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NATO's Strategic Interest in Africa - a Possible Multi-Criteria Analysis

Strategický zájem NATO v Africe – možná vícekriteriální analýza

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Abstract: The paper demonstrates that the Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) is one very useful analytical tool and method to help Allied political decision makers and military strategists to rethink the Alliance's new role and mission in Africa, as the Southern neighbour of NATO and the EU having great possibilities to influence, either positively or negatively, the European and Euro-Atlantic security. Thus, the paper's scope is to use MCA in order to highlight the importance of Africa for NATO's Geopolitics and what Member States should undertake in order to join the competitive North African and Sahel region's arms and presence race against the increased Russian and Chinese economic and military interests.

Abstrakt: Příspěvek představuje multikriteriální analýzu (MCA) jako jeden z velmi užitečných analytických nástrojů a metod, jež pomáhají spojeneckým politickým činitelům a vojenským stratégům přehodnotit novou roli a poslání Aliance v Africe jako jižním sousedovi NATO a EU, který má velké možnosti pozitivně či negativně ovlivnit evropskou a euroatlantickou bezpečnost. Cílem příspěvku je tedy pomocí MCA zdůraznit význam Afriky pro geopolitiku NATO a to, co by měly členské státy podniknout, aby se zapojily do konkurenčního závodu ve zbrojení a přítomnosti v severoafričském a sahelském regionu proti rostoucím ruským a čínským ekonomickým a vojenským zájmům.

Key words: North Africa; Sahel region; Multi-Criteria Analysis; NATO Strategic Interest; Geopolitics.

Klíčová slova: Severní Afrika; oblast Sahelu; vícekriteriální analýza; strategický zájem NATO; geopolitika.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing importance of Africa started to be considered and monitored by NATO political and military experts in the last decade because of three reasons. The first one is represented by the increased political and economic interest, followed by a raised military presence in the area of regional powers, like China, Russia and Iran, materialised through numerous indirect and direct activities to influence and/or control some African dictators and corrupted political elites. This increased interest and presence started with the discovery of huge gas and oil reserves in some African states, easy to access, which exacerbated the race for resources in the area. Including African countries, like Libya, Nigeria, Sudan, Angola, Algeria, Egypt, Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic (CAR), Equatorial Guinea, Tunisia, Cote-d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Congo-Kinshasa, Mauritania, Morocco, South Africa, Ghana, Benin, and Ethiopia, into the international list of the biggest petroleum and natural gas reservoirs from the world just exacerbated the regional fight for illegal resource trafficking, together with gaining control of continental diamonds, copper and nickel mines, and enlarged the corruption and dictatorship in those countries with huge resources.

The second reason is represented by the increased presence of some international terrorist organisations in Africa and their intense extremist activities undertaken in North Africa and the Sahel region. Despite the appearance and spread of the coronavirus pandemic in Africa, Al-Qaida and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have found real "safe havens" in the respective regions, where they could use local corrupted politicians and population in support for financial and human recruiting as well as joining local paramilitary forces, militias and criminal organisations to control other illegal activities, like arms, drugs and human trafficking or taxing tourists, and illicit businesses of fishing, rare animals trade or deforestation.

Lastly and not of a lesser importance, there is the reason of the climate change that is taking place all around the world, with devastating effects everywhere. In Africa, the effects of global warming are most deeply felt on food insecurity, poverty and population relocation. The climate change is also taking shape by changing the type of rainfall, rising temperatures and occurring extreme events. Over the past years, these effects have exacerbated the socio-economic situation and the health crisis brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic across the African continent. There is strong evidence about the desertification in the Horn of Africa and the island of Madagascar, as a result of continuous warming, an increase in the water level of the surrounding oceans, due to the melting of the world's glaciers, but also the melting of its own mountain glaciers, as well as the emergence of extreme weather events, such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions on the island of La Palma.

For a long period of time, Africa was considered an area with less geostrategic importance because of the global powers' competition for Eurasia, the two Americas and Oceania. It had little strategic resources, particularly difficult conditions in desert areas and tropical forests, as well as a strong insecure style of life of its inhabitants. Even so, for a long period of time, NATO let some of its European Allies to take care of the security situation in Africa and fulfil their national interests in the region. Former colonialist

powers, like France, Italy or Germany, continued to be interested in what happened with the European Southern neighbour, interfering directly to control and monitor the security situation in different areas of the continent.

The appearance of the Chinese and Russians on the African market has exacerbated the competition, which only few Allies have been involved in so far, turning it into a real race for economic control of the region, even reaching proxy crises and overwhelming the national capacity of those NATO Member States to compete. The only global superpower, the United States, does not seem to attach much importance to the African continent, having several strategic interests in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Latin and South America. This is why, nowadays, Africa has started to gain more geostrategic importance.

As a result, this paper aims to analyse what the main strategic interest of NATO towards Africa should be, using the Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) method. At the end, we wish to demonstrate, using a scientific approach, if NATO might reconsider its Geopolitics for the region and what NATO decision-makers could undertake to join the competitive African economic and militarisation race in order to contain its military part.

1 METHODOLOGY

The presented paper has two objectives: to identify those reasons which makes Africa an evolving actor in the proximity of NATO Area of Responsibility and to provide to the Alliance's political-military decision makers some demonstrated thoughts for developing a robust strategy for Africa with some further ways for implementing it.

In terms of research methods, the first part presents a multi-criteria analytical tool that might be used by political and military analysts to standardise the main elements of a Geopolitical evaluation/assessment of international/regional security and defence organisations' strategic interests, as well as their member states' ones, regarding some specific world regions, like Africa. This is followed by a descriptive research using content analysis and empirical observation to present the evolving importance of Africa and the fierce international race to control and influence its future. In the later part, a demonstration was conducted, using the MCA method, to present some existing solution to increase NATO's ambition and strategic interest regarding Africa, as well as its possible future involvement in the South. Therefore, using an existing analytical tool and the available data and information regarding the current security situation in Africa, it was possible to elaborate an optimal solution, amongst other potential ones, to be taken into consideration by NATO's decision makers to develop its further strategic interest and implication in that region.

The limitations of the paper are mainly related to scientific resources in terms of the rapid changes of the security environment in Africa, determining the bibliographical sources to be mostly mass-media open sources, as the specialty literature is slowly upgraded in time, but also in terms of the language gap provided that parts of texts already translated by other authors from Arabic, Russian or Chinese are used for the content analysis. Another limitation is related to research itself as the paper is not meant to

present all dimensions of the described African security situation (i.e., each area's evolution in the near future, or each main actor's implication for different parts of Africa), but just to show that there is a trend of regional powers' strong implication in the region, where NATO should reconsider its strategic interest and desire to act in order to better protect its southern flank in the future.

2 THE USE OF THE MULTI-CRITERIA ANALYSIS TOOL

The Multi-Criteria Analysis (MCA) is usually performed through a structured approach, based on the objectives specified by a group of analysts and experts who pursue such an activity. The analysis continues with the identification of attributes or indicators corresponding to each objective and ends with determining general preferences between several alternative options. The analysis also includes a procedural approach that establishes the logical steps to be followed, in order to reach an expected final result, through scientific methods. The staging of the Multi-Criteria analytical process pays attention to a number of steps to follow, such as: establishing the context/issue, identifying options, defining criteria and establishing the optimal version by prioritising/weighting the criteria. In the methods used in this article, the calculations and the achievement of a final result are not considered.

MCA has been and is more often used in the Project Management, especially in domains such as economic, financial and civil infrastructure. In the military domain, MCA has been introduced, starting with 2010, in the training manuals of the American Corps of Engineers, as the "Multi-Criteria Decision-Making Analysis (MCDA)". Thus, in the defence, MCD was used to manage the main resources within the military installations, to choose/select the necessary military equipment to fulfil the mission, to technologically support the distribution process of graduation posts for military education institutions, to take some special measures in contaminated areas and, more recently, in the development of the "Multi-Criteria Information Analysis (MCIA)" methodology.¹ Being considered the most adequate and modern type of MCA, we will make use of the latest approach to Multi-Criteria Analysis, in the field of military intelligence, in order to standardise the main elements of a Geopolitical analysis for determining the possible NATO's Strategic Interests in Africa.

The standardised process of Multi-Criteria Geopolitical Analysis includes five distinct stages, in which the analytical elements taken into account are established, the method

¹ The Multi-Criteria Information Analysis (MCIA) is a methodology developed in 2017, which adapts the Multi-Criteria Decision-Making Analysis (MCDA) to the context of Information Analysis, adding methods and techniques provided by the Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the theory of unorthodox methods of Decisional Analysis ("Fuzzy Sets Theory") of the Dutch professor Hans-Jürgen Zimmerman. See: FRINI, Anissa. A Multi-Criteria Intelligence Aid Methodology Using MCDA, Artificial Intelligence, and Fuzzy Sets Theory, *Hindawi*, 15 May 2017. <http://downloads.hindawi.com/journals/mpe/2017/9281321.pdf>, [26.02.2022].

of calculating the criteria and their weighting are specified and the Performance Matrix is filled up, as follows:

- **Step 1. Determining the Geopolitical issue**, which must answer the question “Is NATO interested in one of the most sensitive regions of the globe? If so, what would be the main Geostrategic and Geo-economics elements of its interest and to what level/degree compared to other national/organisational interests?” To answer this question, the analysts, together with several of the personnel involved, must clearly understand the source of the main problem, as well as the influences it might encounter at the Geopolitical level, internally, but also from the outside factors/actors - it is not advisable to consider and analyse other secondary Geopolitical issues, which would be a waste of time and lead one away from the process.
- **Step 2. Defining the objectives associated with the successful solution to the problem**, as well as the criteria (C) that can be used to evaluate the success or failure of their achievements. These objectives must be well defined and linked to the main Geopolitical issue, and the criteria set will have correct and up-to-date indicators that can measure the degree of efficiency in achieving these objectives. Surely, the first objective would be of political nature and could represent the need to take over/maintain influence in the respective region. This goal would indeed be of Geopolitical interest that would lead to the involvement of the Alliance in the policy of that region. The second objective would be of economic nature and could be the realisation of a number of economic projects in the region of interest, which would increase the physical presence of regional organisations and Member States in the respective regions, but would also exacerbate unfair competition with other actors. The final objective could be to strengthen the common/national security by reducing the risks and threats that come from those regions, such as terrorism, illegal migration or illicit trafficking of drugs, people and weapons. As criteria for quantitative and qualitative measurement of these objectives, we can list:
 - protect the safety of its own citizens in the region;
 - reduce local corruption;
 - reduce/prevent local crises and conflicts;
 - improve the safety of interregional transport;
 - increase jobs in the region;
 - reduce illegal migration to the area of responsibility of regional organizations;
 - reduce terrorist acts and link extremist groups with local organized crime groups;
 - contribute to efficient local economy;
 - support the growth of the sustainable economy at the national/Member State level;
 - facilitate accessibility to technological developments at the economic level by the states in the region;
 - promote the access of the states in the region to the usual facilities and services that can be provided by regional organizations and the great powers;
 - attract the support of the local population to the political/economic/security actions undertaken in the region;
 - monitor the impact on the local population.

$$C = \{C_1, C_2..., C_n\}$$

- **Step 3. Establish and describe the options/alternatives (A)** that could be followed to achieve the objectives associated with successfully solving the problem. If competitive targets have been set, then some options/alternatives will have a margin of effectiveness within these objectives. Thus, we can set the following options:
 - economic and financial support;
 - economic efficiency;
 - economic growth;
 - enhanced security;
 - security through cooperation;
 - safety of citizens and critical infrastructure;
 - resilience;
 - political-diplomatic involvement;
 - protection of transport routes;
 - control for influence.

$$A = \{A_1, A_2..., A_m\}$$

Each regional organisation with great analysed power will have 1-2 objectives associated with solving the Geopolitical problem, with 2-3 evaluation criteria (C) and 3-4 options (A) to follow.

- **Step 4. Collection of data and information** necessary to establish and measure indicators (R) of success or failure of the criteria and achievement of objectives. The indicators represent “quantitative (numerical) measures of the contribution of a certain alternative to the satisfaction of a certain decision criterion.”² Thus, it will be necessary to be able to measure the criteria referred to in step 3, by establishing the following indicators, such as:
 - without impact (p1) = 0-10%;
 - with minimal impact, which can be positive (p2 +) = 10-20% or (p2-) negative = -10-0%;
 - with limited impact (p3) = 20-30%;
 - with moderate impact (p4) = 30-50%;
 - with significant impact (p5) = over 50%.

² Babeş-Bolyai University. Cursul de Teorie a Deciziilor C5/29.10.2019. UBB Cluj-Napoca, p. 11. http://www.cs.ubbcluj.ro/~per/Dss/Dss_5.pdf, [12.12.2021].

$$R = \{r_{ij}, 1 \leq i \leq m; 1 \leq j \leq n\}$$

where “the r_{ij} element represents the consequence for the criterion C_j resulting from the choice of the alternative A_i (r_{ij} can be numbers, but they can also be expressed by binary values (yes/no) or through qualitative terms (color, taste, etc.)”

Obtaining appropriate weights (P) for the established criteria is thus based on their relative importance in meeting the objectives. The weights of the indicators are “associated with the criteria and establish their importance.”³ This step explains the likelihood that different criteria will affect the success or failure of a different decision or, in other words, will have more or less influence over the goal (S). The exact way of calculating the percentages for each criterion will be established by experts and other participants in the analytical process, based on their experience and the national and international context of that period.

$$P = \{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n\}$$

where “each criterion C_j ($1 \leq j \leq n$) is associated with the weight p_j (established by the decision maker in a subjective manner or by a special technique)”

- **Step 5. Achieving the Performance Matrix** of solving the Geopolitical problem, in which each data entered will correspond to the performance provided for an option in front of the criteria established for an objective. It is expected that, at this stage, the measurement method will be established to quantify or qualify options in order to achieve the set objectives (see the table below). For the standardised process of Multi-Criteria Geopolitical Analysis proposed, we will use the method of “direct analysis of the performance of options,” in which only a limited amount of information on the relative qualities of options can be obtained by directly examining the performance of alternatives. The dominant position of certain criteria over others is also verified, when the performance of one option is at least as good as that of another for all criteria and is strictly better than that of another for at least one criterion.⁴

³ Ibidem, p.13.

⁴ Romanian Government. Manualul de analiză multi-criterială Contract no 46/08.12.2010 - Dezvoltarea capacității pentru analiza cost-beneficiu. Co-financed project from the European Regional Development Fund through the Technical Assistance Operational Programme 2007-2013, January 2012, Bucharest, p. 7.

Table 1: The Performance Matrix Model

<i>The Performance Matrix</i>				
<i>Decisional Alternatives (Options)</i>	<i>Decision Criteria</i>			
	<i>p1</i>	<i>p2</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>pn</i>
	<i>C1</i>	<i>C2</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>Cn</i>
<i>A1</i>	<i>r11</i>	<i>r12</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>r1n</i>
<i>A2</i>	<i>r21</i>	<i>r22</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>r2n</i>
<i>...</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>...</i>
<i>Am</i>	<i>rm1</i>	<i>rm2</i>	<i>...</i>	<i>rmn</i>

The proposed standardised methodology for the MCA of the Geopolitical problem will end here, even if the Multi-Criteria Decision-Making Process has a few more steps to follow. But the purpose of the article is to use MCA to assess how NATO could materialise its interests in sensitive regions worldwide, and not to analyse decisions made at the political level. In order to do this type of multi-criteria analysis, NATO decision-makers and military leaders should identify what is the real Geopolitical issue when dealing with Africa and then establish a group of experts and specialised planners to evaluate the region, define the objectives at the Strategic level, as well as the possible options to achieve them. The final attribute of this group is to collect all necessary data and information in order to fill up the Performance Matrix, using the method of “Direct analysis of options’ performances”, in which only a limited quantity of information on relative qualities of options can be obtain by directly examining their performance.

3 EVALUATION OF THE AFRICAN REGION AND NATO'S STRATEGIC INTEREST

3.1 Africa - geoclimate characteristics and economical importance

Africa is a poor continent, well-known for its lack of water and strategic resources, as well as an improper climate for work and productivity.

It was condemned to poverty as a result of the plunder in the era of colonialism and the continued foreign exploitation of its natural resources, even long after decolonisation. Despite all the benefits of colonialism, through missionaries and technology, more than half a century after independence, most African states face major obstacles to progress and poverty becomes even more extreme. The causes of this destabilising situation are multiple, both internal and external. Most are of internal origin, representing crisis and conflicts difficult to manage and resolve, still maintaining the organisation on ethnic, tribal or religious aspects, the existence of political guerrillas, corruption and, more recently, the scourge of terrorism. The causes of external origin are characterised by the lack of regional solidarity, imperfection of collaborative tools and mechanisms, realisation of unbalanced trade exchanges, impossibility of taking control of the raw materials and existence of illegal trade.⁵

Thus, Libya, the African country with the largest oil reserves, encountered a civil war that seems unsolvable because of proliferation through proxy states. African states with significant natural resources, such as the Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, or Mali are unable to use them for their own economic development because of internal turmoil and military coups. Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer, fails to reap the benefits of this wealth, in a chronic crisis, not only economic, but also social.

American political scientist Michael L. Ross, professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), studying how to exploit and manage resources in underdeveloped states, has said that there are at least three adverse consequences for the economic situation of these countries: the emergence of rent, as means of maintaining totalitarian regimes; wealth favouring corruption and clientelism; in the end, they become a factor in military coups and civil wars.⁶ Other experts on the African economy argue that if underdeveloped countries pursue a policy of economic growth, wealth rents increase their vulnerability through the game of prices. This is also financially true where, if measures were taken to assess national currencies, the effect would have a negative effect on exports, encourage imports and prevent the diversification of the economy into agriculture and industry. The income from Africa's natural resources (oil, diamonds, copper, nickel, etc.) maintains the model of the "neo-patrimonial" African post-colonial state and favours the appetite of ruling classes to confuse national wealth with their particular interests. This facilitates the transformation of power into a source of unequal accumulation of unequally divided wealth between privileged political or tribal clans, and poverty, migration, terrorism. This is where African crisis and conflicts have their economic roots.

Nick Dearden, the director of the British Global Justice Now, says that "Africa is rich, but its riches are being stolen."⁷ To illustrate this point, he cites the findings of a report by several regional economic organisations interested in Africa, which presents both the

⁵ APOSTOIU, George. În Africa bogățiile nu sunt o binecuvântare. In *Ziarul Cultura*, 13 April 2015. <https://revistacultura.ro/nou/2015/04/in-africa-bogatiile-nu-sunt-o-binecuvantare/>, [13.02.2022].

⁶ SPRÎNCEANĂ, Vitalie. Africa nu este săracă...doar că bogățiile îi sunt furate. In *Platforma Z*, 5 June 2017. <http://www.platzforma.md/arhive/36618>, [03.02.2022].

⁷ Ibidem.

situation of foreign investment in Africa (about \$ 162 billion each year in the form of loans, remittances from those who work outside Africa and send money home, and aid), as well as huge sums that leave the continent every year (about \$ 203 billion, from which \$ 68 billion come directly through tax evasion, \$ 30 billion is “repatriated” by multinational corporations as profits from the area. \$ 29 million is annually stolen as a result of illegal deforestation, fishing and illicit trade in wildlife, and \$ 36 billion represents the additional cost paid by Africa for the climate change's damages caused to its societies and economies). The resulting difference of about \$ 41 billion is the net credit that Africa owes to the rest of the world.⁸

If the above mentioned data shows that the so-called “illegal financial flows” amount to about 6.1% of Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - three times more than the international community aid sent to Africa -, there is another negative aspect of the financial situation on the continent. This negative aspect is represented by the possibility to transform more than \$ 50 billion external loans to governments and private sector (often taken by speculation and as a result of strategic interests), into huge debts, difficult to pay.⁹ As for corruption, the same report states that there are now about 165,000 Africans with a combined wealth of \$ 860 billion, and of that huge amount, over \$ 500 billion is hidden in safe havens. Thus, Africa's corrupt economic system allows a small minority of Africans to become rich, while the wealth of the peoples of the region is effectively stolen and leaves the continent.

The existence of some natural resources, so generous, does not yet provide a real basis for the development of African states, but has become, rather, a curse. As the English economist Richard Anty stated in 1993, the abundance of natural resources, instead of providing profit to a country, slows down its economic growth and development.¹⁰ This thesis has an explanation related to political springs, rather than economic mechanisms, and is the drama of states that do not have the capacity to manage their wealth in the national interest.

Consequently, the drama of the inconsistent policy of African states is exploited by the geopolitics for control and influence of regional powers, such as China or some European states that still had colonial interests on the African continent. At the same time, regional organisations (such as NATO and the EU) try to protect European security at the exposed borders of their areas of responsibility and to support African security organisations to deal with disastrous crises and humanitarian situations in the various African areas of conflict.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ APOSTOIU, George, *Art. Cit.*

3.2 Security threats and challenges in Africa

Both the Coronavirus pandemic and global warming have affected not only the economic and social situation of African countries, but influenced actions of parties involved in various military conflicts or African terrorist acts, as well as some activities and presence of the international community in the region. The two factors have made it even more difficult to control the situation in the area.

The last few years characterized North Africa and the Sahel region with the emergence of new virulent conflicts and the continuation of the existing ones, some with the tendency to diminish the actions of the belligerents and increase the involvement of the international community, but most with the tendency to amplify the expected magnitude and disasters. Over time, these phenomena have been amplified by the effects of the continuing Coronavirus pandemic and global warming, increasing the disastrous humanitarian situation in the area and even leading to famine, a particularly dangerous phenomenon for the human race.

Thus, in the context of the continued spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in Africa, the military actions of the parties involved in the Libyan Civil War, as well as those of the supporting regional powers, have substantially diminished the effectiveness of security organisations measures in achieving partial stabilisation of the situation in the region. However, the unrest among neighbouring African and European countries has not diminished.

The situation in the area has been exacerbated by the continuation of violent actions in the Tigray region and the establishment of a state of emergency throughout Ethiopia, in the wake of the escalating conflict in the region, which has been going on for a year. The involvement of neighbouring Eritrea in the conflict has not calmed the situation, rather, it has amplified the actions of the Tigray ethnic group not only against regular forces but also against other neighbouring tribes.

After the end of 2020 began with the beneficial effect of the spread of Coronavirus in North Africa and the Sahel region, by signing a peace agreement between the Sudanese authorities and the rebel alliance in early October in Juba, a year later (late October 2021), Sudan woke up with a coup in the capital Khartoum, where General Abdel-Fattah Burhan dissolved the government led by Abdalla Hamdok and imposed a state of emergency. Thus, instead of ending a long period of civil war and leaving open the gates of a future economic recovery of the country, the military coup stopped any attempt to democratize the country and endangered the financial situation and security of the Persian Gulf states.

The conflict situation in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) continues to worsen, despite efforts by the international community, especially the UN and the African Union, to ease it and bring the two countries back to normalcy. But in Mali, Colonel Asimi Goita, who led the August 2020 coup, is in no hurry to restore the country's civilian, democratic leadership, and in the CAR, the government forces do not want to give up the services of the Russian Wagner Group and they even indulged in atrocities against the peacekeeping forces. The same phenomenon seems to be happening in Western Sahara,

where the peace agreement reached in 1991 between the Moroccan authorities and the Polisario Front risks breaking.

Coups have also taken place in Guinea and Chad, where ad hoc military juntas have arrested the corrupt President of Guinea, Alpha Conde (September 5, 2021), and killed Chadian President Idriss Déby Itno (April 19, 2021), respectively. These violent undemocratic military acts, amplified by the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, have disastrous repercussions on the socio-economic situation in the two countries, but also in the entire region and have already raised concerns of major economic powers in the area. USA, Russia and France.

The existence of divergent interests of regional powers and neighbouring states in maintaining the tense situation in some African countries made it impossible to resolve the respective crises and conflicts through negotiations or peacefully, especially in terms of return to democracy. This can be seen in the implementation of the ceasefire agreement in Libya, where Turkey wanted to maintain its deployed military forces, in Sudan, where the generals are supported by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, or in Ethiopia, where Eritrea, Sudan and Somalia's intervention have deepened the humanitarian crisis in the area. Neither did France's politico-military involvement in its former colonies Mali and Chad lead to the resolution of these conflicts, on the contrary, they allowed the French-trained and equipped local military to take power by force. The same occurred in the CAR, where Russia's support through the Wagner Paramilitary Group worsened tensions with the MINUSCA peacekeepers. In turn, the United States was involved in the conquest and possession of the Western Sahara region by Morocco, in exchange for the recognition of the state of Israel.

Moreover, the continued activities of extremist groups Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and Boko Haram in Africa, as well as the emergence of local terrorist groups affiliated with them, funded by international actors, represent a serious socio-economic challenge for African states in the area. This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the recent rise in coups and pandemics that have had adverse economic effects, bringing large numbers of Africans back to the poverty they have escaped after the last two decades of economic growth. Moreover, the effects of climate change have also led to increasing social and economic fragility and escalating resource conflicts.

Despite the negative trend of increasing the number of coups that have overthrown democracies in several African states, we can say that there are some positive aspects that give hope to the normal socio-political development in the region. Thus, free and incident-free local elections were held in Burkina Faso in May 2021, and in countries such as Niger and Zambia, the transfer of power from the military to civilians took place peacefully, following the presidential elections - February 2021 in Niger and August 2021 in Zambia.

As a result, the continuing effects of the Coronavirus pandemic in Africa and the accelerated climate change in the region have influenced the development of African military conflicts during last years and worsened the economic and social situation of African countries. In turn, those negative aspects have a lot of implications in the regional stability, affecting the Euro Atlantic security, too.

3.3 NATO's strategic interest and possible future involvement in Africa

NATO had some unsuccessful experiences in or near Africa in the past. This was because of the lack of a well-defined common Strategic interest in the area and the competition of some Allies for different parts of Africa, acting independently and not within the Alliance.

Thus, in 2001, the North Atlantic Alliance launched one of its first Article 5 operations (Collective Defence) in the Mediterranean Sea, called Operation "Active Endeavour" (OAE), in response to the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11 of the same year. Originally established for the Eastern Mediterranean and control of entry points into the Red Sea, in 2003, the OAE mission was extended to the western part of the sea, including the Strait of Gibraltar, with the mission to monitor and control any ships suspected of involvement in terrorist acts.¹¹ The operation continued until 2016, when it was transformed into a non-Article 5 Crisis Response Operation (NA5CRO), called "Sea Guardian", still an active NATO-led operation of today.

At the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit, the Allies decided to support the international efforts to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden, launching Operation "Ocean Shield" (OOS) a year later, with the mission of deterring and preventing piracy attacks as well as protecting merchant ships to increase security in the region.¹² The operation was completed in 2016, considering that there was no longer a major danger off the coast of Somalia.

Then, in 2011, at the express request of France, the Alliance carried out Operation "Unified Protector" (OUP) in Libya, where it secured a no-fly zone over Libya, which allowed Franco-British forces, sent by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, to defeat the Libyan military resistance and overthrow dictator Muammar Gaddafi, with far-reaching consequences.¹³

Since then, NATO conducted only limited support actions for the African Union (AU) and on AU's request, only, even if the deteriorating security situation in North Africa and the Sahel region would have required a more active military intervention. But the political and legal constraints imposed by the Washington Treaty did not allow the Alliance to militarily interfere in the respective region, because it is out of the established SACEUR's Area of Responsibility. So, for the Allied political and military leaders the NATO's Geopolitical issue is the dilemma of a military intervention in Africa, especially in North Africa and the Sahel region, at the request of some Member States (former colonising powers, such as France and Italy) or even international/regional organisations (the UN, EU, or AU), outside its area of responsibility and current strategic concerns that is currently oriented towards Eastern Europe. In fact, this represents the beginning

¹¹ NATO HQ. Operation Active Endeavour (Archived), NATO, 27 October 2016. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_7932.htm, [15.02.2022].

¹² NATO HQ. Counter-piracy operations (Archived), NATO, 19 December 2016, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_48815.htm, [15.02.2022].

¹³ ALEXE, Dan. De ce nu poate interveni NATO în Africa, *Europa Liberă*, 21 January 2020, <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/de-ce-nu-poate-nato-intervenii-C3%AEn-africa/30389307.html>, [10.01.2022].

of the Multi-Criteria Analysis and fulfils the first step of the process - ***Determining the Geopolitical issue***. Nowadays, NATO's only involvement in the region is politico-military one (more political than military), being represented by the "Mediterranean Dialogue"¹⁴ (MD - launched in 1994) partnership programme activities and the support for the African Union¹⁵ (AU - started in 2005), which is based on the mission of ensuring security through cooperation.

The support provided by the Alliance to the AU and its MD partner states is based on the NATO's conceptual framework established for the Strategic Direction "South" and the Allied stability design efforts, with the following common objectives.¹⁶ These objectives are established at the strategic level and represent the continuation of MCA within the second step - *Defining the objectives associated with the successful solution to the problem*. These common objectives refer to:

- a) a) providing operational support in the areas of logistics and finance within the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), as well as in the planning of operations, by deploying experts (SME) to the AU Department of Peace Operations at its Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
- b) b) strengthening defence capabilities by providing opportunities for participation in education and training courses in Allied facilities and deploying NATO Mobile Education and Training Teams (METTs) to MD partner countries;
- c) c) providing assistance in the development and support of the African Stand-by Forces (ASF) - African long-term peacekeeping capabilities - through courses, assessment, expertise, scientific activities.

To fulfil those common goals, NATO opened, in 2015, an Allied Liaison Office at the AU Headquarters and in 2017 inaugurated a NATO Centre (Hub) for Strategic Direction "South" (NSD-S Hub) at the Allied Joint Force Command (JFC) in Naples, Italy, to address all current and evolving security issues in the Southern neighbourhood and strengthen relations with Southern partners. In 2019, the two regional organisations signed a new Cooperation Protocol to strengthen the partnership and a closer policy and practical

¹⁴ As per the site https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_60021.htm, the Mediterranean Dialogue includes seven non-member states in the Mediterranean area, incl. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. The partnership initiative was established on the basis of the political dialogue and practical cooperation of the seven non-member states with NATO and is coordinated by the Allied Committee on Policy and Partnership. The main instrument of cooperation is the Individual Cooperation and Partnership Programme (IPCP) established for each partner state.

¹⁵ As per the site https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/31829-doc-au_handbook_2020_english_web.pdf, the African Union (AU) was established in 2002 as a forerunner of the Organization of African Union (OAU - created in 1963 to assist African states in gaining independence and recovery after exiting colonialism and apartheid) and has 55 member states. The main objective of the AU is the development of African states and their integration into Africa, by: supporting their promotion in the global economy, discussing the many social, economic and political issues facing the African continent and promoting peace, security, stability, democracy, good governance and human rights.

¹⁶ NATO HQ. Cooperation with the African Union. NATO, 13 November 1919, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8191.htm, [15.01.2022].

approach to address common risks and challenges.¹⁷ The new agreement expanded the scope of NATO's support for the African Union, including counter-terrorism, countering improvised explosive devices, increasing role and protection of women in conflict, increasing integrity and supporting AU-led operations.

In order to continue the step 2 of the multi-criteria analysis method of solving NATO's Geopolitical issue of its military or non-military involvement in Africa, we propose to the NSD-S HUB to establish the following quantitative and qualitative criteria:

C.1 - the level of ensuring the Allied Strategic Air and Naval Transport for African troops in AU-led operations and missions - as an example, NATO already provided the air transport for the AU mission in Sudan in 2005, the air transport for the AMISON mission in 2007 and shipping for the AMISON mission in 2009;

C.2 - the level and percentage of participation of Allied experts in the planning process of African operations - number of SMEs in the AU Department of Peace Support Operations varies annually, depending on AU requests and priority areas (maritime, financial, monitoring, procurement, coordination air transport, communications, information technology, logistics, human resources, military human resources management, contingencies, strategic planning, movement and exercises) and is established for a period of 6 to 12 months;

C.3 - the number of African soldiers and civilians who have completed courses and other forms of education and training in different Allied facilities - 20 students / year at courses and, since 2015, 30 students x 3-4 METTs;

C.4 - the number of ASF training activities organised by some Allies - certification and evaluation, training programmes for staff, assistance in establishing procedures for lessons learned, development of concepts, establishment of the ASF Continental Logistics Base in Douala, Cameroon, conducting the "Amani Africa II" exercise with field troops to operationalise the FSA (October-November 2015);

C.5 - the number of Allied Command and Control (C2) elements involved - JFC Naples, NATO Centre (Hub) for the Strategic Direction "South", Allied Liaison Office at the AU Headquarters;

C.6 - the degree of mitigation / prevention of local crises and conflicts - Libya, Mali, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea;

C.7 - the level of attracting local population support to the political actions and practical cooperation undertaken in the region;

C.8 - the level of achieving consensus in between the Allies.

Each criterion is calculated by adequate weighting (p) of indicators for the criteria's success or failure and the level of meeting the objectives, using an enough level of data and information for each and stipulated in the Performance Matrix table.

The analysis should continue with the third step - *Establish and describe the options/alternatives* in order to answer to the question "What options does NATO have for its direct military or politico-military involvement in Africa?" To do so and provide NSD-S HUB with some realistic alternatives, a group of researchers from the Centre for Defence and

¹⁷ NATO HQ. NATO-African Union plan closer collaboration, NATO, 5 November 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_170512.htm?selectedLocale=en, [20.01.2022].

Security Strategic Studies (CDSSS) from the “Carol I” National Defence University from Bucharest conducted an analysis of the Allied policy in this region, the actions taken so far, the interests of the Member States, and domestic and international legislative criteria and came to a conclusion that the Alliance would have the following possible options:

A.1 - to continue the current political and practical cooperation, as has been the case so far;

A.2 - to reinforce NATO - AU relations, by operationalising the measures established in 2019 and increase practical cooperation in areas of mutual interest;

A.3 - to plan and conduct direct military involvement, at the request of the UN, the AU or the EU.

The fourth step - *Collection of data and information* is represented by subchapters 4.1 - 4.3, from where the group of researchers took all possible information and available data to establish and measure the following indicators of success or failure of the criteria and achievement of established strategic objectives:

- without impact (p1) = 0-10%;
- with minimal impact, which can be positive (p2+) = 10-20% or negative (p2-) = -10-0%;
- with limited impact (p3) = 20-30%;
- with moderate impact (p4) = 30-50%;
- with significant impact (p5) = above 50%.

This method of obtaining the appropriate weights (p) for the established criteria is called “direct analysis of the performance of options” and it is described in subchapter 1. 3. It is based on their relative importance in meeting the objectives. This step explains the likelihood that different criteria will affect the success or failure of a different decision or, in other words, will have more or less influence on the goal (s).

The final step - *Achieving the Performance Matrix* represents the masterpiece of the scientific analysis of the process. The performance matrix of solving the geopolitical problem will be completed, in which each date entered will correspond to the expected performance of an option against the established criteria. for an objective, according to Table 2.

Table 2: The Performance Matrix of solving NATO's Geopolitical issue

<i>The Performance Matrix</i>									
<i>Decisional Alternatives (Options)</i>	<i>Decision Criteria</i>								
	x 1	x 2	x 2	x 3	x 1	x 3	x 2	x 3	<i>Total</i>
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	
A1 To continue the current political and practical cooperation	1	6	4	6	1	3	2	6	29

A2 To reinforce NATO - AU relations	2	4	6	9	2	6	4	9	42
A3 To plan and conduct direct military involvement	3	2	2	3	3	9	6	3	31

The exact method of calculating the percentages for each criterion is determined by experts and other participants in the analysis, based on their experience and the national and international context of that period. In the model above, the group of researchers from CDSSS considered the followings:

- p1 to p3 as having a minor importance for the established criteria and no multiplying effect (x1);
- p4 as having a medium importance and some kind of multiplying effect (x2);
- p5 as very important and with greater possibility to multiply its effect (x3).

Thus, by verifying the dominant position of criteria C4, C6 and C8 over the others, when the performance of option A2 is at least as good as that of A3, it turns out that the option of strengthening NATO's partnership with AU is the best one with regard to the Alliance's policy towards Africa.

CONCLUSIONS

If, until recently, Africa represented a region of lesser Geostrategic importance to the interests of the Alliance, the complex and unpredictable changes in the security environment of the area, exacerbated by the Sino-US economic war, global warming, regional competition for resources, and the coronavirus pandemic, have repositioned the area in the spheres of interest of the respective regional organisation and raised its interest to include it in its Geopolitics.

China's direct economic involvement in sub-Saharan African states, through major investments and the implementation of "Belt and Road Initiative's" (BRI) projects (which would later attract protection and security structures on the African continent), demonstrated Beijing's expansionist intentions to take political and economic control of the former French colonies in the area and influence their long and very long-term development. Of no less interest were Russia and other regional powers' military interventions in African conflicts as well as the increase in terrorist actions in the Sahel region, which drew the international/regional organisations' attention of the poor and ineffective involvement in managing the catastrophic political situation and the humanitarian disaster in Africa. Especially the position of NATO towards the African states and the African Union is at stake, due to the individualistic policy of some Member States, former colonising powers.

In the face of the US reluctance to get involved and resolve African tensions, because of its strategic interests in other parts of the world, a fierce competition for the exploitation of large oil and gas reserves on the continent, the fight for control of diamond,

copper and nickel mines, illegal permissive activities (drug, arms and human trafficking, deforestation, fishing and wildlife illegal trade), the growing presence of terrorism with international ramifications (Al Qaeda and the Islamic State), corruption and political dictatorship in African states with natural resources, triggered the growing interest of the great powers to control and manipulate those African states and to use non-state actors in the area to win the competition for resources.

Therefore, the inclusion of the Multi-Criteria Analysis method has the expected effect of assessing how NATO should materialise its interests in such a sensitive region of the globe and not to analyse decisions made at the level of the regional organisation in this respect. In this context, the analysis includes a procedural approach, with established logical steps, in order to reach an expected final result, by scientific methods. The staging of the Multi-Criteria Analytical Process focuses on a five-step process to follow: establishing the context/problem; defining possible strategic objectives to achieve; identifying options; defining criteria; and establishing the optimal choice by prioritising/weighting the criteria. In the present article, the calculations and the achievement of a final result were not considered.

The MCA result of the main strategic interests of the Alliance towards Africa reveals the best possible option to be followed for the regional Geopolitics, resulting from the Performance Matrix and presents the political/strategic objectives, quantitative and qualitative criteria, as well as indices for measuring these criteria and leading to the achievement of the proposed objectives. It is, of course, up to NATO's decision-making authorities to take these scientifically argued results into account and implement them.

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