.
[112] Peter, "Global Fragmentation", cit., pp. 1–15.

structural dynamics traced across the preceding sections find their sharpest operational expression – and, read against MINUSCA, it identifies consent as the channel through which they operate.

6. Conclusion

The post-Cold War solidarist moment was always more fragile than its advocates acknowledged. The redefinition of security from human-centric to regime-centric, far from being just a theoretical abstraction, represents a systemic shift from a solidarist to a pluralist international society, written into the international practices and institutional architecture of global governance.

Together, the cases of Libya and Syria illustrate the rapid collapse of the post-Cold War solidarist consensus. The overreach of Western powers in Libya – who stretched a civilian-protection mandate into a campaign for regime change – destroyed the fragile trust required to operationalise R2P, making states more reluctant to treat it as a stable authorization frame and more inclined to insist on sovereignty-first constraints.[113] A resurgent bloc of rising powers, empowered by the transition toward a more multipolar global order, contributed decisively to the reassertion of pluralist norms. Syria then consolidated this shift: P5 disunity and the decline of the liberal order constrained UN mediation from within, while alternative formats and power mediators filled the space with approaches oriented toward de-escalation, territorial control, and regime survival rather than democratic transition or inclusive settlement.[114] The net effect is the institutional and practical reassertion of a pluralist order: civilian protection has become politically conditional and procedurally blocked, while the security of governing authorities has emerged as the implicit baseline around which conflict management is organised. The ambitious, human-centred projects of the solidarist era have thus been subordinated to the pluralist imperatives of order, non-intervention, and state authority.

MINUSMA demonstrates how the macro-level shift toward a pluralist, multi-order world has been operationalised within the micro-level practices of UN peacekeeping. Powerful states exploit the UN's institutional mechanisms to strip peacekeepers of the authority needed to monitor or challenge state-perpetrated abuses, reducing missions to instruments of state consolidation.[115] Its trajectory shows how collective security mechanisms have adapted to accommodate authoritarian host-state preferences – subordinating human protection to the imperatives of consent, counterterrorism coordination, and regime survival. Faced with a divided Security Council, assertive host states, and the proliferation of alternative security coalitions, the UN has retreated from the transformative aspirations of liberal peacebuilding, institutionalising through stabilisation and pragmatic

[113] Morris, "Libya and Syria", cit., pp. 1265–1283; Tocci, "On Power and Norms", cit., pp. 51–75.
[114] Costantini, Hanau Santini, "Power mediators", cit., pp. 131–147.
[115] Smidt, Ruhe, Otto, "Many hurdles to take", cit., pp. 1095–1111.

peacekeeping a regime-security logic that prioritises state survival over the protection of individuals. That retreat, as the comparison with MINUSCA suggests, operates less by removing protection from mandates than by routing it through the host state: where missions retain the authority to act on their own account, protective practice survives inside a stabilisation frame; where they do not, it is available only at the incumbent's discretion. The pluralist order does not need to repudiate human protection; it needs only to make its exercise depend on the consent of the authorities from whom populations most often need protecting.

Exploring Information Security: A Theoretical Analysis of The Growing Relevance of Information as A Security Matter

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Abstract

In the last decades, information has emerged as a core issue across social, political, and military domains. This article addresses the question of how information should be situated within contemporary security studies. Summarizing information characteristics among its main operational fields, the paper maps information security's theoretical and conceptual position within security studies. It argues that information security is best understood not as a distinct sector, but as a cross-cutting structural condition that reshapes the distribution of vulnerabilities across both state-centric and human-centred security domains.

Keywords: Information Security, Security Studies, Human Security, Security Vulnerabilities.

Sommario: 1. Introduction – 2. Information: what is it and why it matters for security – 2.1 Brief genealogy of information relevance for security – 3. Security and Human Security – 3.1 Critics to Human Security – 3.2 Human Security within Security – 4. Information Security in the matrix of security debates – 5. Information Security and States Security – 5.1 Military Threaths and state's information security – 5.2 Non-military threats and state's information security – 6. Information Security and society, groups and individual security – 6.1 Military threats and social/individual's information security – 6.2 Non-military threats and social/individuak's information security – 7. Discussion – 7.1 Criticism – 8. Conclusion.

1. Introduction

Information relevance is growing in contemporary politics, international affairs, and social dynamics. Although propaganda and manipulation are not new to politics, information emerged clearly in international relations discussions. From this starting point, information has gained relevance for security matter too. However, information is a multisectoral concept, little institutionalized and formalized within theoretical circles. Thus, even intersecting international science with political and military matters, information has not a clear theoretical and epistemic collocation within them. Increasing this debate in the literature is the goal of the article. In particular, the paper aims to investigate whether information intersects security in its narrow national security meaning and in its "human" reading (Human Security).

Firstly, the article introduces the main characteristic and genealogy of information as a security matter. Once identified its relevance, it briefly exposes security studies and identifies its operational typology. Security studies is an academic branch of international relations that studies organized violence, military conflict, national security, and international security. It merges with diplomacy, foreign policy, conflict resolution, emergency management, intelligence, and human security. Given these bases, the paper explores and evaluates the conceptual collocation of information within the security sector.

The main hypothesis is that information security is best understood as a cross-cutting structural condition that reshapes the distribution of vulnerabilities across existing security domains, being a modality which has to be embedded longitudinally in the canonical domains of security studies. The paper is a theoretical and conceptual mapping, aimed at clarifying categories and suggesting research and policy implications, not at causal inference from data.

2. Information: what is it and why it matters for security

For analytical clarity, and exploring the fields within it acts, information can be understood at three levels: as data, as communication, and as an environment. Each level is distinctively relevant to security.

The first dimension considers information as processed data[1] – defined as the analysis, interpretation, or usage of neutral material concerning entities. Data may include personal data, defined by the GDPR as the "information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person"[2], they comprehend: name, identification number, location data, online identifier or factors specific to the physical, physiological,

[1] Data.gov, *Glossary: Data vs. Information*, 2026, https://resources.data.gov/glossary/data-vs.-information/.
[2] European Union, *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*, *Article 4: Definitions*, Regulation (EU) 2016/679, 2016, https://gdpr.eu/article-4-definitions/.

genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity[3]. At the same time, sensitive data may concern states and organisations, comprehending strategical, tactical, and organisational knowledge about their functioning. Even if physical archives are still relevant, nowadays the debate mainly concerns data in *cyberspace* – the network of physical (central and peripherical nodes), logical (norms to process and transmit data), and *persona* (agent which interact within the network) layers which defined the human-machine interaction[4]. Cyberspace implies an increase in data's accessibility and circulation, which makes their protection dependent on the so-called *cybersecurity*.

From a security perspective, this level raises issues related to privacy, surveillance, and data protection. The aggregation of data of people or institutions allow to detect and interfere important questions. It enables detailed profiling, creating new forms of vulnerability. Consequently, the protection of data is not merely a technical challenge but also an ethical and political matter – which concern autonomy, privacy, and the control of sensitive information.

The second level reads information as a communicative content. It includes narratives, frames, discourses, and mis- or dis-information – all crucial to communication. In detail, narratives "help to construct personal and social identity, provide sense and order to experience, and frame and structure action"[5] which are responsible of the ontology of the human world. Frames organise meaning by providing and emphasising aspect of reality and its interpretation[6]. Discourses represent the sum of linguistics and not linguistics elements which produce a specific form of reality[7]. In parallel, there are important procedures within this dimension: misinformation – which refers to the dissemination of material whose trueness cannot be verified committed without intent – and disinformation, that involves the sharing of false information with the strategic intent to do so.

At this level, information becomes a security issue because communication shapes perception, legitimacy, and political behaviour. Communication has assumed a relational and constructive dimension, going beyond the mere transmission of information. Accordingly, critical studies from media (McLuhan), social science (Foucault, Frankfort School, Habermas), and linguistics (Fairclough, Wodak) state the soft power of communicative content in the definition and mutation of social spaces, structures, and international relations.

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[3] European Union, *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Article 4: Definitions*, cit.

[4] D. Van Puyvelde, A. F. Brantly, *Cybersecurity: Politics, Governance and Conflict in Cyberspace*, Cambridge, Polity, 2019.

[5] G. Roberts, "History, Theory and the Narrative Turn in IR", *Review of International Studies,* 32 (2006), 4, pp.703-714, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210506007248.

[6] R. M. Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", *Journal of Communication*, 43 (1993), 4, pp. 51–58, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x.

[7] P. Baker, S. Ellece, *Key Terms in Discourse Analysis*, London-New York, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011.

Finally, information can be understood as an environment. According to NATO's operational definition, the information environment is

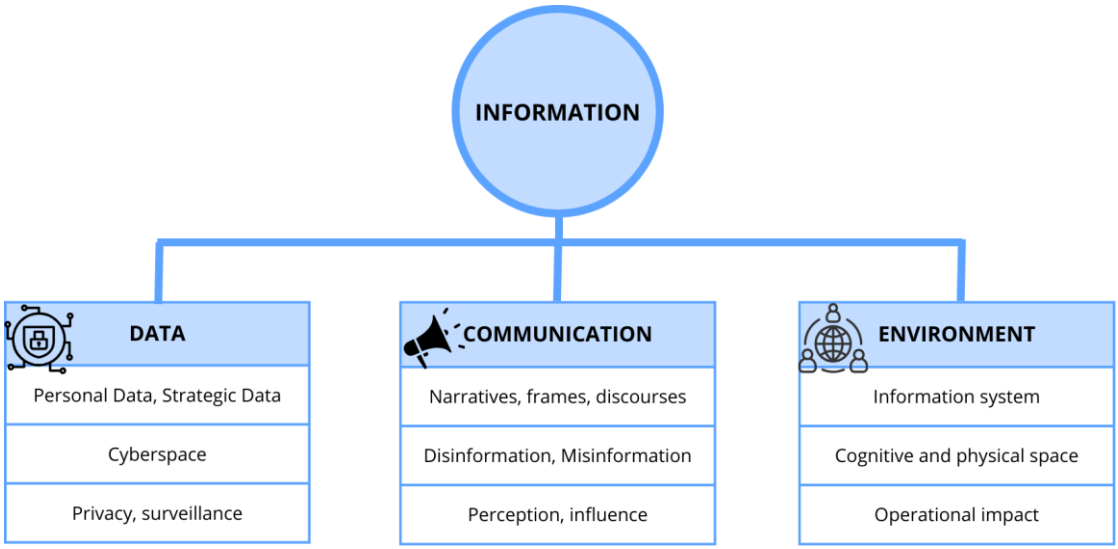
> "an environment comprised of the information itself, the individuals, organizations and systems that receive, process and convey the information, and the cognitive, virtual and physical space in which this occurs".[8]

In this sense, information constitutes a wide space where communication processes, technological infrastructures, and cognitive interactions intersect.

From this perspective, the security relevance lies in the fact that the information environment may affect multiple domains, shaping whether actors perceive threats, organise actions, and exercise power.

The diagram (below) summarizes those notions:

Figure 1. Levels of Information and Security Matters



2.1 Brief genealogy of information relevance for security

As information lacks a single universally accepted definition, reflections on its role in security must consider the different trajectories though which its relevance has emerged. The aim of this section is not to provide a comprehensive historical overview, but rather to show how information progressively evolved from a technical and strategic tool into a structural environment which eventually shape the contemporary policies.

Information as processed data has long been linked to security. The first root of protection of data was within military and diplomatic contexts. States historically sought to protect sensitive information

[8] NATO Standardization Office (NSO), *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions (English and French), AAP-06 Edition*, 2021, cit., p. 68.

concerning strategic decisions, military capabilities, and diplomatic negotiations. However, with the expansion of cyberspace and large-scale data collection, the scope of data security has expanded beyond state secrecy. Digital data (of people and organisations) increasingly allow entities to construct detailed profiles of individuals, groups, and institutions – raising concerns not only about cybersecurity but also about privacy, autonomy, and surveillance. Personal data defines identities and allows detailed outlines and profiles of people which may be used for profiling[9]. For instance, when a fitness application analyses sleep patterns and activity levels to estimate a user's "risk of stress", it not only records biological parameters but also produces evaluations that may influence how individuals perceive themselves and organise their behaviour. In the same way, predictive policing systems may shape institutional responses.

Information as communication intersect deeply with social sciences, which – from rhetoric and propaganda studies in the ancient societies (from Greeks to Romans) – have progressively emphaticised the cognitive and normative role of language in shaping social and political contexts. The growing importance of global media systems made this dimension particularly visible in international politics. For instance, the real-time coverage of conflicts during the First Gulf War (the so-called "CNN Effect") illustrated how global news networks could influence political decision-making by accelerating response times, shaping public expectations, and constraining governmental action[10].

Within political and military fields, the management of narratives has become paramount and has translated into the growing importance of the management of narratives, public messaging, and strategic communication. They aim to modify, influence, and integrate information strategies to create some desired effects on will, comprehension, and skills of a targeted-audience to reach a goal. During the Afghan and Iraqi missions in the early 2000s, information operations revolved to win "hearts and minds" of local population and to support ISAF and USA liberal values[11]. The same approach has developed in other contexts. Russia has developed the model of information warfare, while China the integrated information strategies aimed at shaping narratives and protecting intellectual and technological knowledge[12].

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[9] S. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, New York, Public Affairs, 2019.

[10] S. Livingston, *Clarifying The CNN Effect: An Examination of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention*, Shorenstein Center Research Paper Series, R-18, Cambridge, Harvard University, 1997.

[11] G. R. Dimitriu, "Winning the Story of War: Strategic Communication and the Conflict in Afghanistan", *Public Relations Review*, 38 (2012), 2, pp. 195–207, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.11.011.

[12] M. Conoscenti, The Military's Approach to the Information Environment, in S. Maci et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse and Disinformation*, London-New York, Routledge, 2024, pp. 218-238, https://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003224495-17.

More recently, the expansion of digital technologies has contributed to a further transformation of information into a more structural environment. Technologies such as social network, Artificial Intelligence, bots, and algorithmic systems mediate how information circulates. Communication has become more decentralised and faster, while traditional gatekeepers multiply. In addition, the engagement of the so-called *cyberspace* into everyday practices allows actors to conduct indirect, less accountable, and highly reproducible actions within a complex network of physical, logical, and human interactions[13].

In this sense, information has broadened its agency, and it can be understood as an environment. It is not a mere strategic tool for politics, but also an operational space where the world take form. These developments have expanded the scope of information-related vulnerabilities. Information can now involve the cognitive dimension of individuals and societies, influence public opinion through digital platforms, and use algorithmic amplification to intensify social polarisation or erode trust in institutions. At the same time, the large-scale collection and commercial exploitation of personal data by major technology companies illustrates how information dynamics also shape economic and socio-political structures, generating new forms of power and dependency based on data extraction and behavioural prediction[14].

Taken together, these transformations indicate a shift in the role of information within security debates. Information increasingly constitutes the environment within which political, social, and security interactions occur. Understanding this transformation is therefore essential for analysing how contemporary vulnerabilities emerge across individual, societal, and state levels.

3. Security and Human Security

In 1994, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released the *Human Development Report*[15] introducing the concept of "Human Security". It represents a new and broad paradigm which aim to interpret security as a people-centred and universal matter. The term aimed to expand the traditional meaning of security as a statal and "defensive" concept. Following this reflexion, security is not just "national security" but it is an "integrative concept"[16], where its components are inherently interdependent. Human Security means freedom from wants, from indignity, and from fear; and it regards both chronic and sudden threats. In this sense, Human Security allows people to meet their essential needs, empowering participation and local development. The report identifies seven broad

[13] D. Van Puyvelde, A. F. Brantly, *Cybersecurity,* cit.
[14] S. Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism,* cit.
[15] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994*, United Nations, 1994, https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1994.
[16] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994*, cit., p. 24.

dimensions of Human Security, namely: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. Emerging from the report, those categories represent domains of basic human vulnerabilities and capabilities. The interconnectedness of Human Security's fields suggests its global nature, as that of its threats[17].

At the same time, this ambitious and normative model of Human Security comes with some criticisms.

3.1 Critics to Human Security

Scholars individuate two main problems of Human Security.

First, academics have rase Human Security's conceptual vagueness and operational difficulties[18]. As it potentially comprehends a wide range of social, economic, and political vulnerabilities, it becomes difficult to define clear analytical boundaries or to translate the concept into concrete policy priorities. From a theoretical level, any kind of discomfort for the individual may be defined as a Human Security matter, making extremely hard to exactly define its borders and to translate it in a new strategic and policy-making doctrine[19].

Second, the normative nature of the concept makes it politically flexible, allowing it to function as a rallying concept[20]. The vagueness of Human Security enables heterogeneous actors to adopt the concept while interpreting it in ways that align with their own political interests. In some cases, this flexibility may also facilitate the securitisation of new policy areas, thereby legitimising political intervention under the broad label of "security".[21]

Despite these criticisms, the Human Security framework remains analytically useful because it highlights how vulnerabilities affecting individuals and societies can constitute security problems. This broader perspective provides an appropriate framework for examining how information-related vulnerabilities affect not only states but also societies and individuals.

3.2 Human Security within Security

A convenient approach to the Human Security concept is to consider it as a field of security studies. In this frame, its reflexions resonate "with non-military threats to the safety of societies, groups, and individuals, in contrast to more traditional approaches to security studies that focus on protecting

[17] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994*, cit., p. 34.
[18] R. Paris, "Human Security. Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?", *International Security*, 26 (2001), 2, pp. 87–102.
[19] For instance, in the EU's security doctrines, the issue emerges clearly. The European debate is clearly stated in: G. Christou, "The European Union's Human Security Discourse: Where Are We Now?", *European Security*, 23 (2014), 3, pp. 364–381, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2014.884075.
[20] R. Paris, "Human Security. Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?", cit.
[21] M. McDonald, "Securitization and the Construction of Security", *European Journal of International Relations*, 14 (2008), 4, pp. 563-587, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066108097553.

states from external threats".[22] This categorisation follows the division of security field in a typology, as explained by Roland Paris and reported in the following table:[23]

Table 1. A matrix of Security Studies**.**

		Source of security threat	
		Military	**Military, non-military, or both**
Security from whom?	**States**	Cell 1. National security	Cell 2. Redefined security
	Societies, groups, and individuals	Cell 3. Intrastate security	Cell 4. Human security

Following this classification, information assumes relevance in more than one cell. The following section will explore and try to depict the idea of "information security" within the security studies field. The analytical value of this framework grounds in the fact that information-related vulnerabilities do not remain confined to a single cell of the matrix. Instead, they operate across all four dimensions. The following sections examine how information interacts with the different referent objects and threat types identified in the matrix (above) from a theoretical and epistemological perspective.

4. Information security in the matrix of security debates

Information security is normative and operational category which concern:

a) the protection of data (information as processes data), both in individual (personal data) and state dimensions;
b) the protection of reliable access to acceptable information and fair conditions for belief and system formation, not simply the absence of influence by communication (information as communicative content);
c) the protection of national and people' informational space where social, political, and military dynamics occurs (information as an environment).

All those dimensions imply both physical and cyber domains, as well as the idea of searching for epistemic justice.

[22] R. Paris, "Human Security. Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?", cit., p. 96.
[23] R. Paris, "Human Security. Paradigm Shift or Hot Air?", cit., p. 98.

Consequently, information insecurity occurs when and where the information – as processed data, as communicative content, and as environment – is undermined in its statal or societal/individual domains from different threats: namely: military, non-military, or both. It undermines basic interests of an actor as a primary driver or as a multiplier of pre-existing issues.

Each category will be described on the base of the following analytical structure: information layer (processed data, communicative content, or environment), characteristics and functioning mechanisms of dynamics, and the nature of information as a dependent or independent variable. Analysis is divided between state and non-state security, and between military or non-military threats (see Table 1).

5. Information Security and States security

As seen in the second section, top-level decision-making and institutional domains are largely addressing information – in all its dimensions – as an integral part of doctrines and operations. The nature of these information threats can be both military (*Cell 1*) and non-military (*Cell 2*).

5.1 Military threats and states' information security

Military speaking (*Cell 1*), warfare is a crucial source of information insecurity, where the use of information strategies varies within each context. Here, it is relevant the so-called *hybrid warfare*, which includes the use of information environment as a space where military and political information operations and counteroperations occur.

Under the "processed data" layer, information insecurity from states consists in the theft of sensitive data (hacking) or in the destruction of crucial functions of a state compromising software and data (cyberattacks; e.g., the 2007 cyberattacks on Estonia).

Under the communication layer, those information operations are deeply embedded in mixed environment (*Cell 2*: military and non-military). For example, the spread of disinformation campaigns (e.g., the *Russia gate* in the 2016 US elections) or the development of narratives to influence operations (e.g., the "hearts and minds" approach in Afghanistan and Iraq's missions)[24]. Through framing and influencing dynamics, those operations can cause belief changes, which eventually modify the outcome of wide strategies.

[24] G. R. Dimitriu, "Winning the Story War", cit.

Information military operations (NATO, USA), information warfare (Russia), information dominance (China)[25], and algorithmic manipulation (clickbait, fake news, echo chambers)[26] are all military and political operations which operate primarily within the information environment layer.
In these cases, information security is both the dependent variable – the resilience or vulnerability of the state's information environment depending on hybrid warfare operation – and the independent variable – when it shapes strategic outcomes and military effectiveness which basically consist in the strategic field of hybrid warfare.

5.2 Non-military threats and state's information security

States' security is affected by information even outside the military sector (*Cell 2*). Regarding economy, according to van Niekerk and Ramluckan[27], economic information warfare (EIW) is responsible of damaging practices at a broad level. For instance, information manipulation or dissemination of fake news on financial or economic matter (communication layer) directly affect business management, supply chains, and competition in national and international trade and affairs. Finally, online information environment can enrich illegal networks (criminals, drug cartels), guaranteeing encrypted chats and less accountability (information environment).
Moreover, environment destruction can be considered a national security matter. Environment may be affected by information operations as well documented by linguistics analysis by Arran Stibbe in *Ecolinguistics*[28]. The book analyses all the communicative elements which are accountable for ecological destruction. It identifies a diffuse information (as communication) issue with industrial and capitalist discourses which encourage unlimited growth, exploitation, human exceptionalism and unnecessary consumption on a finite planet. Information communication on the environment is further responsible for credibility and facticity of stories and campaigns. For example, the documentary *The Great Global Warning Swindle*[29] denies human responsibility in global warming, reducing facticity of some scientists while increasing that of others in order to validate its thesis. The reduction of the warning over water, soil, and air pollution emergences contribute to national and international underestimation of chronic environmental threats, appointing information responsible for the deterioration of the natural environment, thereby increasing state insecurity.

[25] M. Conoscenti, "The Military's Approach to the Information Environment", cit.
[26] M, Gombar, "Algorithmic Manipulation and Information Science: Media Theories and Cognitive Warfare in Strategic Communication", *European Journal of Communication and Media Studies*, 4 (2025), 2, pp. 1–11, https://doi.org/10.24018/ejmedia.2025.4.2.41.
[27] B. van Niekerk, T. Ramluckan, "Economic Information Warfare: Feasibility and Legal Considerations for Cyber-Operations Targeting Commodity Value Chains", *Journal of Information Warfare*, 18 (2019), 2, pp. 31–48, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26894669.
[28] A. Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*, 2nd ed, London-New York, Routledge, 2021.
[29] M. Durkin (director), *The Great Global Warming Swindle*, WAGtv, 2007, 1h14m.

The same analysis is true for health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Worlds Health Organisation (WHO) has introduced the term *infodemic* to express the large spread of false or misleading information (communicative contents) during a disease outbreak. This phenomenon: "Causes confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health. It also leads to mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response".[30]

In non-military domains, the integrity of information security can function as an independent variable influencing behavioural, institutional, and policy outcomes – eventually damaging states security.

Starting from these reflexions, it is crucial to recognise that individual and social considerations derive from them.

6. Information Security and society, groups and individual security

The following paragraph analyses whether information insecurity can affect data protection (where information is intended as processed data), cognitive autonomy (information as communicative content), and socio-political dynamics (information as an environment) of society, groups, and individuals.

6.1 Military threats and social/individual's information security

Disinformation, public diplomacy techniques, cyberattacks, hacking, massive surveillance are all information mechanism which affect both individuals and societies.

In detail, regarding processed data, information security must protect the so-called *personal data*. It aligns with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[31], which has been promoted by the European Union in 2016 (effective since 2018) to stress the protection of people with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. It regulates organisational practices for data protection, supports individual situational awareness about data and their compromission, and requires accountability and transparency in data usage[32]. In this case, information security is the dependent variable, which allow people to protect personal and sensitive data about themselves.

On the communicative layer of information, individual information insecurity includes the non-feasibility of reliable information and mechanism to protect from disinformation. It also includes the lack of opportunity to maximize conditions for non-dominated, critically informed judgement

[30] World Health Organization (WHO), *Infodemic*, 22 December 2020, https://www.who.int/health-topics/infodemic.

[31] European Union, *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)*, Regulation (EU) 2016/679, 2016, https://gdpr.eu/tag/gdpr/.

[32] European Union, *General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Art. 4: Definitions,* cit.

reducing vulnerability to systemic control and manipulation (cognitive autonomy). Considering people as situated within a social order, where both individual and social levels exercise a mutually influence, the collective dimension is included in the same reasoning. As a consequence, information security against the threat of disinformation, manipulative narratives and frames assumes the goal to reduce destructive consequences, mainly through education (triangulation and recognition of reliable sources).

Regarding the military security threat (*Cell 3*), this personal and collective domain of information security is dependent to external military threats, eroding the protection of these components and resulting in the consequences of macro-dynamics on citizens (e.g., massive theft of data which may comprehend personal data). Of course, it is valid for hybrid warfare contexts, including mixed military and non-military threats (e.g., disinformation campaigns). At the same time, information security may become the independent variable: it protects data and cognitive autonomy to influence social outcomes, enhancing individual and social information resilience. Thus, information security operates as a mediating variable between hybrid military threats and individual/social resilience in the informational environment.

6.2 Non-military threats and social/individual's information security

In the non-military domain (*Cell 4*), information security intersects directly with Human Security. Generally speaking, information (human) security reflects the concerns about protection of personal data and cognitive autonomy. It cares of chronic threats (e.g., pervasive data harvesting, algorithmic profiling, echo-chambers, framing, misinformation, and surveillance) and of sudden shocks (e.g., data breaches, ransomware attacks, micro-targeting advertising), which can rapidly transform public perceptions and social cohesion. Distribution of information (in)security is not equal: it appears more acute within minorities, highly polarized environments, and less educated societies – where there is less opportunity to detect and comprehend manipulation or to defend from information operations.

However, rather than adding a new eighth category, the analysis emphasises the interconnectedness of Human Security domains – recognizing the wide range of actions of information (as seen in the previous paragraphs). Given this, information can be understood as a cross-cutting dimension that conditions vulnerabilities across the seven Human Security domains identified by UNDP. In details:

- *Personal and community security: protection from physical, ethnic, and sectarian violence*. Even if information operations rarely produce physical insecurity – as violence and threats are expressed via media platforms and discrimination acquires a "cyber" dimension (e.g. cyberbullies, cyberstalking)[33] – consequences on personal and community security can occur.

[33] D. Van Puyvelde, A.F. Brantly, *Cybersecurity,* cit.

Online harassment, cyberstalking and hate speech can inflict psychological harm, reputational damage, increase social tensions, and eventually enhancing offline violence. As a matter of fact, information digital campaigns targeting migrants, religious or ethnic minorities have been shown to foster hostility, normalise discriminatory practices and contribute to the racialisation of laws and social norms[34]. Thus, information practices and the theft of personal data reinforce and legitimise practices that enable personal and community insecurity.

- *Political security: protection of human rights in a society.* Manipulation campaigns and content moderation practices (such as shadow banning)[35] can limit visibility of specific voices and undermine freedom of expression and political participation[36]. Again, disinformation targeting minorities has been linked to direct violations of human dignity and other fundamental rights[37]. In such cases, information security transforms the quality of civil and political rights.
- *Economic security: basic income from work or safety net*. Economic information warfare (EIW), fake financial news and data theft can destabilise markets, harm competition and facilitate fraud, disproportionately affecting already fragile economies and businesses. Here, information security acts as an independent variable influencing individual economic security, especially in already unstable contexts.
- *Environmental security: protection from natural and man-made environmental damages.* Destructive ecological narratives and denialist discourses encourage limitless growth and consumption, downplaying scientific warnings about environmental degradation, and reducing public and political support for mitigation and adaptation policies. Of course, destructive dynamics involving the environment will eventually affect the individual/groups security.
- *Health security: protection from diseases and unhealthy practices*. It reflects the *infodemic* issue (see 4.2), as well as a different phenomenon: inaccurate information about diets and life style which enhance unhealthy practices among population. This is the case of advertising for

[34] J. Szakács, É. Bognár, *The Impact of Disinformation Campaigns about Migrants and Minority Groups*, In-Depth Analysis, Policy Department for External Relations Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, 2021.
[35] Shadow banning is commonly known as a controversial and hard to detect type of social media content moderation which is based on the reduction of visibility of a distinct type of content on social media without notifying the user itself. See: L. Savolainen, "The Shadow Banning Controversy: Perceived Governance and Algorithmic Folklore", *Media, Culture & Society,* 44 (2022), 6, pp. 1091–1109.
[36] For instance, in the right aftermath of the 7th October 2023, at the renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, several activist and journalist denounced a decrease in their social media interaction, affecting their freedom of speech and right to work. See: U. Siddiqui et al., "Significant Censorship of Palestine on Social Media Sparks Outcry", *Al Jazeera*, 24 October 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/24/shadowbanning-are-social-media-giants-censoring-pro-palestine-voices.
[37] J. Szakács, É. Bognár, *The Impact of Disinformation Campaigns about Migrants and Minority Groups*, cit.

fast food chains[38] or, as Stibbe reports in the case of *Men's Health Magazine*, of suggestion over the high consume of red meat to increase masculinity appearance[39].

- *Food security: physical and economic ac cess to basic food*. In wars or economic crisis, information manipulation around conflict, sanctions or market conditions can affects the four dimensions of food security (access, stability, utilisation, and availability to basic food)[40]. But the effect of unhealthy food advertising promoting junk food can be a threat in wealthier societies too, contributing to nutritional insecurity in qualitative terms.

These reflections can be condensed as follows:

Table 1. Mechanisms and Impacts on Human Security domains

Human Security Dimension	**Informational Mechanism**	**Type of Impact**
Personal Security	Online provocation, disinformation, data misuse, digital facilitation of crime	Psychological harm, reputational damage, facilitation of offline violence
Community Security	Identity-based disinformation, censorship, hate speech	Ethnic tension, loss of self-esteem, racialisation of laws
Political Security	Manipulation campaigns, shadow banning, information warfare	Restriction of freedom of speech, erosion of human dignity
Economic Security	Economic information warfare (EIW), fake financial news, data theft	Market instability, weakened competition, fraud risks
Environmental Security	Ecological narratives, denialism, growth-driven discourse	Distortion of scientific credibility; underestimation of ecological threats
Health Security	Disinformation, infodemic, misleading advertising	Risk-taking behaviours, mistrust in institutions, unhealthy lifestyles
Food Security	Information distortions in crisis contexts; unhealthy consumption narratives	Reduced access, availability, stability, and utilisation of food

[38] J. L. Harris, S. K. Graff, "Protecting Young People From Junk Food Advertising: Implications of Psychological Research for First Amendment Law", *American Journal of Public Health,* 102 (2012), 2, pp. 214–222, https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300328.
[39] A. Stibbe, *Ecolinguistics*, cit.
[40] Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Declaration of the World Summit on Food Security,* November 2009, https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/wsfs/Summit/Docs/Final_Declaration/WSFS09_Declaration.pdf.

In all these cases, information security is best seen as a dependent variable (protection of data and cognition) that, once compromised, modifies outcomes across Human Security domains. Informational mechanisms function as enablers and multipliers of other forms of (in)security; thus, they better provide a transversal lens rather than introducing a separate, autonomous sector.

7 Discussion

This analysis suggests that information security operates as a structural, cross-cutting variable within contemporary domains of security.

At the state level, informational infrastructures and practices operate both as dependent and independent variable. In military contexts, hybrid warfare, cyber operations, control over data, and influence campaigns demonstrate how the status of informational environment shapes strategic outcomes by influencing perceptions, decision-making, and public support. Information security therefore becomes a factor that both reflects and produces strategic power within the informational environment.

Similarly, in non-military domains, economic governance, environmental policy and public health depend on informational integrity. Manipulated financial narratives, environmental denialism, or health misinformation demonstrate how informational distortions can alter institutional responses, social behaviour and policy priorities, often in ways that exacerbate existing insecurities. In these cases, information security functions primarily as an independent variable influencing state resilience.

At the societal and individual levels, information security acquires a mediating role. Protection of personal data and cognitive autonomy – secured through regulation, technical safeguards and media literacy – constitutes the dependent dimension, as individuals rely on these protections to avoid exploitation and manipulation. However, once secured, these protections contribute to broader social resilience by strengthening critical judgement, institutional trust, and resistance to influence operations. Information security therefore mediates between external informational threats and collective resilience within the informational environment.

This reflexion is strengthened through the concept of Human Security. Informational mechanisms such as disinformation, algorithmic amplification, and narrative framing affect multiple domains including personal, political, economic, environmental, health, and food security. This cross-cutting function suggests that information security should be conceptualised as a systemic link among state security, societal cohesion and individual autonomy within a shared, digitally mediated environment.

7.1 Criticisms

Nevertheless, information security can be normatively expansive and politically instrumentalised.

First, information security as an analytical concept reflects criticism of Human Security as a vague term. Actors can claim to protect "information security" while hiding different interests: political (foreign interference) or lucrative (surveillance capitalism). The same logic applies for internal information control or repression within a state (censorship, National Information Network, Great Firewall) or a group (digital marginalization, shadow banning and targeted content moderation).

From the analysis it is possible to retrieve that information security can be understood both as an analytical concept to describe cross-cutting vulnerabilities and as a normative project to protect human autonomy and dignity in the information environment. These two lenses can be in tension. Open definitions may allow to instrumentalization and plausible deniability, making information security a double-faced dimension: on one hand, a normative dimension of protection mechanism for individuals and, on the other hand, a political function. In a more critical point of view, the contrast can be between declared goal (human security) and operationalization (political tool).

Secondly, from a postcolonial perspective, claimed neutrality and universality of Human Security reflects a liberal-individualist ontology rooted in Western political history (e.g. liberal democracy, human rights, and free markets)[41]. In contrast, alternative models such as state-centric frameworks prioritizing collective stability or communitarian attitudes (high cultures) [42] express different hierarchies of what they consider "secure", further complicating a global projection of information (human) security practices.

8 Conclusion

Considering information as a three-layered defined concept and exploring the transversal modality of security, the paper suggests a theoretical mapping of the intersection between information and security studies. Instead of treating information security as a specialised subsection of cybersecurity or communication policy, it may be more accurately conceptualised as a cross-domain conditioning factor of security dynamics. Its distinctive role lies in structuring the informational conditions under which actors interpret threats, coordinate action, and legitimise political responses. From this, information security emerges as a sector and as a systemic mediator linking state security, societal resilience, and individual autonomy within contemporary hybrid and digitally mediated

[41] For instance, a debate arises from the different read while considering universal rights as human rights. South American constitutions (Bolivia, Ecuador) states communitarian, plural, and non-anthropocentric rights – such as autonomy of native population within their territories, preserving nature following the *vita degna* principle. Or, the Cairo Declaration of Islamic Human Rights (1990) which ground right in religion. In Asian countries, it is a share thought that human rights are a transposition of Western's; thus, Asiatic documents often focus more on duties within the community rather than on rights.

[42] R. Cohen, "Negotiating Across Cultures", in Chester A. Crocker et al. (eds.), *Turbulent Peace. Challenges of Managing International Conflict*, Washington, US Institute of Peace Press, 2001.

environments. Doing so, information security can be better understood and evaluated within policy-making processes, military initiatives, and interdisciplinary critical studies.

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