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Promoting Peace and Security

# Horizon Insights

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**Latest Gaza War to Reshuffle Cards in the Middle East**

**The Western Balkans: How is the Region Endangered by Russian Influence?**

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**Commentary: Generative AI – Astonishing But No Reason to be Afraid**

**Book Review: Foolproof - Why we Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity**

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# Contents

Foreword	IV
Latest Gaza War to Reshuffle Cards in the Middle East	1
The Western Balkans: How is the Region Endangered by Russian Influence?	6
Commentary: Generative AI – Astonishing But No Reason to be Afraid	13
Book Review: Foolproof - Why we Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity	17

## Foreword

### Dear Reader,

We are happy to be with you in the last issue of 2023. Although we had to make difficult choices in selecting the articles to be included in the journal, three interesting articles and a new book review are waiting for you.

The first article discusses Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants attacked Israel from Gaza, on October 7, 2023, killing over 900 Israelis and wounding 2,700. Israel responded with extensive air raids, resulting in 3,478 Palestinian deaths. The conflict disrupted regional normalization efforts and drew global condemnation. Analysts compare it to Israel's 9/11, with significant regional implications. The violence has intensified humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and economic instability, while raising questions about Israeli intelligence and potential broader regional escalations.

The second article summarizes the Western Balkans, a region of diverse nationalities and religions, faces significant Russian influence amidst its ongoing integration struggles into Euro-Atlantic structures. The geopolitical landscape is unstable, with Russia leveraging cultural and religious ties to Serbia and Republika Srpska to counter Western influence. Russia's tactics include hybrid operations and supporting nationalist leaders, posing a challenge to the EU's strategic autonomy. The West needs a robust strategy to counter this influence and support pro-European movements.

The third article explains that Generative AI (GenAI) creates novel content like audio, data, codes, or images, transforming digital content and job execution. While ChatGPT gained massive popularity, fears of AI replacing human jobs persist. GenAI is efficient but limited by its programming and prone to errors and misuse. Proper governance is needed to harness its potential while preventing malicious practices. GenAI will augment rather than replace human roles, necessitating human oversight and policy development to maximize benefits and mitigate risks.

The last piece of our issue reviews the recent book "Foolproof: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity" by Sander van der Linden which is an insightful and timely exploration into the pervasive issue of misinformation in the modern world. This book delves into the psychological mechanisms that make people susceptible to false information and offers practical strategies to build resilience against it.

As we close out this final issue of 2023, we hope these articles provide you with valuable insights into the complex challenges and emerging trends shaping our world today. From the ongoing geopolitical conflicts to the rapid advancements in technology and the growing threat of misinformation, it is more important than ever to stay informed and critically engaged. We look forward to continuing this journey of exploration and analysis with you in the coming year. Thank you for your continued support, and we wish you a thought-provoking and enlightening read.

Sincerely yours,

Beyond the Horizon ISSG

# Latest Gaza War to Reshuffle Cards in the Middle East

by the Middle East Task Force

## Background

On October 7, 2023, in the next day of the 50th anniversary of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the world woke to the news of another terrorist attack where militants of [Hamas and Islamic Jihad](#) infiltrated borders around Gaza from land, air and sea to seize control of 26 towns and a military unit close to Gaza. Footages of civilians and soldiers abducted with the barbaric attack abound on social media. At least 260 people were reported to be killed at a techno [music festival](#) near the Gaza Strip following the launch of Hamas' brutal onslaught.

According to [Haaretz](#), so far more than 4400 rockets have been fired from Gaza while at least 900 Israelis have been killed and 2700 wounded. From [Palestine](#) on the other hand, at least 3,478 dead and 12,065 wounded have been reported. In response to the offensive named as "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was at war adding: "The enemy will pay a price it has never known before." The US President Joe Biden described the attack as an "appalling assault against Israel by Hamas terrorists." A statement by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union read: "The EU condemns in the strongest possible terms the multiple and indiscriminate attacks across Israel by Hamas and deeply deplores the loss of lives. [...] The EU recalls the importance of working towards a lasting and sustainable peace through reinvigorated efforts in the Middle East Peace Process." The [Egyptian President](#) Abdel Fattah el-Sisi emphasized the importance of ending the ongoing escalation and exercising self-restraint by all parties.

On October 09 (Monday), IDF Spokesperson Daniel Hagari said: "Control has been achieved in all the communities, but there may still be terrorists in the area." He added that they "have almost completed evacuating Gaza border residents." According to the report by [Haaretz](#), Hamas and Islamic Jihad has stated to have 100 and 30 hostages respectively.

IDF has been conducting air raids on targets in Gaza since Day 1. On October 12, the Israeli Air Force stated over X (former Twitter) to have dropped some [6,000 bombs](#) on Gaza since the war began, adding that it "will continue to attack forcefully and relentlessly, as long as necessary."

Some analysts label the attacks as 9/11 of Israel while some others try to explain what we have been observing with conspiracy theories. But it is certain that the war will be a major event that will reshuffle cards in the region. The implications of the attack on Israel and the wider region cannot be fully grasped without a comprehensive look into international, regional, and national / local dynamics.

## (How) Did the attack evade Israeli Intelligence?

Based on the strength of Israeli intelligence in control of Gaza and the long-time preparation required to conduct attacks in such scale but using conventional tactics, many analysts posit the Gaza attacks were fruit of Israeli state efforts to create a rally around the flag to save squeaking Netanyahu government. It is no secret that Israel's Shin Bet, Mossad and IDF follow closely what happens through the network of informants and agents inside Palestinian militant groups alongside high-tech surveillance equipment such as cameras and ground-motion sensors. What is more, the facts that:

- the event coincided with the 50th anniversary of the 73' War that would, by nature of the things, require extra caution,
- the [US intel community](#), on September 28, October 5, and October 6 was in expectation of an imminent attack by Hamas, the final report of October 6 being based on reporting from Israel,
- [Egypt](#) warned the Israelis three days prior to the attacks about a likely attack,



• the weapons that have been pouring to Gaza from Iran for like a year has been a known issue by the Israeli authorities, as can be seen from X tweets by journalist Vera Mironova

does not allow us to believe that Israel was not informed or was not expecting these attacks to take place.

The problematic internal situation in Israel stemming from the hardline government's aggressive settlement policies disregarding international and humanitarian norms, and the judicial overhaul that divided the Israeli society across different fault lines in fact lends support to such theories. At a time when the hardline government is lambasted by even the staunchest ally, the US, and the whole statecraft including the IDF was politicized around the legal reforms, the event certainly unified nation behind Netanyahu to settle scores against attackers.

The theory remains short to explain several aspects. To start with, the damage made is too big. Israel could start such operations even after much smaller attacks. Taking into consideration some 130 hostages to include Major General Nimrod Aloni, the reputation of IDF and Israeli intelligence at stake, the theory seems an overstretch. Yet still it is early to decide on this. So far, the analysts close to the Israeli state have not gone further than saying the country is currently at war and an investigation after the dust of the war is settled will reveal the truth.

### Iran, Hezbollah, and Türkiye

The role of Iran and Hezbollah in the attack has drawn the attention of observers and governments. Despite their sectarian divergences, Iran and Hezbollah consistently [support](#) Hamas, particularly in terms of funding, supplying weapons and military technology, as well as training Hamas-linked militants. They unite their forces against a "common enemy". This is compatible with Iran's strategy of avoiding direct confrontation and instead using proxies in the region.

Iran has praised the attack but denied its involvement by [asserting](#) that it does not meddle in other countries' decision-making processes. The assertion was also confirmed by a senior Hamas leader in an [interview](#) with NBC News. The preliminary findings of the [Intelligence Agencies](#) also [align](#) with the claims of the Iran and Hamas

The strike of Hamas against Israel occurred at a time when Israel and Arab countries were pursuing normalization. Israel had normalized ties with the UAE and Bahrain in 2020, Sudan and Morocco in 2021 through Abraham Accords. In August 2022, Tel Aviv expanded its efforts by normalizing relations with Turkey, and was in the process of normalization with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Considering the status of the country as the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" and its financial clout over the whole Middle East, the deal would be a real-changer to allow Israel normalize relations with its neighbors and the region, help healing the [siege mentality](#) in Israel.

Saudi Arabia's main conditions for [normalization](#) with Israel are fewer restrictions on US arms sales, US assistance to develop civilian nuclear control, and major progress towards creation of a Palestinian state. If these efforts succeed, it could lead to a trilateral security alliance between Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the US. The Israeli government could claim a victory in its polarized domestic politics, and the US could present a unified front against Iran while shifting its focus to Asia and compete with China. There was a certain level of support to those conditions from within Israel and a certain progress was achieved. Being encircled by regional states to include Israel within a defense pact would mean a nightmare scenario by Iran. [Iranian President](#) Ebrahim Raisi voiced this concern on October 1, denouncing any attempts to normalize relations with Israel as "reactionary and regressive." This normalization would also mean a major blow to Hamas also. Such normalization would mean marginalization of the Palestinian cause and hopes to achieve statehood. So, at a time when:

- international leadership has ceased to exist for Palestine,
- the US has lost its ability and credibility to force a just and equitable solution to the Palestine problem,
- the Israeli governments do not respect international norms and agreements as regards rights of the Palestinians and expansion of settlements,
- as a poll in 2021 shows - nearly 80% of Palestinians want President Mahmoud Abbas to resign, 45% of Palestinians believe Hamas should lead and represent them while support to secular Fatah is only 19%,
- the KSA is so close to normalization with Israel



Hamas conducted the attack, expecting -based on historical evidence- a harsh Israeli reaction.

Hamas achieved all its objectives. As reported by AFP, Saudi Arabia informed the US on its decision to [pause](#) discussions on possible normalization with Israel. The harsh Israeli reaction has estranged Israel in the eyes of many sympathizers while increasing visibility of the Palestinian cause. Hamas also increased its political backing from Palestinians after the events, posing itself an able entity to attract global attention to the Palestinian cause.

**As for Hezbollah**, the group constitutes an element of threat for Israel. To deter opening of new fronts against Israel, US declared to have ordered [two aircraft carrier strike groups](#), the USS Eisenhower and the USS Gerald R Ford to the eastern Mediterranean. The [UK](#) made a similar move, declaring to have dispatched a military package to include P8 aircraft, surveillance assets, two Royal Navy ships, three merlin helicopters and a company of Royal Marines. Other forces already in the area included: four Ticonderoga class guided missile cruisers, the USS Normandy (CG 60), the Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyers USS Thomas Hudner (DDG 116), USS Ramage (DDG 61), USS Carney (DDG 64), and USS Roosevelt (DDG 80). When added on top of the other, it shows the US and the UK are indeed alert for the contingency that Hezbollah, Iran and other states / militant groups join the war against Israel.

Lebanon, as state, has no control over the actions of Hezbollah. Yet, the internal conditions in Lebanon creates a context for the latter's actions. Within current context, Hezbollah's entry into war does not seem plausible if not provoked. The group will be willing to remain as a deterrent. As Hanin Ghaddar says, the group's strategy will be to maintain a limited escalation along the borders, to distract Israel with the chances of a Lebanon war, while maintaining plausible deniability. Yet, the escalation is always a possibility as Israel's incursion into Gaza intensifies and exchange of fire between Israel and the group can sometimes be hard to fathom where it will end.

Another beneficiary of the war is **Türkiye**. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been vocal in his criticism of Israel's actions. Erdogan has referred to the Israeli siege and bombing of Gaza as a 'massacre', expressing sympathy with Hamas, which Turkey does not consider a terrorist organization, despite it being designated as such by the United States and the European Union.

Erdogan's stance on the conflict has garnered attention and raised questions about his role in the situation. Some may argue that his strong condemnation of Israel positions him as a winner in this conflict, particularly among those who share similar views. Erdogan is a populist leader and considering Erdogan's history of shifting foreign policies, it wouldn't be surprising if Ankara changes course and distances itself from its current lukewarm relationship with Israel. This wouldn't be an unprecedented move for Turkey.

On the other hand, with the war, the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) that was agreed by the US and the EU at the G20 summit in New Delhi earlier this month becomes hard to achieve. The corridor would connect Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan and Israel by rail, entirely bypassing Turkey and it would lead to Europe and India by ship. Erdogan was vocal about his distaste with the corridor, announcing his alternative.

### **Migration:**

The conflict situation in Gaza and Israel has caused a mass displacement of people. While dozens of small communities have been fully evacuated in southern Israel, the situation in Gaza is catastrophic. Because of the Israeli bombardments, and halt of electricity and supplies brought essential health, water, and sanitation services to the brink of collapse, and exacerbated food insecurity.

In the Gaza Strip, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) increases day by day, estimated around 1 million people of whom nearly 400,00 are taking shelter in [UNRWA](#) facilities. The U.N. has said that mass evacuation orders in the area will affect more than a million people. A total evacuation would mean the entire 2.23 million population of Gaza would have to squeeze into the southern half of the strip.

Since Gaza is surrounded by blockades imposed by Israel and Egypt, and air and sea access are also prevented by Israel, it is very difficult to leave Gaza for Palestinians. UNRWA is seeking ways for possible opening of a humanitarian corridor from Egypt.

According to the [UNHCR](#), the population of the forcibly displaced and stateless people with Palestinian origin residing in Europe in 2022 was 30,797. On the other hand, it is also evident that Palestinian refugees have been systematically [denied](#) of their right to return and forced to live in exile under precarious and vulnerable conditions outside the borders of Palestine.

The situation has a potential to increase the number of Palestinian refugees in other countries. During the times of increased mass displacement of people in the world, this has another potential to add up to the challenges that the EU has already been tackling.

### **Impact on Global Economy**

The global economy has already experienced the adverse impacts of the COVID Crisis, as well as the Russia-Ukraine War. The conflict between Israel and Hamas could potentially further harm the global economy. In

the event that the Israel-Iran situation escalates, [Bloomberg](#) Economics anticipates a significant increase in oil prices, potentially reaching \$150 per barrel. This escalation could also result in a global economic growth decline to 1.7%, effectively causing a recession that would subtract approximately \$1 trillion from the world's total output.

## NATO

The situation in Gaza overshadowed everything else in the agenda of NATO Ministers of Defence gathering in Brussels held between 11-12 October 2023. Israeli Defence Minister's presence and presentation was an indication of NATO's support to one of its Mediterranean Dialogue partner countries. NATO Secretary General condemned the terrorist attacks perpetrated by HAMAS "in the strongest possible terms" in the press conference, but this was something short of a North Atlantic Council statement which was reportedly blocked by Turkey. In line with the U.S. perception and approach, Secretary General's remarks particularly related to civilian casualties and possible third-party intervention was apparently aiming to deescalate the situation.

After Ukraine, Israel is NATO's second partner now at war, making Euro-Atlantic region and its periphery less stable and secure. Gaza War also challenges NATO's brand-new strategic concept inked in 2022 that gives NATO crisis prevention and management and cooperative security as core tasks. Historically NATO has been reluctant to actively intervene in the crises in the MENA region (with the exception of Muammar Qaddafi's Libya) but failing to deliver in this one would be perceived as a matter of credibility for NATO.

## EU

When it comes to Israel-Palestine conflict, the EU hardly has a chair at the table. It's no secret since the EU cannot translate its economic muscle into political power in the absence of a common political view across the member states. The Middle East reflects this better than any other policy areas. As an example, the reactions vary from forbidding demonstrations in support of Palestine in Germany to calling on people to take to the streets to protest for Palestinians in Spain.

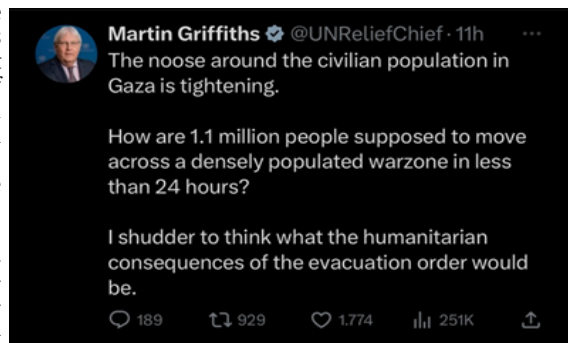
Most importantly, the cacophony is not limited to the member states, spreading within the European Commission. In the wake of the Hamas attack, the Neighborhood Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi readily announced to halt all Palestine aid. A spokesperson later tried to limit the damage and explained that the EU would scrutinize where the money is used as if it was never done. The HR/VR went further and said a suspension is not on the agenda, to the contrary, the aid needed to be increased. As a result, with a statement, the Commission revealed to [triple](#) the aid. Uncoordinated and unwise statements prevailed during last week inside the executive branch.

The EU's official and long-lasting stance is two state solution. This unique stance provides the EU a good advantage on intermediary efforts contrary to the US. Unfortunately, neither side will trust a paralyzed negotiator.

## Palestinians: The Fight Turns into Humanitarian Plight

It is certain that the main losers in the overall picture are and will continue to be the Palestinians. Israel has already and will continue to exact a heavy toll against Hamas and 2.3 million Gazans of which 70 per cent of the settlers are refugees. As Haaretz reported, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant ordered a full siege on the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip. Accordingly, he said: "No power, no food, no gas, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly."

Israeli Air Force has been pounding Gaza since day 1. According to Health Ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra as reported by Al Jazeera, at least 3,478 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli air raids on the Gaza Strip since fighting between Hamas and Israel began on October 7. Number of Palestinians injured reached 12,065 while 70 percent of the victims being women, children, and the elderly. At least 1,300 others also remain missing under the rubble, including 600 children. On October 17, a massive explosion in al-Ahli al-Arabi, also known as the Baptist hospital [killed at least 471 Palestinian](#) civilians. To date, most Arab countries hold Israel responsible while both Israel and the US blames Islamic Jihad. Israeli Defense Forces were also reported to have used white phosphorus, a weapon with a highly incendiary effect, in densely populated civilian residential areas of Gaza City. [Amnesty International](#) reported this based on "indisputable evidence" found by its fact-finding team. On October 14, the Israeli army ordered mass exodus of more than 1 million people to the south within



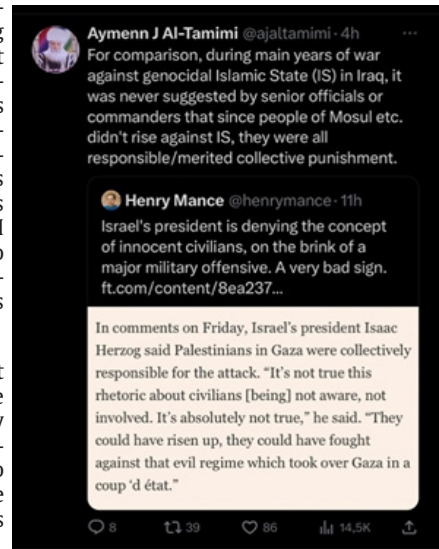


24 hours to allow for a ground operation. With no water, electricity and power, unending air raids, forced exodus, the whole weight of the war is on the Palestinians.

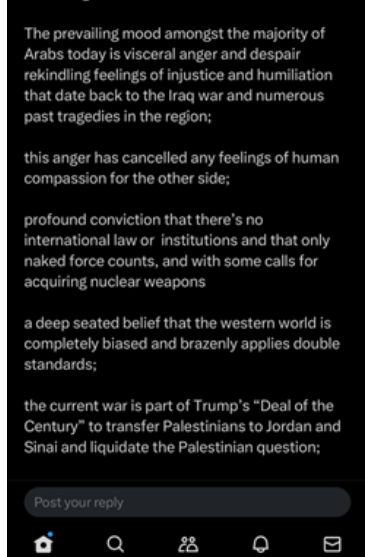
## Conclusion and Strategic Foresight

Killing innocent civilians to include women and [children](#) and firing rockets to residential areas can only be labeled as terrorist attacks. There is no way to justify Hamas terrorist attacks and incursions into Israel. This is true despite Israeli government's policies of repression, blockade, annexation, and occupation of East Jerusalem, settling Jewish civilians in the East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and displacing the local population, provocative actions such as facilitating hardline groups entry to the Aqsa Mosque despite the norms that non-Muslim prayer at the mosque is forbidden. In the havoc created with the War in Ukraine and absence of a global leader, Hamas seems to have seized the moment to increase political gains, without considering the 2.3 million Palestinians living in extreme conditions in Gaza. Hamas, with the attacks on innocent civilians, has actually betrayed the Palestinian cause. A tweet by Haaretz builds a better picture of what Hamas is. Accordingly, in March 2019 PM Netanyahu told his Likud party's Knesset members: "Anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state has to support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas. This is part of our strategy".

But there is no way to justify disproportionate use of force against helpless innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure under the disguise of punishing Hamas. It is not possible to attribute to any civilized norm a full siege on Gaza Strip nor Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's statement that reads: "No power, no food, no gas, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we act accordingly." Leveraging the pretext of Hamas using civilians as human shields has no place in international norms.



Israel's revert to disproportionate use of force against Palestinians, and Israeli politicians' rhetorics not heeding Palestinian lives only eclipses the view to its disadvantage, creating an extremely negative view especially in the Muslim world. Whoever sows wind reaps storm. At such moments, calm and respect to human dignity should reign to reach military targets while respecting human lives. Such conduct would help differentiate a terrorist organisation's behaviour with that of a responsible state.



So far, Hezbollah has clearly shown it has no interest in opening a new front against Israel. Iran has not made a forward movement either. If they had intention, they would have moved at the first days after the attacks, when the vulnerability was greater.

So far, there is no clear articulation of aims for the Israeli operations. What is the end state targeted in Gaza? Will Israel content itself with siege around Gaza or will it channel its military might to push Palestinians further south and create a buffer zone, or does it calculate to [force a permanent expulsion of Palestinians](#) further south into south Egypt. The provocation with no food, water and electricity, the forced exodus, the US-Israeli proposal for [North Sinai Refuge](#) for Gazans, the mass of forces in the Eastern Mediterranean in support of IDF that has no match in the region, in fact lends support to the last contingency.

Another lingering question is, what will be the aim after achieving targets in Gaza? Will Israel turn to Iran and Hezbollah to settle scores?

Given the huge military support from UK and US, Israel might turn to Hezbollah to liquidate its weapons and ammunition stockpiles and revert to Iran to reduce its nuclear enrichment capabilities, which is seen as a threat by Saudi Arabia and the UAE also.

Will it be possible to maintain momentum attained by Abraham Accords? The plight and anger felt in Arab capitals will delay if not preclude continuation of the peaceful atmosphere reached by accords after the dust settles.

If the aim is not to expel Gazans, Israel should accept mediation especially from Egypt to find a common ground to exchange prisoners, defuse tensions and bring life back to normal.

# The Western Balkans: How is the Region Endangered by Russian Influence?

by Çlirim Toci\*

*[The Balkans] produce more history than they can consume.*

*-Winston Churchill-*

## Abstract

The Western Balkans is a vital European region of different nationalities, religions and cultures. It stands between the West and the East. The overall image of the region is that it has been the prize in incessant battles for competition between different powers and actors for centuries. Since the end of the Cold War, nations of this region have been looking toward integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Some have succeeded, while others are still struggling to integrate. But, the War in Ukraine has put the spotlight the Western Balkans again. The West has to give new impetus and sustain local ambitions towards the EU membership. Looking at what is happening in the Balkans, the paper at your hand aims to underline the challenges and implications caused by the Russian influence. At the same time, internal actors are using Russia for localized power games.

**Keywords:** The Western Balkan, the Russian influence, the West and power balance.

## 1. Introduction

In the early part of the 20th century, historians metaphorically coined the term “powder keg of Europe” for the Balkan region. This allusion was obvious during tensions among nations at the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the beginning of World War I (1914-19). The region has passed through several stages since then, most prominently WWII, the Cold War and the post-Cold War era. Fukuyama characterizes this last stage, the post-Cold era, as a new era that marks ‘the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government!’.

The Balkans could not benefit from this “final form of human government” as described by Fukuyama. After 1990, the region experienced disintegration and conflicts among former Yugoslavian republics while the rest of Europe enjoyed “peace dividends”. The political and economic atmosphere that immediately changed drastically evidenced the struggle of the regional states to establish themselves as democracies in the Western sense, defying attempts of Serbia to establish hegemony. Against this historical backdrop, the EU and the US policymakers, when referring to the Western Balkans, often identify the region as a geographical entity with this ‘suis generis’ political context.

The geopolitical landscape in the region is bipolar and unstable. On the one side, countries like Albania, Kosova, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are more oriented towards Euro-Atlantic integration. On the other side, Serbia and Republika Srpska, one of the three political entities comprising Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), are closely connected to Russia because of cultural and linguistic affinity, the Orthodox Church, and the affiliation of the Slavic Brotherhood. From the two, Serbia is pursuing its ambition to join the EU while also cultivating ties with Moscow.

In this context, the West has to be versatile. It has to respond robustly to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine (2022) while not diverting self-attention from the six states of the Western Balkans (WB6)<sup>2</sup>. It is in the interest of the EU to revitalize the enlargement process because, without WB6, it will never achieve strategic autonomy or manage to be a global player. The Western Balkans is the missing puzzle of European integration and geopolitical space.

It is in fact worth answering the question of “Why”? The paper at your hand will primarily examine why the region matters so much to Russia. This further raises several questions that need to be identified and analysed. More precisely, is the willingness of Russia to keep long-standing ties with the region can be attributed to the aim of reducing the Western power and to the desire to create a power balance in the backyard of the EU?

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## 2. Willingness to maintain long-standing ties

The Balkans, for centuries, have been known as a center of great power competition and strategic interest between the Orient (the East) and the Occident (the West). Historically, Russia has been a critical player, and its influence is not new for the region. The influence was most visible in supporting and recognising Serbian independence during the 19th century. Russia is considered an essential ally for all Serbs and Orthodox Christians in former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. In the region, the Kremlin is seen 'as someone who stands up to the West', said Vuk Vuksanović.

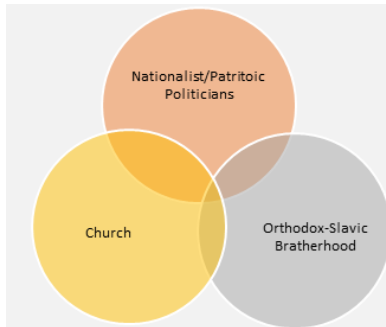


Figure 1: Russian political campaign toolkit in the Western Balkans.

Since ascendance to the president's office, Mr. Putin has sought to reclaim his role as a power broker. He directly criticized the US for "attempting to create a unipolar world" <sup>3</sup>. To the same effect, Russia has used the case of Kosovo and NATO strikes (1999) to create grievances against the Western powers.<sup>4</sup>

The Western Balkans hold great geostrategic importance for Russia because it is in the backyard of the EU. With disputes and unresolved conflicts among entities within Bosnia and Herzegovina and between Kosovo and Serbia, Moscow seeks to leverage the instability and weaken the influence of NATO and the EU. Russia, for years, has used political campaign toolkits like Serbian nationalist/patriotic politicians, the Orthodox Church and the Orthodox-Slavic Brotherhood (See Figure 1) to deepen the impact.

During the last decade, Moscow has extended and strengthened its activities, exploring nationalist/patriotic politicians and building a network of proxies parroting the same narratives. This aligns with the intent of the local and state actors to promote their own regional interests. The Russian political toolkit involves and works with various political actors, e.g., Milorad Dodik and Aleksandar Vulin. They are both known for their pro-Russian feelings and anti-Western stances. For instance, Mr. Vulin is considered the 'man of Moscow'. He has supported the creation of 'the Serbian Word' (Srpski svet), similar to the Kremlin-backed word 'Russkii mir' (Russian World), uniting all Serbs in the Western Balkans.

Russia has cultivated close ties with old/veteran and young politicians to promote Russian interests. Different pro-Russia actors and states support the Kremlin in the Balkan and beyond. For instance, Serbian ruling forces benefit from being pro-Russia to keep a tight grip on power. In comparison, the war in Ukraine has not changed the attitude of Serbs toward Russia. While recently, Mr. Dodik, the Serbian leader in Bosnia and Herzegovina, aligned Republika Srpska with Russia and pushed for a separation from the federation.

Notwithstanding the pro-Russia policies of Serbia and Republika Srpska, Russia is constantly looking for new relations and influence in the political spectrum among Western Balkan countries. Several cases have shown that political forces are affiliated with the Kremlin, such as the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (Savez nezavisnih socialdemokrata) of Milorad Dodik in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Left (Levica) in North Macedonia, and the Democratic Front (Demokratski Front)<sup>5</sup>, Democratic Party of Unity (Demokratska stranka jedinstva), New Serb Democracy (Nova srpska demokratija) and Serb List (Srpska Lista) in Montenegro.

However, although the political environment in Serbia does not make any difference from previous cases, there are several pro-Russia parties, such as Obraz, Serbian Action (Srbska Akcija), Serbian Radical Party (Srpska radikalna stranka), and Strength of Serbian Movement (Pokret Snaga Srbije), are allied with Russia policy and attitude.

All these political entities adopt anti-West rhetoric. These anti-West stances became more visible in Bosnia and Herzegovina when Milorad Dodik attempted to withdraw Serbs from tax bodies, medicine certification agencies, and even the armed forces. In Montenegro, these stances were prior to NATO membership (2017). The rhetoric about the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue was even intensified. While in North Macedonia, 'the Levica distanced themselves from 'the contraversion actions' of Macedonian diplomacy to introduce sanctions against Russia.' As they indicated, 'the decision was taken under pressure from the EU and NATO.'<sup>6</sup>

In this context, Russia, observing the dynamics of the region, appointed the secretary of Russia's Security Council, Nikolai Petrushev (2015) known as 'Putin's trustable man', as his envoy. His appointment marked another step in the Kremlin's interest in strengthening regional ties. Mr. Petrushev is known for his close relations with Serbian politicians and anti-West feelings. He has met top officials in Serbia and Republika Srpska to cultivate close ties to organisations and ethnic nationalist groups who oppose the West. Meanwhile, information shared by Intelligence Online suggests that with a secret operation in Belgrade, Moscow 'has recruited nearly 500 Balkan nationals to fight in Ukraine' or to join the pro-Russian separatists<sup>7</sup>.

All of these Russian actions are geared towards strengthening pro-Russian voices. The Russian non-governmental organisations, like the Center of National Glory, the Russian Institute of Strategic Research, and the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, have increased their activities. During the last decade, they brought in different academics, journalists, and intellectuals who share anti-West attitudes and promote the Kremlin's voice.

Russia knows that political influence always matters and does not shy away from using religion and the Church 'as soft-power instruments'.<sup>8</sup> 'The Russian Orthodox Church is more closely linked to the Putin's regime than many observers assume.'<sup>9</sup> The Church and religion are known to be crucial societal and political factors. Russia and Serbia have been spiritually united for centuries, and churches are closely bonded. The Russian Orthodox church is seen as one of the vociferous opponents of any deal-making with the West. Along the same lines, Gazprom, in 2019, which Russia uses as a political and economic instrument to project power, 'has donated \$5 million to the Serbian Orthodox Church'<sup>10</sup>. It signifies Russia's growing presence and strengthening relations based on cultural-religious ties.

The Russian Orthodox Church has always leveraged the narrative of the Orthodox-Slavic Brotherhood. Russia knows that the Slavic brotherhood and historical relations between Russia and Serbia matter. The strategic narrative must take these facts into account. Mark Twain once said that history does not repeat itself, but it sure rhymes. History is a dialogue between the past and the present, able to channel and construct decisive actions. History and strategic narrative are two rhyming influences to align Serbia and Russia, bonding them emotionally.

### 3. Reducing Western Influence

Following the beginning of the 21st century, Russia changed its approach towards the Western Balkans. It involved inexpensive tools, like hybrid operations including (dis)information campaigns, cyber-attacks, supporting proxy organisations, and use of political and economic influence, to undermine the West's objective to integrate region's countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Russia considers 'Near Abroad' as its sphere of interest. History has shown that Russia has had long-standing interests and reasonable impact but a limited capacity for transformation over the region.

Nowadays, the security environment and the war in Ukraine has further diminished the Russian economic and political presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro (MNE) and Serbia (SRB). These are three Western Balkan countries where Russia still has influence and historical connections.

To some extent, Russia is struggling to maintain its status (recognized by the West as a great power) and presence in selected countries. Moscow thinks that the West wants to drive them out of the region. The West is attempting to solve lingering unresolved political issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosova, bypassing Russia. The Kremlin is worried about such attempts and is moving from a close cooperation model with the West (in the mid-1990s) to a more confrontational competition, looking to undermine the Western presence. The Western Balkans is transformed into an area of confrontation, and Moscow has developed three practical objectives: 'first, it aims to assert global power; second, it is willing to hamper Euro-Atlantic integration by opposing NATO and EU involvement; and third, it is using, particularly Kosova, as leverage for Russia's broader foreign policy.'<sup>11</sup>

When we look under the bonnet of the conflict today, strategy is linked to actions on the ground. Actions are considered ways leading to the end state. In strategy, one thing that matters more is engagement with actors. If we look carefully from a strategic angle, achieving these three objectives is mainly opportunistic and not wildly realistic. 'This movement has not yet affected Moscow's ability to act as a spoiler to the Euro-Atlantic integration of three countries.'<sup>12</sup> In the wake of the war in Ukraine, the region is less important. The Russia's Foreign Concept Policy has mentioned the region on two occasions. The first time in 2000, when Putin ascended to power, and the second in 2008, when Kosova declared independence.

The reality is that Moscow has attempted to undermine Euro-Atlantic integration and destabilize the region. For instance, the Montenegro government has faced strong opposition from Russia and internal Serbian-backed political forces to prevent the country from joining NATO. Even the Church and Patriarch Amfilohije of Montenegro, in 2013, had declared and disagreed with NATO membership. He considered NATO the 'fourth Reich, that is, the continuation of fascism and they wish to dominate the whole world.'<sup>13</sup> The Orthodox Church in Serbia and Montenegro still remembers and considers the NATO air campaigns against the Milošević regime in 1999: feelings of being betrayed and rejected by the West.

The strategic narrative and history stay side-by-side. Russia knows that and it wants to take advantage of employing them. In 2016, Russia and Serbia orchestrated a plot to assassinate the prime minister of Montenegro. The 'coup d'état' did not achieve its objectives and Montenegro became a member of NATO. The NATO membership is supposed to be seen as an instrument that may end the turbulences in the country's political environment. Meanwhile, political polarisation exists, e.g., between the Democratic Front, a pro-Serbian and pro-Russia coalition, and the Democratic Party of Socialists of Mr. Đukanović, a pro-Western party accused of nepotism and interference.

In a strategic sense, the Kremlin delivers a narrative and hopes to involve external and internal parties. They can use the narrative and history as a force multiplier. They promote brotherhood among Orthodox Slavs. While in the region, they employ 'low-cost (asymmetric) operations in the information space, including (dis)information campaigns, cyber-attacks, and clandestine operations combined with the support of proxy organizations and the use of political and economic influence.'<sup>14</sup> These tactics will produce results in all six Western Balkans countries. For instance, 'the government of Serbia will allocate to Serbian organisations in Montenegro this year (2023) about 4,270,000 euros more than it did in 2022.'<sup>15</sup> Serbia and Republika Srpska (pro-Russian oases) are mainly dominated by anti-Western nationalist behavior of autocratic leaders like Milorad Dodik in Bosnia and Herzegov-

ina and Aleksandar Vučić in Serbia.

At the same time, Russia is constructing a strategic narrative and taking advantage of Bosnia and Herzegovina's fragmented political environment. They promote disputes and disagreements among three communities and oppose NATO membership. Even the ambassador of Russia in Sarajevo, Igor Kalubukhov, declared that 'if Bosnia and Herzegovina will join NATO, they will react to the threat in line with their interest.'<sup>16</sup>

The Kremlin openly supports the Serbian nationalist leader, Mr. Dodik, to counterbalance its interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the West. He is always attempting to undermine the unity and functionality of the central government. He has threatened to withdraw Serbs from all national-level institutions and repatriate the power away from Sarajevo. For years, the West, especially the US, viewed him as a destabilizing leader and threatened to sanction him. In response, he declared that 'if anyone attempted to stop this separatist movement, this would lead to inter-ethnic violence and we (Serbs) have to rely on the help of our friends (referring to Russia).'<sup>17</sup> It is viewed more as an internal political game (playing the Russian friendship card) and a message to the Western community that no decision can be achieved without him.

This environment favors Mr. Dodik and Serb nationalists (Russophiles), who are at the center stage of a long-running game between Russia and the West. At the same time, 'the Republika Srpska is becoming much more independent,' stated Paul Stronski, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The Kremlin is treating Dodik as an independent head of state. Russia has welcomed him twice, in October 2022 and in May 2023. The first visit was more about getting political credit among Serbs and support for the independence of Republika Srpska. The international community considers Mr. Dodik as a threat to the Dayton agreement. However, for now, he enjoys the support of Belgrade and Moscow. He aims to create a 'de facto' independent Republika Srpska.

#### 4. Creating a Balance of Power

Russia aims to keep the West on alert for renewing conflicts in the Western Balkans and prevent Western influence. There are two cases when Russia could exercise power influence. First, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains structurally intact but institutionally and politically dysfunctional. Second, there is open conflict and disagreements between Kosova and Serbia. In both cases, Russia is engaging in what is considered, by analysis, the backyard of Europe.

In Republika Srpska and Serbia, being pro-Russia is a prerequisite for nationalist politics. For instance, Mr. Dodik proudly shows his loyalty that 'there is no request when he goes to [Russian President Vladimir] Putin that he will not accept.'<sup>18</sup> He openly and constantly engages 'Russophobia' to undermine the Western effort to stabilize Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mr. Dodik has refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the High Representative and declared that it is a privilege to be a strategic partner of Russia.



Figure 2: The Poll by Belgrade-based Demostat, 2022

While the overall environment in Serbia seems not to be very promising, thousands of pro-Russian supporters marched in Belgrade before the elections on April 2023 to support the War in Ukraine, wearing T-shirts bearing Putin's face. Meanwhile, far-right groups' People's Patrol' and 'Our People' were waving banners with 'Z' supporting the Kremlin, chanting slogans such as 'Serbs and Russian – brothers forever'.<sup>19</sup> 'Serbia considers itself 'privileged' to be Russia's strategic partner.'<sup>20</sup>

The President of Serbia, Mr. Vučić, is trying to put a tricky balance between EU integration and deep cultural and religious ties with Russia and refuses to join the US and the EU sanctions against Russian entities. For instance, a 2022 poll by Belgrade-based Demostat shows 'that 33% of the respondents said Serbia should harmonize foreign policy with the EU While 56% responded negatively and 11% did not answer.'<sup>21</sup> If the majority of Serbs vote tomorrow, 'only 34% will vote to join the EU, 51% will vote against and 11% are undecided.'<sup>22</sup> Still, Russia is considered the most crucial ally, supported by 40% of public opinion, 30% supported the EU and 24% supported China.'<sup>23</sup> The public opinion shows that Russia and China are more desired partners than the EU (See Figure 2)

The government in Belgrade is working to balance the EU membership and strategic partnership with Russia. Mr. Vučić stated in the UN General Assembly (Oct 2023) that 'he represents a country willing to join the EU but also unwilling to step on traditional friendship it has built over the centuries with Russia.'<sup>24</sup> Serbia was not aligned with the EU foreign policy requirements to raise sanctions against Russia. Mr. Vuksanović said he (Mr. Vučić) is 'balancing and playing Russia and the West against each other'.<sup>25</sup> if they are that far apart Maybe now is the right moment to explain to Mr. Vučić (the president of Serbia) that Serbia 'cannot sit on two chairs at the same time, especially if they are that far apart.'<sup>26</sup>

At first sight, Belgrade seems willing to increase regional influence. This ambition is not only a matter of political rhetoric. Serbia is upgrading and equipping its armed forces, mainly buying or getting donations from Russia, Belarus and China. In reality, Serbia is deeply dependent on the EU economically. Without the economic support of the EU, the Serbian economy may stagnate. Most Serbian companies do business in the West, particularly in Germany, Italy, Hungary and other Western countries.

In a particular way, Serbia has a free trade agreement with Russia. The agreement has been in effect since 2006. They are also part of the Euroasian Economic Union (EAEU), led by Russia since 2009. The Serbian membership in these two organisations was praised as a new opportunity. The agreement was considered a 'triumph of foreign policy over economics,' said Vuk Vuksanović.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, the process is not guided by commercial and economic conditions. The foreign policy of Belgrade aims to come even closer to Russia and balance the West. A comparison lays the fact bare. 'Serbian trading with EAEU countries is estimated to be USD 3.4 billion'. The amount is less than 10 percent of Serbia's total trade, whereas trade with the EU constitutes 63 percent.<sup>28</sup> From a foreign investment perspective, the EU investments in the country are ten times higher than Russian investments. 'According to data from the delegation of the EU, the Union invested about 2.8 billion euros in grants and another 6.6 billion in soft financing of about 300 projects, all between 2007 and 2022.'<sup>29</sup> This EU assistance does not include EU support to the transport sector, IPARD<sup>30</sup> funds, or other EU Programs.

In the current environment, the political ambition of Serbia is to explore the EU political and economic opportunities and use Russia as a 'political lifeboat' to balance the West. Serbia depends on Russian political leverage, e.g., in the UN, OSCE and UNESCO. In contrast to these dependencies, in 2022, Serbia voted for the UN resolution condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. In this case, Belgrade demonstrated a pragmatic foreign policy standing on the sideline of the EU-Russian conflict. The Serbian foreign policy is sometimes guided by self-interests instead of shared values with Russia.

However, the Western Balkans is vulnerable to what is happening in Ukraine, and Russia remains an existential threat. Autocrats always want to create new conflicts, destabilise regions, and shift the focus. There is little interest among these actors in following the rules of international order. Populism and autocracy challenge international cooperation and regional and global security.

## 5. Conclusions

Russia has targeted the Western Balkans for years to project power and influence. The Kremlin is using every opportunity or disappointment with the West to take advantage of and increase its regional footprint. The EU integration has not produced expected results. The Western Balkan nations and pro-European parties may lose credibility and fail to join the bloc. At the same time, extremist groups will get advantages and will see Russia as an alternative.

The war in Ukraine and the Hamas-Israeli conflict that is now raging (2023) should not shift the focus from the WB6. It is a significant and strategic area in Europe. Russia will try to influence and gain importance among Slavic and Orthodox Christians in Serbia, Montenegro, Republika Srpska, Kosova and North Macedonia. They will use nationalist leaders and the Church to gain support and stir them away from the West.

Milorad Dodik and Aleksandar Vučić will keep close ties with Russia and China while simultaneously showing willingness to join the EU. Russia will not use weapons and tanks to destabilize the region. They will use hybrid actions such as autocratic leaders, pro-Russian media outlets, the Church, criminals and political parties. A conflict at the gates of Europe is not in its interest. It will involve the EU and NATO; millions may flee to Western Europe.

However, the power projection of Russia has not changed the strategic direction of the WB6 so far. Russia is gaining small victories in a political ground in fragile, corrupt and unsettled disputes in the Western Balkans. The internal actors are using Russia for localised power games.

Looking at the curve of Russian influence throughout the region, the West has to build up a solid strategy to push back Russian influence and establish an ambitious accession agenda. They have to set up a road map for the accession process. These actions will support the pro-European movements and diminish the pro-Russian rhetoric. Nations in the WB6 would know what to do and how long to wait until they join the West. Otherwise, nations will lose hope and Russia will gain terrain, threatening and destroying all political, economic and security achievements.

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# Generative AI – Astonishing But No Reason to be Afraid

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by Jannis Figura \*

## 1. Introduction

Generative AI (GenAI) is a form of artificial intelligence that can create novel content such as audio, data, codes, or images. It will drastically change how we approach digital content in the future, and a range of jobs are executed.<sup>1</sup> GenAI gained significant attention worldwide when the California-based company OpenAI launched its artificial intelligence chatbot ChatGPT 3.5 in November 2022. The chatbot gained over 100 million users within the first two months after release.<sup>2</sup> ChatGPT is a text-based machine learning model that consists of several language models and large amounts of public data, which allow it to create new content based on user instructions. Its capabilities range from giving information on quantum physics to writing poems that sound as if they are written by humans.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, many people fear that artificial intelligence could make content-creating jobs branches, such as journalism, marketing or copywriting obsolete.<sup>4</sup> This article examines the current position of generative AI with its benefits and challenges and what it might bring in the future to address these concerns.

## 2. The current generative AI landscape

### 2.1 The capabilities of generative AI

Current GenAI systems can process large amounts of data and generate novel output. At their core lay so-called artificial neural networks (ANNs), which are programmed to make them mimic human thinking. ANNs can learn and recognise data patterns which steadily improves the output. The main advantages of generative AI are the time-efficient and cost-efficient creation of new content by reducing the dependency on human involvement.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, generative AI systems are excellent at understanding complex systems as they possess more processing power than humans which allows them to organise large amounts of data. At the same time, they are utilisable for data synthesising and transformation. For instance, converting satellite images to map views, or generating marketing data based on market and consumer behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Generative AI opens the floor for innovations and creative thinking as users can instruct GenAI models to combine data in unforeseen ways. This new potential is specifically helpful for businesses using animations and artificial environments. Furthermore, this technology simplifies many working procedures by taking over tasks previously done by humans.<sup>7</sup>

Some critics argue that GenAI will become so competent that it will make humans dumb as they outsource most thinking to AI. For instance, current GenAI systems can write B-level essays, giving reason to believe that students will cheat their way through education. However, teachers can simply return to paper-based exams, use lockdown browsers that prevent other tabs from opening, or include AI in exams itself to show students how distinguished human thinking is from AI. For instance, GenAI has a high tendency to stereotypical thinking and underrepresent minorities and diversity. So, instead of keeping GenAI out of education and jobs, people should learn how to live and work with it.<sup>8</sup>

### 2.2 The challenges of generative AI

While artificial neural networks can process more information than humans, they cannot copy us as their operations are bound by their coding and algorithms. For instance, they can only mimic human patterns but not comprehend them, which limits their application scope. So, while it seems astonishing what GenAI can create, it is crucial to consider that the content consists of information humans decide to provide the system. Since AI operations rely on human instructions or prompts, it is necessary to consider the potential use of GenAI for malicious practices. As mentioned earlier, GenAI is programmed to produce a desired output, while its content may not be as accurate as a human text. In certain practices, such as disinformation campaigns, the accuracy of content is not that important, but rather the persuasiveness of the messages. This example is one area where GenAI is exploitable for malicious practices.<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, in security-related areas such as coding and programming, people with bad intentions can compromise generative AI products. They can intentionally write and share codes with hidden backdoors online that GenAI inserts in new programmes, which makes them vulnerable and prone to hacking. Furthermore, even though unintentionally, GenAI may coincidentally reproduce a copyrighted code because the AI relies on publicly available material.<sup>10</sup> Even more concerning is that AI systems tend to produce buggy and vulnerable codes without human intervention as they have difficulties in anticipating weaknesses. The problem is that these systems do not understand what security means. A study of AI programming systems discovered that approximately 40% of all generated programmes in the research project had security vulnerabilities.<sup>11</sup>

### 2.3 Governance of generative AI

At the moment, there are no governance structures for GenAI operations. Within private companies, most of them

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favour limiting access to their products and self-govern their applications for economic revenue. However, newer companies such as OpenAI advocate a more democratic approach to GenAI and provide some services for free. In this view, GenAI has the potential to positively impact society by giving everyone access to its benefits.<sup>12</sup> Models such as ChatGPT do not necessarily cause a stir due to their incredible functions, but rather the fact that they are easily accessible for the public.<sup>13</sup> From a non-corporate point of view, there are no regulations for these technologies. This absence brings several problems, for example, potential privacy infringement, intellectual property theft, and copyright issues. Most content is either online or based on online material, which makes it more problematic to attribute and claim ownership.<sup>14</sup>

Engler (2023) advocates that companies providing GenAI or businesses using these models are responsible for ensuring their appropriate use. Once national governments begin using them, they also become responsible for monitoring their functioning. Currently, the governance of GenAI is still in the early stages. Therefore, developers of GenAI models must ensure that their programmes work within certain limitations. For instance, prevent programmes like ChatGPT from generating texts that include misinformation or discriminate against people.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.4 The market value

The generative AI market will probably be worth more than 200 billion dollars by 2032.<sup>16</sup> GenAI is currently still in the developing stage. Nonetheless, it is expectable to bring enormous economic benefits in the upcoming years. For instance, GenAI reduces costs by automating tasks previously done by humans, such as data gathering, augmentation or image generation. These capabilities also reduce costs for companies and save time.<sup>17</sup> Figure 1 shows a general overview of the GenAI market in 2023.

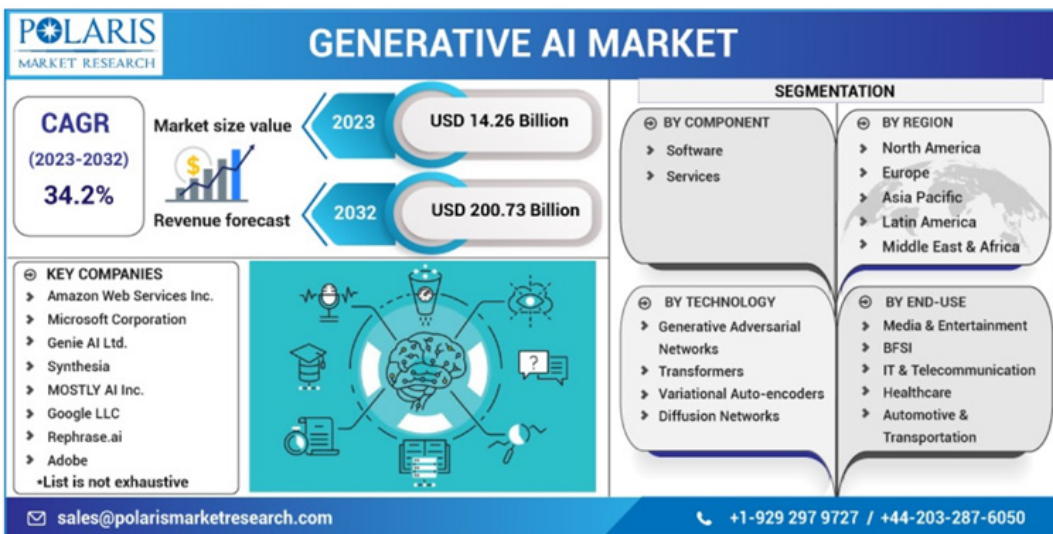


Figure 1. An overview of the GenAI market in 2023. Retrieved from Polaris Market Research (2023).

Already in February 2023, the importance of GenAI for future businesses became clear when Google's parent company Alphabet Inc. lost \$100 billion market value (9% shares) due to an error in its new chatbot Bard. Google already announced that Bard would be the future of its search function. Thus, it came as an unpleasant surprise when Bard explained in an advertisement that the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) made the first pictures of exoplanets in 2022, even though those were already taken in 2004 by the European Southern Observatory (ESO). Such simple mistakes can have grave economic consequences for companies promoting these technologies. Some experts say that there is a need for success due to high competition in GenAI development, which led to an early release by Google causing this error.<sup>18</sup> Mistakes like these show us that GenAI is still in the development stage and large-scale incorporation in our everyday life will take more time.

## 3. Implications

Generative AI models will undeniably change how many jobs are done in the future and businesses operate. Its distinguished advantages are simplifying many working procedures and processing large amounts of data. Consequently, it saves valuable time and resources. However, the main challenges of GenAI are the weak governance structures and its tendency to make mistakes as it cannot understand its own creation. The governance structures are required to prevent misuse and malicious practices. The GenAI market is still developing, but models such as ChatGPT already give us an idea of what this technology can do.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that GenAI will make content-creating jobs obsolete because AI models cannot comprehend the output they produce nor the relationship its content has with the receiver or audience of the content.

Therefore, GenAI should be seen as less of a threat to the job market but rather as a supportive component that will augment and improve current human capabilities. We must learn how to use GenAI for our own benefit instead of just accepting the results it gives us. This symbiosis requires training with AI in businesses and education. Simultaneously, policies are needed to direct the development and application of GenAI. While it seems astonishing what GenAI models such as ChatGPT can create, it is vital to take a closer look to identify their flaws. This article mentions the tendency to stereotypical thinking, the creation of inaccurate content, and insecure systems, among others. It is undeniable that GenAI will improve and reduce these problems. However, similar to a takeover by AI, it is unreasonable to believe that GenAI will ever achieve perfect results in all its applications as it will always operate within a human context, whether it is its input or output. Therefore, jobs such as programmers, journalists or copywriters are always needed to supervise and interpret the work of AI. Similar to many other innovations, GenAI will have positive and negative effects on our daily life.

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# Book Review: Foolproof - Why we Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity

By Jacob Burdge\*

## Foolproof

Why We Fall for Misinformation  
and How to Build Immunity



Sander van der Linden

*"An insightful and forensic examination"*  
Mariana Spring, BBC's Disinformation and  
Social Media Correspondent

shared, thereby amplifying the reach of misinformation. This creates an environment where false information can spread rapidly and widely, outpacing efforts to correct it. This observation underscores the necessity for a more responsible approach to information dissemination by these platforms.

### Prebunking: A Proactive Approach

One of the strengths of "Foolproof" is its focus on solutions. Van der Linden introduces the concept of "prebunking" as a proactive approach to combating misinformation. Prebunking involves inoculating people against false information by exposing them to weakened forms of misinformation and explaining the tactics used to spread it. This method draws on the psychological theory of inoculation, which posits that exposing people to a controlled amount of misinformation can build their cognitive immunity to it.

Van der Linden provides several practical examples of how prebunking can be implemented. One notable example is his collaboration with Google Jigsaw to create interactive games that teach players to recognize common misinformation tactics. These games, such as "Bad News," have been shown to improve players' ability to identify and resist misinformation in real-world scenarios.

### Emphasis on Critical Thinking and Media Literacy

Another significant aspect of the book is its emphasis on critical thinking and media literacy. Van der Linden argues that education systems should incorporate these skills into their curricula to prepare students for the complex information landscape they will encounter. By fostering critical thinking, individuals can become more discerning consumers of information, better equipped to evaluate the credibility of sources and the veracity of claims.

### Transparency and Accountability

In addition to educational reforms, Van der Linden advocates for greater transparency and accountability from social media companies. He suggests that platforms should implement clearer policies for flagging and removing

**Foolproof: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity** by Sander van der Linden is an insightful and timely exploration into the pervasive issue of misinformation in the modern world. This book delves into the psychological mechanisms that make people susceptible to false information and offers practical strategies to build resilience against it.

### Psychological Mechanisms and Cognitive Biases

Van der Linden, a renowned social psychologist, begins by examining the root causes of our vulnerability to misinformation. He outlines how cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and the Dunning-Kruger effect, play significant roles in how individuals process information. Confirmation bias, the tendency to favor information that confirms one's preexisting beliefs, is particularly insidious as it leads people to ignore or dismiss contrary evidence. The Dunning-Kruger effect, on the other hand, highlights how people with limited knowledge in a domain often overestimate their own understanding, making them more likely to believe and spread misinformation.

### The Role of Social Media

The book also addresses the role of social media in the spread of false information. Van der Linden points out that platforms like Facebook and Twitter are designed to maximize engagement, often at the expense of truth. The algorithms prioritize sensational and emotionally charged content, which is more likely to be

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false information and improve their algorithms to prioritize accuracy over engagement. This is a call for systemic changes to ensure that the infrastructure of information dissemination supports truth and reliability.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, *Foolproof: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity* is an insightful and actionable guide to understanding and combating misinformation. Van der Linden's expertise in psychology and his practical approach to building resilience make this book an essential read for anyone concerned about the impact of false information in today's society. By addressing both the psychological underpinnings and systemic issues that contribute to the spread of misinformation, Van der Linden provides a comprehensive roadmap for building a more informed and discerning public.

The book's thorough examination of cognitive biases and the role of social media offers a deep understanding of why misinformation spreads so effectively. Moreover, the proposed solutions, including prebunking and a strong emphasis on media literacy, offer practical tools for individuals and institutions alike. Van der Linden's call for greater accountability and transparency from social media platforms adds a crucial dimension to the broader fight against misinformation, highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach to this complex issue.



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