
Promoting Peace and Security

Horizon Insights

Quarterly Journal by Beyond the Horizon ISSG - Volume 7 Issue 3 - 2024 (Jul - Sep)



Governance, Growth, and Geopolitics: Insights from China's Two Sessions

**Critical Thinking and Clear Language:
A Democratic Immunity to Fake News**

Unveiling the Chessboard: Macron's Gambit, NATO's Dilemma, and Putin's Warning Amidst the Ukraine Crisis

Book Review: Before the West The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders

Beyond the Horizon International Strategic Studies Group (BtH) is an independent next-generation think & do tank in Belgium. BtH aims to promote glocal (global & local) peace and security by its strong in-house capacity and extensive network of partners throughout the world.

Disclaimer and Other Legal Information

The views and opinions expressed in this journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any other agency, organisation, employer or company. Assumptions made in the analyses are not reflective of the position of any entity other than the author(s) – and, since we are critically-thinking human beings, these views are always subject to change, revision, and rethinking at any time.

The authors and the journal are not to be held responsible for misuse, reuse, recycled and cited and/or uncited copies of the content by others.

Photo Credits : Freepik

Editorial Board

Prof. Hall Gardner, The American University of Paris, Paris, France.

Prof. Žiga Turk, The University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Prof. Michel Liegeois, Université catholique de Louvain, Leuven, Belgium.

Prof. Felipe Pathé Duarte, The Higher Institute of Police Sciences and Internal Security, Lisbon, Portugal.

Prof. Tanguy Struye De Swielande, Université catholique de Louvain, Leuven, Belgium.

Prof. Rodrigo Alvarez Valdes, University of Santiago, Santiago, Chile.

Prof. Christian Kaunert, University of South Wales, Pontypridd, United Kingdom.

Prof. Muqtedar Khan, Dept. of Political Science & International Relations, University of Delaware, Delaware, USA.

Assoc.Prof. Anne Speckhard, ICSVE and Georgetown University, USA.

Assoc.Prof. Cihan Aydiner, College of Arts and Sciences, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Florida, USA.

Assoc.Prof. Sarah Perret, LabToP-CRESPPA, Paris, France.

Assoc.Prof. Salvin Paul, Sikkim University, Gangtok, India.

Assoc.Prof. Gabriel Johnson, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden.

Dr. Robert M. Cutler, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

Dr. Steven Blockmans, CEPS, Brussels, Belgium.

Dr. David Strachan-Morris, University of Leicester, Leicester, England.

Dr. Ardian Shajkovci, ICSVE, USA.

Dr. Julien Theron, Paris Lumières University, Paris, France.

Dr. Çlirim Toci, Baltic Defence College, Tartu, Estonia.

Dr. Ahmad Wali Ahmad Yar, VUB, Brussels, Belgium.

Dr. Salih Tutun, Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

Dr. Vira Ratsiborynska, Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Brussels, Belgium.

Giorgi Bianisvili, Georgia External Security Department, Tbilisi, Georgia.

Samantha North, University of Bath, Bath, UK.

© 2024 Horizon Insights

Horizon Insights 2024-3 (2024 Jul -Sep)

DOI: 10.31175/hi.2024.03

ISSN: 2593-3582 (printed)

ISSN: 2593-3590 (online)

Please cite as: Surname, Name (Writer) (2024), "Article name", Horizon Insights – 2024/3 Brussels.

For more information visit www.behorizon.org



Beyond the Horizon ISSG
Davincilaan 1, 1930 Zaventem
+32 2 801 13 57-8
info@behorizon.org

Contents

Foreword	IV
Governance, Growth, and Geopolitics: Insights from China's Two Sessions	1
Critical Thinking and Clear Language: A Democratic Immunity to Fake News	4
Unveiling the Chessboard: Macron's Gambit, NATO's Dilemma, and Putin's Warning Amidst the Ukraine Crisis	7
Book Review: Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders	12

Foreword

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to welcome you to the third issue of 2024. This edition brings together a rich array of insights exploring the crossroads of governance, global conflict, civic discourse, and historical imagination.

Our opening article offers a comprehensive analysis of China's 2024 "Two Sessions," a crucial political moment that set the tone for the country's legislative and economic agenda under President Xi Jinping. Ji-han Lim examines how Beijing is navigating a turbulent domestic and international environment through controlled governance, targeted economic goals, and a sharpened security posture—highlighting how the Chinese leadership is redefining stability and power in an era of structural challenges.

The second contribution shifts focus to the foundations of democracy in the digital age. Fatih Yilmaz calls for cultivating critical thinking and linguistic clarity as vital immunities against manipulation and misinformation. His essay outlines how clear language, robust reasoning, and civic engagement form the bedrock of democratic resilience—especially in a world where disinformation thrives on cognitive shortcuts and ideological silos.

In a sharp turn toward the contemporary battlefield of European geopolitics, Laura Scotto di Clemente unpacks the tensions and calculations behind President Macron's recent statements on the Ukraine war. The piece navigates France's evolving defense posture, transatlantic fissures within NATO, and the strategic ambiguity surrounding Western troop deployment. It presents a complex picture of deterrence, diplomacy, and intra-European friction against the backdrop of a deepening crisis.

Closing the issue, we present a review of Ayşe Zarakol's *Before the West*, a bold and erudite intervention into the historical foundations of international order. Through a reexamination of Chinggisid, Timurid, Ottoman, and Mughal systems, Zarakol reframes sovereignty and legitimacy in non-Western terms, challenging Eurocentric assumptions and offering a compelling vision for pluralizing global IR theory.

Each piece in this issue confronts the interplay between power, narrative, and agency—from state strategies and military dilemmas to epistemic resilience and global historiography. We hope the diverse perspectives presented here invite reflection, dialogue, and deeper engagement with the forces shaping our world today.

Thank you for joining us on this intellectual journey. We wish you a stimulating and thought-provoking read.

Sincerely yours,

Beyond the Horizon ISSG

Governance, Growth, and Geopolitics: Insights from China's Two Sessions

by Ji-han Lim*

The National People's Congress (NPC) of China functions as the paramount organ of state authority, operating as a single-chamber legislature endowed with extensive capabilities, including amending the Constitution, legislating, supervising governmental activities, and selecting principal officials for significant institutions such as the National Supervisory Commission, the Supreme People's Court, and the Supreme People's Procuratorate. The NPC is instrumental in supervising government operations and appointing key officials, representing the legislative power within [China's political system](#).

Since its inception in 1954, the NPC has transitioned from being viewed as a mere rubber stamp of decisions during Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution to a more significant participant in legislative and policy formulation within the People's Republic of China. Comprising nearly 3,000 representatives elected for five-year periods via provincial and People's Liberation Army (PLA) elections, the NPC annually convenes to undertake its duties, which encompass constitutional amendments, legislation enactment, official confirmations, state budget administration, and others.

Additionally, the NPC selects members for its Standing Committee, a permanent body that oversees NPC sessions and directs the policy agenda. Despite attempts to incorporate external advice in legislative drafting, public engagement in the NPC's internal processes remains limited. The NPC's operations are fundamental to the governance framework of China, playing a key role in defining the nation's legislative and policy direction.

2024 NPC alongside the Chinese Political Consultative Conference, collectively known as the "Two Sessions," are of critical importance in the political and legislative context of the People's Republic of China. Conducted against a backdrop of significant domestic and global changes, this year's sessions highlight China's strategic priorities and governance models under the leadership of President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang.

Amidst complex challenges, the Chinese leadership has set ambitious economic goals and policy orientations to steer through internal and external challenges. Premier Li Qiang, in his first work report, set a [growth target](#) of approximately 5% for 2024, a target reflecting China's dedication to maintaining economic momentum amidst worldwide uncertainties and post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery. This goal indicates a focus on economic stability and expansion rather than swift reform.

These sessions also brought to light China's stance on national defense and security, with Premier Li indicating a rise in defense expenditures. This continuation of a decade-long trend in increased military spending demonstrates China's strategic intentions and readiness amid regional conflicts, particularly regarding [Taiwan](#).

Moreover, the "Two Sessions" emphasized China's commitment to addressing the structural imbalances impairing its economic framework, highlighting a shift towards a more sustainable and high-quality growth model. These structural reforms aim to mitigate the impacts of a disparate recovery post-COVID, deflationary pressures, and the issues arising from a heavily indebted property sector and local governments.

China's leadership has also laid out a vision for technological innovation and autonomy, stressing advancements in manufacturing, quantum computing, big data, and artificial intelligence. This ambition to lead in the technological sphere may intensify trade tensions and contribute to industrial overcapacity.

Policy Directions and Legislative Priorities

In the 2024 sessions of the NPC and its Standing Committee, the Chinese government has articulated a clear vision for the country's future through its policy directions and legislative priorities. [Premier Li Qiang](#), in his work report, highlighted the government's ambitious goal to achieve around a 5% economic growth target for the year. This target underscores a commitment to maintaining robust economic performance despite the challenges of transitioning to a post-COVID recovery phase. The emphasis on transforming China's growth model indicates a strategic pivot towards enhancing the quality and sustainability of economic development, addressing structural imbalances such as weak household consumption and lower returns on investment.

The government's legislative agenda for the year reflects a nuanced approach to addressing complex domestic and international challenges. For instance, Li's announcement to [increase defense spending](#) signifies a more assertive stance on national security and defense capabilities, resonating with concerns over Taiwan and regional

* Researcher at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

stability. The omission of the term “[peaceful reunification](#)” concerning Taiwan from Li’s report signals a hardened rhetoric, reflecting a potentially shifting approach towards cross-strait.

Furthermore, the NPC and its Standing Committee’s focus extend to social and [demographic challenges](#), with initiatives aimed at supporting childbirth and improving conditions for China’s elderly population. The commitment to financing justified property projects and providing more social housing is a response to the ongoing real estate sector’s challenges, aiming to stabilize the market and address the concerns of homebuyers.

Technological innovation and industrial policy also feature prominently in this year’s legislative priorities. By pledging to lift all foreign investment restrictions in the manufacturing sector and formulating development plans for cutting-edge technologies such as quantum computing, big data, and artificial intelligence, China seeks to position itself as [a leader in global technological advancement](#) while striving for technological self-sufficiency.

The NPC and its Standing Committee, with the Legislative Affairs Commission playing a crucial role in the legislative process, underscore the government’s commitment to a legal and procedural framework that supports these priorities. This includes drafting important bills, conducting public consultations, and proposing amendments to ensure that legislative activities align with the strategic goals set forth by the leadership.

These policy directions and legislative priorities reflect China’s strategic adaptation to contemporary challenges, aiming to secure long-term stability, prosperity, and a competitive edge on the global stage.

Economic Goals and Challenges

In 2024, China’s economic strategy is defined by its dedication to achieving significant growth and tackling major economic issues, as underscored in the NPC meetings. The declaration by Premier Li Qiang of a 5% growth aim is a testament to the ambition for a resilient economic policy that elevates growth, while also indicating a move towards sustainable and high-quality advancement. This goal reflects the complexity of fostering growth amidst the recovery from the pandemic, underlining the importance of extensive policy support and structural economic adjustments.

The outlined challenges involve mitigating the [volatility of the real estate market](#) and the broader issues associated with debt-laden local governments. These concerns underscore the need for strategic measures to stabilize and boost the economy, guaranteeing pathways to sustainable development. The governmental strategy encompasses a measured stimulus, planning for a fiscal deficit of 3% of the economic output, and issuing significant special treasury bonds for local government financing. This indicates a proactive fiscal approach aimed at rejuvenating the economy.

Additionally, the government is concentrating on bolstering China’s defense capabilities, reflecting a wider strategic outlook that considers economic stability a key element of national security. [A 7.2% increase in defense expenditure](#) over the previous year highlights the emphasis on sustaining a formidable defense posture amidst regional and international uncertainties.

Defense and Security Posture

During the 2024 sessions of the NPC, China emphasized its defense and security strategy through notable policy declarations and strategic adaptations, illustrating the nation’s defensive stance and its broader security outlook.

In his speech, Premier Li Qiang announced an uptick in defense expenditure, continuing the trend of reinforcing China’s military strength. This development, consistent with a decade of increased defense budgets under President Xi Jinping, demonstrates China’s determination to boost its strategic and military preparedness. This year’s augmentation in the defense budget continues a pattern of significant growth since Xi came to power, highlighting a focus on enhancing military capability and readiness amidst regional and global challenges.

The discussions in 2024 also marked a significant change in tone concerning Taiwan, notably omitting the phrase “peaceful reunification.” This adjustment hints at a potential shift in China’s approach towards Taiwan, signifying evolving strategic perspectives against the backdrop of China’s national security policies and regional geopolitical tensions.

From an international perspective, the elevation in defense expenditure and a refined approach towards Taiwan, as underscored in Premier Li’s speech, indicate a bolder security stance with potential repercussions for regional equilibrium and global diplomatic relations. The focus on military preparedness highlights China’s determination to defend its sovereignty and protect its interests amid escalating geopolitical tensions. Moreover, China’s pledge to [technological independence](#) and innovation, by easing restrictions on foreign investments and promoting progress in quantum computing, big data, and AI, might shift the balance in global economic and technological arenas, influencing international commerce and technology collaboration frameworks.

Conclusion

The 2024 sessions of the NPC, unfolding against a backdrop of considerable internal and international challenges, have articulated a detailed agenda indicative of China's strategic objectives and administrative methodologies. The NPC, being the paramount legislative institution in China, together with the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, constitute the "Two Sessions," a critical juncture in China's political timeline facilitating the establishment of policy directions and legislative undertakings.

In the current year's meetings, spearheaded by Premier Li Qiang, China has put forward ambitious economic goals and measures designed to revolutionize its developmental blueprint. This aims at rectifying structural discrepancies and propelling a trajectory of high-quality growth. Efforts to mitigate the fiscal vulnerabilities of municipalities and the housing market, the emphasis on technological breakthroughs, and strategies to combat demographic hurdles and bolster social cohesion have been highlighted.

Furthermore, the escalation of defense expenditure and a nuanced approach towards Taiwan underscore a strategic stance focused on protecting national sovereignty, aligning with wider security concerns. These initiatives are integral to China's strategy to maneuver through intricate regional and international geopolitical landscapes.

The legislative endeavors and the operations of various commissions and committees within the NPC showcase a methodical and all-encompassing approach to policy formulation and governance enhancement. This spans the creation of legislative agendas, the facilitation of public consultations, and the drafting and passing of laws, aiming collectively at catering to the dynamic requirements of the country and its populace.

At its core, the resolutions of the 2024 "Two Sessions" demonstrate China's dedication to a harmonized strategy encompassing economic growth, national defense, and societal well-being. The focus on technological progress, demographic strategies, and economic adjustments reflects the leadership's aspiration for a robust and sustainable development model. As China advances through the intricacies of a post-pandemic reality, its policy choices and legislative actions are poised to significantly impact its domestic administration and its stance in international affairs.

Critical Thinking and Clear Language: A Democratic Immunity to Fake News

by Fatih Yilmaz *

Navigating a Landscape of Influence

We live in a continuous interaction with people and (social) institutions that try to influence our thoughts and actions. Our parents, friends, colleagues, activists, political parties, traditional or digital media tools, advertising companies... there are opinions everywhere and everyone has an agenda. However, their intentions do not always align with our personal well-being. For some, we are an instrument to achieve their goals: a political party wants our vote, an advertiser wants to sell us something, social media wants our attention, etc.

In an age of information overload, cultivating critical thinking is more essential than ever. It enables us to navigate complexity, evaluate the reliability of sources, and distinguish credible information from manipulation or fake news. Critical thinking empowers individuals to make reasoned, independent judgments based on facts rather than emotion or misinformation.

It is the disciplined process of actively interpreting, analysing, and evaluating information and arguments. This practice enhances the quality of our thinking, allowing us to reflect logically and independently on beliefs, claims, and decisions.

Constructing Sound Reasoning

To defend or reassess our worldviews, we must be capable of building robust arguments rooted in logic and evidence. Whether one supports democracy or questions its efficacy, critical thinking provides a framework to evaluate such beliefs impartially. Distinguishing fact from opinion is fundamental in this process.

The sheer volume of information we consume encourages the formation of ideological clusters, communities of like-minded individuals that reinforce existing beliefs. Critical thinking challenges this clustering by promoting openness to alternative perspectives.

The Democratic Imperative

In democratic societies, citizens are not mere bystanders but active participants in shaping laws and policies. From migration and healthcare to retirement reforms, these issues impact our daily lives. A critically engaged citizenry must ask: How informed are we about these policies? What are their implications?

Critical thinking is not only about personal decision-making—it is a democratic necessity. It allows citizens to scrutinise political rhetoric, hold leaders accountable, and challenge unjust laws or policies that affect rights, freedoms, and social well-being.

As Paul and Elder (2007) succinctly put it:

"Much of our thinking, left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed or down-right prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and that of what we produce, make, or build depends precisely on the quality of our thought."

Proper training in critical thinking equips individuals to detect manipulative discourse and resist disinformation campaigns.

The Role of Language in Critical Thinking

Language is the primary medium through which thoughts are expressed and understood. It facilitates analysis, the articulation of reasoning, and the formation of coherent arguments. Clear and precise language supports the development of critical thought by enabling individuals to identify bias, structure ideas, and evaluate perspectives.

Critical thinking thus demands more than grammatical accuracy—it requires semantic awareness, conceptual clarity, and contextual sensitivity.

Challenges in Multilingual Societies

In multilingual contexts, the risk of misinterpretation rises. Nuances, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references may be misunderstood, leading to distorted comprehension. Therefore, language proficiency in the local language(s) becomes essential for informed participation.

Communication—verbal, written, and non-verbal—shapes perceptions and understanding. Enhancing local language skills supports the ability to engage critically and meaningfully with public discourse.

* Director of Projects & Partnerships at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

Learning Through Language

Language education plays a pivotal role in cultivating critical thinking. Activities such as reading varied perspectives, discussing complex topics, and writing structured arguments foster cognitive engagement. Learners develop the skills to question assumptions, detect inconsistencies, and present reasoned viewpoints.

Writing exercises the cognitive domain: it demands clarity of thought, evidential support, and persuasive structure—core elements of critical engagement.

Practical Tools for Language Educators

Language educators can reinforce critical thinking through structured analysis of media and texts. The following guiding questions support this pedagogical aim:

- What is the nature and intent of the article? Is it factual reporting or opinion-driven?
- Are sources named, or are claims vague and unverified (e.g., “everyone knows”)?
- Are sources reliable and appropriately cited?
- Is selective citation used to support a specific narrative (cherry-picking)?
- How is language employed—does word choice subtly shape perception (e.g., “even the English”)?
- Do the arguments logically follow from the presented facts?

These exercises enhance analytical thinking and can be carried out in either the learners’ native or target language. Vocabulary analysis is particularly useful:

- Does a term like “lazy seat hangers” reveal an implicit bias compared to “young generation”?
- Are time-related terms such as “long-term” consistently defined across sources?
- Are graphs labelled clearly and comparably, or manipulated to mislead?

Developing an independent approach to vocabulary fosters deeper comprehension and empowers learners to derive meaning without constant assistance. Skills such as inferring meaning through context, recognising patterns, and identifying word parts (prefixes, suffixes, roots) are crucial, especially for non-native speakers.

Immune 2 Infodemic [tools](#) can also be used by educators to develop and exercise critical thinking skills.

Conclusion

In an era characterised by information abundance and increasing polarisation, clear language and critical thinking stand as essential tools for democratic resilience. The ability to analyse, question, and articulate arguments with precision not only empowers individuals to resist manipulation and misinformation but also reinforces their role as active, informed citizens. Language education, particularly in multilingual societies, plays a pivotal role in fostering these competencies. By integrating critical thinking strategies into language learning and public discourse, we can equip individuals with the cognitive tools necessary to navigate complexity, uphold democratic values, and contribute meaningfully to the public good.

References

- Baron, N.S. (2015). *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World*. Oxford University Press.
- Beyond the Horizon (2023). *Critical Thinking Handbook*. Immune2Infodemic Project. <https://immune2infodemic.eu>.
- DeLaplante, K. (2020). *Critical Thinker Academy: Learn to Think Like a Philosopher* [MOOC]. Udemy.
- Fisher, A. & Scriven, M. (1997). *Critical Thinking: Its Definition and Assessment*. Edgepress and Centre for Research in Critical Thinking, University of East Anglia.
- Kagan, S. & Kagan, M. (2010). *Coöperatieve leerstrategieën. Research, principes en de praktische uitwerking*. Bazzalt.
- Lau, J. & Chan, J. (2023). *Critical Thinking* [MOOC]. <https://philosophy.hku.hk/think/critical/ct.php>.
- Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2007). *A Guide to educators: Critical thinking competency standards*. Foundation for Critical Thinking Press.
- Pederson, J. (2017). *Jordan Peterson on the Power of Writing* (YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=bfDOoADCfkg>.
- Reyes, A.C. & Cuzzamu, E.B. (2022). *Role of Critical Thinking and Effective Communication in Humanities*. *Technoarete Transactions on Advances in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2 (4), 1-6.
- Ryan, R.M. & Deci, E.L. (2018). *Self-Determination Theory*. Guilford Press.
- Sanacore, J. (2021). *Teaching Critical Thinking in the Context of Political Rhetoric: A Guide for Classroom Practice*. Routledge.
- Tomlinson, B. (2011). *Materials Development in Language Teaching* (Cambridge Language Teaching Library). Cambridge University Press.
- Van den Branden, K. (2006). *Task-based language education: from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Van der Linden, S. (2023). *FOOLPROOF: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity*. HarperCollins.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and Language*, revised edition. The MIT Press.

Unveiling the Chessboard: Macron's Gambit, NATO's Dilemma, and Putin's Warning Amidst the Ukraine Crisis

by Laura Scotto di Clemente *

1. Macron's controversial stance on Western troop deployment to Ukraine: a closer look and its aftermath

In the last weeks, French President Emmanuel Macron defended his deliberate choice not to rule out the potential deployment of Western troops to Ukraine despite the controversy it has generated. Brushing off criticism from both domestic and international circles, Macron emphasized the careful consideration behind his statements regarding Russian aggression towards Ukraine. Speaking to reporters during a visit to the 2024 Olympic village near Paris, Macron underscored the gravity of the current geopolitical situation, stating that each word uttered on this matter was meticulously weighed and measured.

While the idea faced staunch opposition from NATO allies like the US, the UK, and Germany, it found some support from countries like [Estonia and Lithuania](#). French officials sought to downplay Macron's remarks, pointing to potential activities such as demining and arms production that could involve Western presence in Ukraine. During a meeting with French Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis said, "There cannot be any 'buts.' We must draw red lines for Russia, not ourselves. No form of support for Ukraine can be excluded. We need to continue supporting Ukraine wherever it's most needed", highlighting his [worries](#) about Moscow setting its prospects on the Baltic countries, which used to be part of the Soviet Union and are now members of the EU and NATO.

Meanwhile, the speaker of Russia's lower house of Parliament cautioned Macron against sending troops, making historical parallels with [Napoleon's ill-fated campaign in 1812](#).

During the following days, France's Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné, [emphasized](#) the necessity of considering new measures to support Ukraine, highlighting areas such as mine clearance, cyber defense, and localized weapon production on Ukrainian soil. The French Foreign Minister asserted that certain actions [might necessitate a presence in Ukraine](#) without it to necessarily escalate to combat. Therefore, Séjourné reiterated that Macron's stance remained open to various possibilities, emphasizing the President's willingness to explore unconventional avenues of support.

However, following Macron's statement the news is likely to be more than contradictory. On the one hand is the position of Elysian diplomacy, which has clarified that Macron's intention was to [stimulate discourse on the matter](#) rather than propose concrete plans for troop deployment, combined to the deliberately reassuring and influential tones of the [President's interview](#) given to TF1. On the other hand, [POLITICO](#) published an article highlighting that the French troops are adapting their training for [potential high-intensity conflicts](#) against adversaries like Russia, moving away from counterinsurgency tactics. The combat training center ([CENTAC](#)) in eastern France simulates battlefield conditions, emphasizing combined arms warfare and the use of advanced technology. Lessons from Ukraine highlight the importance of coordination and resilience. Soldiers undergo intense, 96-hour exercises, learning to operate without electronic devices and manage logistical challenges. Emphasis is placed on soldiers' adaptability and decision-making under pressure. The goal is to ensure readiness and effectiveness in modern warfare scenarios.

2. Macron's speech to the Nation: "Russian victory would undermine EU security"

Last Thursday, March 14, on French national television, President Emmanuel Macron restated his resolute stance on the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. During the interview, Macron articulated his belief that the conflict in Ukraine carries [profound implications for the security and integrity of Europe as a whole](#). He stated that any limitations imposed on aid to Ukraine would ultimately amount to [choosing defeat](#) in the face of Russian aggression. Macron warned that a scenario in which Russia emerges victorious in Ukraine would not only erode Europe's credibility but also [jeopardize its very security](#), reducing it to a severe state of vulnerability.

Against this backdrop, Macron called for a lucid reassessment of the prevailing circumstances, urging resolute action to prevent Russia from achieving its objectives in Ukraine. He addresses to the entire Nation, highlighting that "[la sécurité des Français se joue en Ukraine](#)".

Moreover, Macron's remarks reflect a broader diplomatic landscape in which tensions and diverging perspectives among European leaders have come to the forefront. While some leaders, such as the German Chancellor and the President of the United States, expressed profound reservations about such a move, Macron reiterated that all options, including the deployment of troops, should remain on the table.

In light of these developments, Macron's interview underscores the need for a [unified and decisive approach](#) among European nations in addressing the crisis in Ukraine. Despite facing pushback from certain quarters, Macron has consistently advocated for robust support for Ukraine, viewing it as essential for safeguarding Europe's security and integrity in the face of external threats.

* Research Assistant at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

The President's speech is lucid and firm and almost reminiscent of fatherly tones toward the audience. It is clear that the purpose of the interview, for Macron, was partly to encourage, partly to warn the French people. The voice does not tremble, nor does it contain overly aggressive words. The message is very clear: reinterpreting Churchill's famous Fulton speech, the French President reminds that today we must have "*Le nerf de la paix*", adding that "*vouloir la paix ce n'est pas choisir la défaite, ce n'est pas laisser tomber l'Ukraine*".

3. Other NATO Allies' position

The discourse surrounding the potential deployment of ground troops to Ukraine has ignited an outbreak of responses from various NATO countries, juxtaposing differing stances and strategies in navigating the conflict. French President Emmanuel Macron's assertion that "[nothing should be ruled out](#)" concerning potential deployments prompted mainly negative, but also positive, reactions from leaders across NATO allies, amplifying the complexity of the situation. While acknowledging the possibility of security needs justifying elements of deployment, Macron emphasized France's commitment to a nuanced approach in the face of mounting tensions. In response, US President Joe Biden reiterated his administration's stance, emphasizing a path to victory through [military aid rather than direct troop engagement](#). This sentiment was echoed by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who highlighted existing agreements barring European or NATO member states from deploying troops to Ukraine, aside from limited training missions. Italy echoed similar sentiments, stating that international support for Ukraine should not involve ground troop presence, and cautioned against escalating tensions with Russia.

Sweden, the newest NATO's ally, indicated that it does not envision sending ground troops to Ukraine at the present moment.

On the contrary, [Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis](#) has expressed openness to the discussions initiated by the French President regarding the possibility of NATO sending troops to Ukraine. Landsbergis emphasized that amidst the current crisis, no option should be dismissed outright. He highlighted the importance of ongoing discussions, noting that such deliberations prevent Putin from benefiting further from the situation.

While underscoring the importance of establishing clear red lines and avoiding strategic dilemmas for the Russian army within Ukraine, Landsbergis emphasized that it is [premature](#) to determine the most suitable options for troop deployment. He reiterated, though, that all possibilities should remain on the table.

Meanwhile, [NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg](#) maintained that the alliance's military support for Ukraine would remain limited to the supply of ammunition and equipment without considering any troop deployment. As discussions unfold, the urgency of the situation is underscored by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's appeal for creating a collective defense against Russian aggression. Zelenskyy's participation in the [Paris meeting](#) via video link highlighted the gravity of the crisis and the imperative for international solidarity in confronting the ongoing conflict.

4. Ukrainian partnerships with France, Germany, and Poland

In February, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy solidified crucial partnerships with France and Germany, securing [long-term security pacts](#) with both nations. In a significant move, Ukraine and France inked a bilateral security agreement to bolster Kyiv's defense against Russia. The agreement, signed by Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron, outlines [commitments](#) from Paris to provide increased arms support, train Ukrainian soldiers, and allocate up to three billion euros (\$3.23bn) in military aid over the course of a decade. Additionally, the pact underscores mutual efforts to [enhance cooperation in artillery](#) procurement while facilitating Ukraine's future integration into the European Union and NATO. In this occasion, President Zelenskyy emphasized the tangible impact of this collaboration on social media, noting its significance in defending lives within Ukraine and across Europe. Similarly, Ukraine sealed another pact with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, signifying Germany's commitment to [backing Ukraine with military assistance](#) and imposing sanctions on Russia, alongside measures to maintain Russian assets frozen. Germany also allocated an immediate aid package totaling [1.13 billion euros](#) (\$1.22bn), primarily for air defense and artillery support. These diplomatic endeavors unfolded amid escalating tensions in Avdiivka, as Ukrainian forces faced mounting pressure from advancing Russian troops. Ukraine's efforts have been troubled by a shortage of ammunition exacerbated by delays in Western military aid. Zelenskyy's diplomatic overtures reflect Ukraine's proactive stance in seeking international support amid the ongoing conflict with Russia.

More recently, on March 15th, during a summit of the "[Weimar Triangle](#)", German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk reaffirmed their solidarity with Ukraine. Tusk emphasized the situation's urgency, expressing a collective determination to prevent Russia from prevailing and to support Ukraine until the end. Despite being key allies of Ukraine, some differences between Scholz and Macron were evident, particularly regarding the potential deployment of Western ground troops, which remains a point of contention. While Macron has suggested not ruling out such a possibility in the future, Scholz has maintained a stance against deploying ground troops on Ukrainian soil. This discrepancy underscores the difficulty in achieving a unified approach among European countries.

5. French and Germany military aids to Ukraine: a comparison

Germany's assistance is structured in [two main categories](#): financial aid from the Federal Government's security

capacity building initiative and direct provision of materials from the Federal Armed Forces' supplies. In terms of financial support, Germany has allocated significant funds for the military assistance, with approximately 28 billion euros earmarked or already made available for Ukraine's support over the next few years. This includes contributions to the European Peace Facility (EPF) and commitments worth about 6 billion euros for future years.

[France's contributions](#) primarily consist of a diverse range of equipment aimed at supporting Ukraine's immediate combat capabilities. In total, French military aid value to Ukraine amounts to 2.615 billion euros, plus a contribution of 1.2 billion euros to the European Peace Facility.

Both countries have provided training to Ukrainian troops, with more than 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers trained by the [French](#) and [German](#) militaries in Poland, Germany and France. Comparing the assistance provided by France and Germany, both countries have demonstrated significant commitment to bolstering Ukraine's defense capacities. In this period of [artillery scarcity](#), though, it is necessary to clarify how the two different countries contributed to this.



Obviously, certain details regarding some military deliveries, particularly about orders in planning are classified. However, on the part of the German government, some decisions have already been made. According to the [Federal Government](#), the following artillery will be delivered to Ukraine in the upcoming months:

- 36 wheeled self-propelled howitzers RCH 155
- 18 self-propelled howitzers PzH 2000
- more than 120,000 projectiles 122mm
- more than 250,000 projectiles 155mm
- 14 wheeled self-propelled howitzer Zuzana 2 (project jointly financed with Denmark and Norway)

On the other hand, the Elysée does not yet provide clear and concrete directions, probably because still in the de-

cision-making phase. On this regard, profound criticism has arisen regarding France's ranking in military support for Kyiv. French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu expressed dissatisfaction with the methodology and validity of rankings provided by the German research group [Kiel Institute](#), which placed France behind other European countries in terms of military support for Ukraine. Back in January, following discussions between the French Defence Minister and his Ukrainian counterpart Roustem Umerov, the Elysée has embarked on the new agreement to reinforce Ukraine's defense capabilities, entailing France to take charge of steering an ammunition and missile production coalition for Ukraine. The newly-launched "[Artillery for Ukraine](#)" coalition aims to strengthen military support for Kyiv both in the short and long term.

6. Empowering Europe's Defense: funding initiatives to strengthen industrial readiness and innovation

The European Commission has taken significant steps to reinforce the community's defense capabilities and support its defense industry through several key initiatives, allocating substantial funding and resources to address critical needs.

Firstly, the Commission allocated €500 million under the [Act in Support of Ammunition Production \(ASAP\)](#). This funding aims to enhance Europe's ammunition production capacity to 2 million shells annually by 2025. The Commission swiftly evaluated the A.S.A.P. Regulation and selected [31 projects](#) to increase ammunition production and readiness. These plans span explosives, powder, shells, missile production, testing, and reconditioning certification. The funding, totaling €513 million from EU and Norway budgets, will leverage additional investment from the industry, amounting to around €1.4 billion. The focus of A.S.A.P. on powder and explosives, critical for ammunition shell production, is expected to significantly booster production capacities.

Secondly, the Commission launched the Work Program for the instrument to reinforce the European defense industry through common procurement ([EDIRPA](#)) and the fourth annual Work Programme of the European Defense Fund ([EDF](#)). These programs, with a combined budget of nearly [€2 billion](#), aim to incentivize joint procurement efforts among Member States and support defense research and development (R&D) projects. EDIRPA, with a budget of €310 million, encourages Member States to collectively acquire defense products, particularly in areas like ammunition, air and missile defense, and platform replacement. Meanwhile, the EDF, with an allocation of €1.1 billion, focuses on funding R&D projects.

The initiatives follow the adoption of the first [European Defense Industrial Strategy](#) (EDIS) and the proposal for a European Defense Industry Programme (EDIP). These measures underscore a concerted effort to strengthen the European defense technological and industrial base and ensure promptness in responding to evolving security challenges. The funding priorities are aligned with the capability needs identified by Member States within the Common Security and Defense Policy ([CSDP](#)) framework, aiming to foster innovation, interoperability, and the cross-border participation of SMEs.

Meanwhile, Pentagon said it will provide approximately [\\$300 million in weapons](#) to Ukraine following a discovery of cost savings in its contracts, despite facing a significant deficit of around \$10 billion in replenishing the weapons drawn from its stocks to assist Ukraine. This aid package, the first announced since December, arrives at a critical moment as Ukraine faces [a dire shortage of munitions](#), with efforts to secure additional funding for weapons procurement stalled in Congress.

While the aid provides a much-needed improvement to Ukraine's military efforts, it is not an efficient solution, and the Pentagon emphasizes the necessity of passing the stalled supplemental spending bill, which includes approximately [\\$60 billion in military aid](#) for Ukraine. The aid announcement coincides with Polish President Andrzej Duda's and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk's [visit](#) on 12 March to Washington, urging the U.S. to address the funding impasse. However, efforts to pass the [aid package](#) face hurdles in Congress, with Republican opposition hindering progress. The Pentagon's reliance on cost savings to provide additional weapons underscores the challenges posed by inflationary pressures and the higher costs of replacing outdated systems. The aid, primarily drawn from army stockpiles, highlights the strain on U.S. resources and the need for sustained support to bolster Ukraine's defence capabilities amidst escalating conflict.

7. Russian position on the matter

Russian President Vladimir Putin issued a stark warning to the West, emphasizing the gravity of the situation. He warned that a direct confrontation between Russia and the U.S.-led NATO alliance could escalate into World War Three. Despite this warning, Putin stressed that such a scenario was [not desired by anyone](#). The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has plunged Moscow's relations with the West into their most profound crisis since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

Putin, who has frequently highlighted the dangers of nuclear conflict, reiterated that he had never considered employing nuclear weapons in Ukraine. However, he acknowledged the presence of [NATO military personnel in Ukraine](#), noting instances where English and French were spoken on the battlefield. With a post on Telegram,

Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin responded to Macron's statement, saying, "[Before making such statements, Macron would do well to remember how it ended for Napoleon and his soldiers, more than 600,000 of whom were left lying in the damp earth](#)".

Moreover, in response to French President Emmanuel Macron's remarks regarding the potential deployment of ground troops in Ukraine, Putin cryptically remarked [that "everything is possible in the modern world"](#), suggesting that while the French President does not intend to eliminate the possibility of disposing troops in Ukraine, the Russian President does not rule out the use of nuclear power. He cautioned that any escalation would bring the world perilously close to a full-scale global conflict, a prospect few would welcome.

In the days before the Russian elections, Putin addressed Ukraine's increased attacks on Russian border regions, indicating that Russia might establish a buffer zone from Ukrainian territory to [safeguard its borders](#) if the assaults persisted. He refrained from providing specific details but suggested that such an area might be necessary to prevent foreign-made armaments from reaching Russian soil.

Putin expressed his desire for peace talks in Ukraine –of course, at his terms –, urging Macron and France to contribute to finding another resolution to the conflict rather than exacerbating it further. Moreover, he condemned Western criticism of the Russian election, particularly from the United States, dismissing it as [hypocritical](#) and questioning the democratic legitimacy of U.S. elections.

8. Conclusions and Strategic Foresight

Macron's bold stance on considering all options, including Western troop deployment to Ukraine, demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the crisis's severity. By emphasizing the existential threat posed by Russian aggression and the need for unwavering support for Ukraine, Macron aims to rally European unity and resolve against external threats. However, this standpoint has sparked controversy, with divisions within NATO and skepticism from some European allies complicating efforts to present a united front. While countries like Lithuania express openness to discussions on troop deployment, others, like Germany, choose diplomatic and economic measures over military intervention. This divergence highlights the challenges of *consensus-building* within the alliance and the need for careful diplomacy to bridge differing perspectives. There's a real and strong fear of military escalation. However, especially following the clarifications exhibited by the Elysian President on national TV, it is not believed that this mere statement can significantly change relations between the allies or create more consternation than a simple political statement can do.

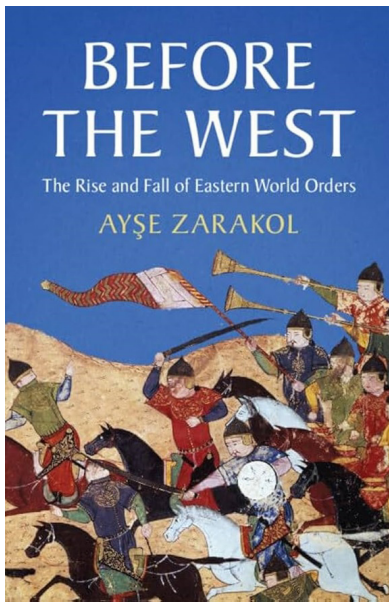
For its part, [Kyiv believes](#) that if such a decision is ever made, Western partners are unlikely to be involved in frontline fighting, but rather may be engaged in non-boots-on-the-ground tasks.

A possible presence of NATO ground troops could take many forms to assist Ukrainians, from [medical assistance to technical support](#). As Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Antonio Tajani](#) pointed out, "*We are not at war with Russia. We are defending Ukraine, which is something completely different*". Macron's message was meant to simply refer to the fact that Europe must be ready to support Ukraine in the long run and it is necessary to remain open to examining ways to deepen this support. Meanwhile, Putin's warnings are a stark reminder of the risks inherent in escalating tensions between Russia and the West. Despite calls for peace talks, Russia's actions, including the attack to Avdiivka, suggest a readiness to assert Russian interests forcefully, further heightening tensions.

In conclusion, officially, both the French and German governments have stated that as of today, no European troops are to be stationed in Ukraine. In this regard, if any German, or French, or other EU country's military personnel were to be located in Ukraine in the future, it would be solely for technical-logistical support roles, and far away from the front line –precisely to avoid the risk of escalation in the event of the death of some European soldier. This very argument is supported by the conversations between German soldiers, which were [intercepted](#) by Russian intelligence services. In any case, it remains very unlikely that Germany and France would expose themselves to such a risk for two main reasons. First, it is incredibly risky from a diplomatic point of view because it moves the possibility of dialogue even further away. Second, it is not essential. In fact, it is believed that the two countries in question will continue to call Ukrainian soldiers back to EU territory to proceed with training and technical preparation, without the need to place their own military personnel on Ukrainian territory.

Book Review: Before the West: The Rise and Fall of Eastern World Orders

by Ji-han Lim *



In *Before the West*, Ayşe Zarakol challenges the very architecture of historical imagination in international relations. Where most accounts trace the genealogy of modern global order through the Westphalian moment, the Enlightenment, or European imperialism, Zarakol instead rewinds the clock to the thirteenth century and centers a radically different story: one in which Eastern polities—not Europe—spearheaded expansive and enduring international orders. Her book is a tour de force in historical reorientation, offering not only a corrective to Eurocentric narratives but a new vocabulary for understanding sovereignty, legitimacy, and international order itself.

Zarakol's core argument is simple but profound: modern IR has been constrained by a backward-reading of history that treats the rise of the West as both inevitable and exceptional. This retrospective teleology distorts the premodern global order and sidelines the sophisticated world-making practices of non-Western polities. *Before the West* excavates this alternative lineage through a sweeping examination of Chinggisid, Timurid, Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal orders—each of which, she argues, aspired not only to regional dominance but to universal sovereignty. These were not passive or isolated systems, but international orders that shaped Eurasian politics for centuries.

Methodologically, Zarakol blends grand historical synthesis with deep conceptual analysis. Drawing from primary sources, comparative political theory, and a wide range of secondary literature, she reconstructs the rise, reproduction, and eventual decline of what she terms

“Eastern world orders.” The Chinggisid order, anchored in the Mongol Empire and its successor khanates, serves as the foundation. It was not merely a geopolitical formation, but an epistemic model of rule—transregional, non-confessional, and remarkably stable. Successor empires across Eurasia internalized and adapted these templates in ways that structured diplomacy, legitimacy claims, and patterns of succession long before the West imposed its own order through gunboats and treaties.

Zarakol is not the first scholar to question Eurocentrism in IR, but her intervention is distinct in three ways. First, she refuses to frame Eastern contributions as subordinate or instrumental to Western success—no “East as enabler of the West” argument here. Second, she avoids the pitfall of romanticizing non-Western empires. The book does not mask the violence, hierarchy, and exclusion inherent in Eastern world orders. Rather, Zarakol seeks to understand them on their own terms. Third, and most significantly, she treats these premodern orders as genuinely international—not merely regional systems of rule. In doing so, she reclaims the term “world order” from its post-1945 connotations and restores its precolonial complexity.

Before the West offers a crucial reframing of strategic continuity. Instead of viewing non-Western actors as reactive or peripheral, Zarakol places them at the center of system-shaping dynamics. The notion that sovereignty can be conceptualized and operationalized outside of the Westphalian frame has implications not only for historical understanding but for contemporary geopolitical analysis. In a moment when China, India, Türkiye, and Russia increasingly invoke civilizational narratives and premodern legitimacy, Zarakol's work provides the intellectual scaffolding to make sense of these claims without defaulting to Orientalist tropes.

Zarakol's work also destabilizes developmentalist assumptions. Her analysis implicitly critiques teleological models that view economic and political modernization as processes led and defined by the West. By foregrounding long-standing Eurasian governance structures and sovereignty models, she invites a more pluralistic reading of political evolution—one where institutions, norms, and hierarchies circulated globally well before capitalism's rise or European hegemony.

One of the book's most compelling features is its theoretical ambition. Zarakol redefines foundational IR concepts: sovereignty is decoupled from territorial fixity; legitimacy is shown to derive from divine mandate, lineage, and universalist aspiration rather than popular consent; order is achieved not through balance-of-power logic but through nested hierarchies of kinship and cosmological alignment. These redefinitions do not merely provincialize Europe—they globalize the very grammar of international relations.

Still, the book does not aim to replace one civilizational frame with another. Zarakol is careful not to trade Euro-

* Researcher at Beyond the Horizon ISSG

centrism for Asiacentrism. She acknowledges the complexity and heterogeneity within Eastern polities, and is reflexive about the limits of her own geographical and temporal scope. Her project is ultimately diagnostic: she seeks to recover lost alternatives in global order-making so that IR can escape the gravitational pull of a singular, Western origin story.

Some readers may find the book's scope dizzying. Spanning five centuries and dozens of polities, it necessarily abstracts at times. Others might wish for more engagement with African, Southeast Asian, or Indigenous world orders—regions Zarakol brackets explicitly due to the book's thematic constraints. But these are not so much flaws as invitations for further research. In providing an expansive canvas and a clear methodological precedent, *Before the West* lays the groundwork for a more polycentric historiography of IR.

In sum, Ayşe Zarakol has written a field-defining book. *Before the West* is not only a major contribution to historical IR but also a challenge to the discipline's conceptual foundations. For anyone interested in the global pasts that could have been—and the plural futures that might still be—it is essential reading.

 @Beyond the Horizon

 @BehorizonOrg

 @BehorizonOrg

