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ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΔΙΕΘΝΩΝ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΩΝ ΑΝΑΛΥΣΕΩΝ  
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC ANALYSES

# **Trump's re-election and its impact on the European Security & Defence**

A rational assessment based on strategic documents

LTC (Ret.) Georgios KOUKAKIS

*Research Paper no. 110*

**ΚΕΔΙΣΑ  KEDISA**

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
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A rational assessment based on strategic documents

LTC (Ret.) Georgios KOUKAKIS

November 2024

## Disclosure Statement

The opinion expressed in this paper represents the author's personal views and in no way reflects the official position of the Center for International Strategic Analyses (KEDISA) or any other Institute or Organization he is affiliated with.

Heraklion (Crete), 14 November 2024

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## Abbreviations

CSDP Common Security and Defence Policy

DPCI Defence Projects of Common Interest

ECSC European Coal and Steel Community

EEAS European External Action Service

EEC European Economic Community

EU European Union

GDP Gross Domestic Product

HR/VP High Representative for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

MS member state(s)

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSS National Security Strategy

## Abstract

The re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and its consequences in a variety of policy fields is expected to be the subject of debate in the coming period across the globe. One of these areas is rightly the security & defence sector, as both the actions of this politician during his previous administration and his inflammatory statements during his election campaign have raised concerns about 'what lies ahead' in terms of the global security environment. And since everyone is primarily concerned about what is going to happen in their 'neighbourhood', the question for European citizens is:

### **How will European Security & Defence be affected by Trump's re-election?**

This paper attempts to answer this burning question by drawing on evidence - hence the reference to evidence in the title - from strategic documents of the US, NATO and the European Union. Through these, it highlights the intentions of these actors with regard to the security and defence of the European area, in order to draw rational conclusions and make similar assessments regarding the role that the US and NATO are expected to play in this area during the second term of the future US President.

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**Key words:** European Union, USA, Elections, Security, Strategy, Defence

## 1. Introduction

The re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and its consequences in a variety of policy fields is expected to be the subject of debate in the coming period across the globe. One of these areas is rightly the Security & Defence sector, as both the actions of this politician during his previous administration and his inflammatory statements during his election campaign have raised concerns about 'what lies ahead' in terms of the global security environment.

The aim of this paper is to answer how Trump's re-election will affect the European Security & Defence. Its importance lies not only in the fact that it provides current information contributing to the existing literature regarding the European Security & Defence, but also because it is based on data drawn from strategic documents of the US, NATO and the European Union. Its main conclusion is that the European leaders should see this political change as an opportunity for further enhancing the Security & Defence sector, rather than as a threatening event.

The research method used in the paper is the qualitative analysis, while its structure comprises a brief analysis of the EU's historical background indicating its evolution from an economic union to an ambitious security provider, the presentation of the context of the 2023 '*European Union Space Strategy for Security and Defence*' in addition to several recent developments regarding the Security & Defence and Space sectors, an analysis of the data presented throughout the occasional paper and an assessment of the future prospects of the European Security & Defence sector, based on the contemporary geopolitical conditions of the security environment and some final concluding remarks.

## 2. The role of NATO & the EU

The first point to be clarified is the institutional framework for cooperation between the EU and NATO. NATO was established by the North Atlantic Treaty ([North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 1949](#)), signed on *4 April 1949* in Washington, D.C. –which is why it is



sometimes referred to as the Washington Treaty– by twelve (12) states,<sup>1</sup> with the aim of creating a defence alliance to protect the Euro-Atlantic area. A key element of this alliance and the foundation of *collective defence* is Article 5 (mutual assistance clause), according to which:

*«The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security».*

Element	2003 European Security Strategy	2016 Global Strategy	2022 Strategic Compass
<b>Ends</b>	Addressing threats Building security in the EU neighbourhood Effective multilateralism	Security of the Union State & Societal Resilience to East & South Cooperative Regional Orders ----- Integrated Approach to Conflicts & Crises Global Governance for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	<i>ACT</i> Become a more assertive S&D actor <i>SECURE</i> Be prepared for fast-emerging challenges <i>INVEST</i> Increase defence expenditures Reduce critical military & civilian capability gaps <i>PARTNER</i> Deepen cooperation with partners Further tailor partnership packages

**Table 1.** The evolution of the element of *ends* of the EUSS

**Source:** Compiled by Georgios Koukakis ©

<sup>1</sup> NATO's founding member states were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States.



Figure 1. EU factsheet regarding the Strategic Compass

Source: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2022-03-21\\_strategic\\_compass-factsheet.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2022-03-21_strategic_compass-factsheet.pdf)

As for the EU, although it was founded in 1951 as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) with the aim of strengthening solidarity among European states and promoting peace through the concentration of coal and steel production, over time it has evolved - after becoming the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 and the current European Union (EU) in 1993 - into an ambitious security provider, taking the following actions:

1. In 2003 the EU adopted the *European Security Strategy* ([Council of the European Union, 2022](#)), launching several *Common Security and Defence Policy* (CSDP) missions ([Krentz, 2023](#)).
2. In 2011 the EU created the *European External Action Service* (EEAS), which has similar responsibilities to a state's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
3. In 2016 the EU adopted the *Global Strategy* ([EEAS, 2019](#)).
4. In 2022 the EU issued the *Strategic Compass*, which set clear and time-bound objectives, grouping them into four pillars ([Koukákης, 2022](#)).

### 3. The NATO-EU relations

Although relations between NATO and the EU were initially very antagonistic –mainly due to the suspicion with which US officials viewed EU security and defence initiatives– to the point that some analysts described them as a "*frozen conflict*" ([Hofmann & Reynolds, 2007](#)), they normalized over time. This was expressed through a series of events (**Table 2**) as shown below:

1. On 16 December 2002, the *NATO-EU Declaration on ESDP* was signed in Brussels (Belgium),<sup>2</sup> establishing a strategic partnership between the two organisations to address new challenges, while stressing that NATO remained the foundation of the collective defence of its members ([Hofmann & Reynolds, 2007](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was originally referred to as the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

Year	Milestones in EU-NATO cooperation
2001	<b>Launch of cooperation</b> between the two actors
2002	<b>NATO-EU Declaration on ESDP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Addressing new challenges</li><li>- EU conducting Crises Management Operations (CMOs) in areas not involving NATO</li><li>- Establishment of 6 key principles of cooperation</li><li>- Participation of NATO member states in ESDP</li></ul>
2003	<b>Signing of Berlin Plus Agreements</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Access to NATO planning capabilities for EU-led CMOs</li><li>- Availability of NATO assets-capabilities for EU-led CMOs</li><li>- Procedures for the release, monitoring, return and withdrawal of assets and capabilities</li><li>- Adoption of specific procedures</li><li>- Arranging for EU-NATO consultation in the context of an EU-led CMOs</li><li>- Arrangement for coherent and mutually reinforcing capability requirements</li></ul>
2016	Signature of the <b>1<sup>st</sup> EU-NATO Joint Declaration</b> Adoption of <b>1<sup>st</sup> package of proposals</b> to enhance cooperation (42 proposals)
2017	Adoption of <b>2<sup>nd</sup> package of proposals</b> to enhance cooperation (34 proposals)
2018	Signature of the <b>2<sup>nd</sup> EU-NATO Joint Declaration</b>
2022	Publication of a new <b>NATO Strategic Concept</b> Publication of the <b>EU Strategic Compass</b>
2023	Signature of the <b>3<sup>rd</sup> EU-NATO Joint Declaration</b>

**Table 2:** Milestones in EU-NATO cooperation

**Source:** Compiled by Georgios Koukakis ©

2. On 17 March 2003 the *Berlin Plus Agreements* were signed, setting out the modalities of cooperation between the EU and NATO ([European Parliament, n.d.](#)).

3. On 8 July 2016, the leaders of the European Council, the European Commission and NATO signed the *1<sup>st</sup> EU-NATO Joint Declaration*, which stressed inter alia ([NATO, 2016](#)) that:

*"A stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing.  
Together they can better provide security in Europe and beyond".*

4. On 10 July 2018, the three leaders signed the 2nd Joint Declaration which reaffirmed the excellent cooperation between NATO and the EU ([NATO, 2018](#)), stressing that:

"EU efforts will also strengthen NATO, and thus will improve our common security. For NATO Allies, such efforts foster an equitable sharing of the burden, benefits and responsibilities, in full accordance with their commitment undertaken in the Defence Investment Pledge".

5. On 10 January 2023, the three leaders signed the 3<sup>rd</sup> EU-NATO Joint Declaration (NATO, 2023), which stressed, inter alia, the need to expand their cooperation in other areas (EEAS, 2021).

Finally, it is worth noting that the most recent *NATO Strategic Concept* adopted at the NATO Summit held on 29-30 June 2022 in Madrid (NATO, 2022) stresses, among other things, the need to strengthen NATO's cooperation with other organisations such as the EU, but also to increase the national defence spending of its member states (MS) in order to reach the 2% of GDP target for defence spending, which is not met by all member states (NATO, 2024).

#### **4. Trump's first administration**

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of the United States is –apart from being the main Grand Strategy document from which all the strategic documents of the other state agencies are derived– the document with which each President makes his "mark", providing the guidelines according to which the foreign policy of the United States is conducted.

The National Security Strategy implemented during the first term of Donald Trump's administration (2017-2021) was published on 18 December 2017 (The White House, 2017), becoming the seventeenth (17<sup>th</sup>) NSS of the United States. Regarding its content – which was described by many as unrealistic to even post-Cold War, as it was interpreted as an attempt to maintain US primacy in the international system (Inboden, 2018)– it provided for the following, among other things:

1. It defined four (4) main pillars of action:
  - a. *Pillar I: Protect the American people, the homeland and the American way of life,*
  - b. *Pillar II: Promote American prosperity,*
  - c. *Pillar III: Preserve peace through strength, and*
  - d. *Pillar IV: Advance American influence.*
  
2. It focused on the following six (6) geographic areas of interest:
  - a. The Indo-Pacific,
  - b. Europe,
  - c. The Middle East,
  - d. South and Central Asia,
  - e. The Western Hemisphere, and
  - f. Africa.
  
3. It was full of references to the attempts made by the People's Republic of *China* to undermine the USA –a fact that led to the deterioration of relations between the two states ([Jost, 2017](#))– and similar references to the actions of *Russia, Iran and North Korea*.

*«The United States fulfills our defense responsibilities and expects others to do the same. We expect our European allies to increase defense spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024, with 20 percent of this spending devoted to increasing military capabilities. On NATO's eastern flank we will continue to strengthen deterrence and defense, and catalyze frontline allies and partners' efforts to better defend themselves. We will work with NATO to improve its integrated air and missile defense capabilities to counter*

*existing and projected ballistic and cruise missile threats, particularly from Iran. We will increase counter-terrorism and cybersecurity cooperation»* ([The White House, 2017:48](#)).

## 5. The Biden administration

Regarding the Joe Biden administration, a strategic document entitled *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* was initially issued on *03 March 2021* ([The White House, 2021](#)), to provide guidance to the Departments and Agencies until the new NSS was issued. The main points of this document were as follows:

1. Define the following three (3) priorities:
  - a. Protecting the security of the American people,
  - b. Expanding economic prosperity and opportunity, and
  - c. Protecting the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life.
2. Link national security to the distribution of power, prevention of immediate threats, and maintenance of a stable and open international system.
3. He continued to identify the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation as threats while emphasizing the climate crisis ([Baumann, 2021](#)).
4. He argued that the *well-being of citizens* and the *resilience of society* are the main factors affecting national security rather than external threats ([McInnis, 2021](#)).

On *October 12, 2022* ([The White House, 2022](#)), President Biden issued the eighteenth (18<sup>th</sup>) NSS of the United States, the main points of which were the following:

1. It identified the *strategic challenges* of addressing the competition among the great powers of the age and the consequences of climate change, the food crisis and other global common threats as strategic challenges.

2. He pointed out that the US remained the dominant power at the global level, and that the nature of contemporary competition was about *defending democracy* against the revisionist foreign policy of authoritarian governments, citing the People's Republic of China and Russia as typical examples.

3. He stressed that the best way to meet all challenges is cooperation and that the US pursues a free, accessible, benign and secure international order.

4. It defined the following US global priorities:

- a. The "out-competing" of *China* and the constraining of *Russia*,
- b. Limiting and constraining *Russia* by constraining and restricting Russia's influence.

5. It focused on the following six (6) geographical areas of interest:

- a. The Indo-Pacific,
- b. Europe,
- c. The Western Hemisphere,
- d. The Middle East,
- e. Africa, and
- f. The Arctic.

6. Finally, as far as the European Security & Defence is concerned, the document stated ([The White House, 2022:38-39](#)) that:

*«As we step up our own sizable contributions to NATO capabilities and readiness –including by strengthening defensive forces and capabilities, and upholding our long-standing commitment to extended deterrence– we will count on our Allies to continue assuming greater responsibility by increasing their spending,*



*capabilities, and contributions. European defense investments, through or complementary to NATO, will be critical to ensuring our shared security at this time of intensifying competition».*

## 6. Trump's inflammatory statements on NATO and Russia

An event that indirectly concerns European Security & Defence which was not given so much importance in Greece is the change of four (4) National Security Advisors within two (2) years during Trump's Presidency, as the person who holds this post is considered the "right hand man" of every President, influencing him significantly on security & defense issues. First Counselor Michael T. Flynn resigned in *February 2017* ([Ansari & Dewan, 2017](#)), his successor LTG H.R. McMaster resigned in *March 2018* ([Ewing, 2018](#)), while Third Counselor John Bolton resigned in *September 2019* handing over his duties to Robert O'Brien at the President's request due to a "difference of opinion" ([Hudson & Wagner, 2019](#)).

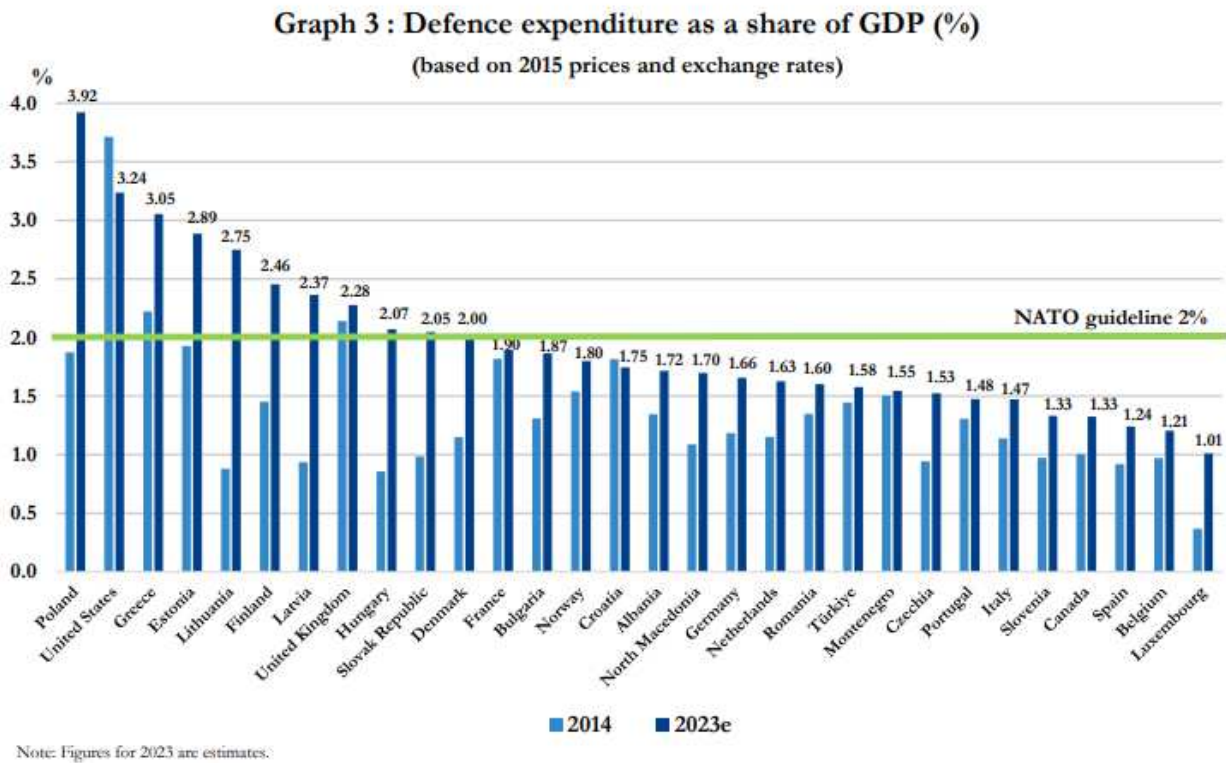
However, the greatest concern in Europe was caused by various statements made by Trump regarding the US stance towards the future of NATO and Europe, during both his Presidency and his pre-election campaign. More specifically:

1. In *July 2018* –during the NATO Summit– then President Trump warned European leaders that the US would withdraw from NATO if it did not increase its defence expenditure in line with the 2% NATO guideline ([MacAskill, 2018](#)). Relatively recently, however, he said he still supports Europe, warning European leaders to take advantage of this ([McDonald, 2024](#)).

2. In February 2024 –during his election campaign– Trump declared that he would "encourage" Russia to attack any of the US NATO allies that have not fulfilled their financial obligations ([Helmore, 2024](#)). Shortly afterwards, however, he clarified that this statement was a kind of negotiation to bring "financially inconsistent" states into compliance ([Le Monde, 2024](#)).

## 7. The EU after Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 and the ongoing armed conflict to this day forced the EU and its member states to take important decisions on security & defence in support of Ukraine's struggle and to review procedures, strategies and institutions, one of the most important events in the EU-NATO relationship was the general increase in defence expenditure by most European states to comply with the 2% of GDP guideline set by NATO (**Figure 2**), but also the manifestation of individual efforts by states such as *France* and *Germany*, which expressed their intent to strengthen their defence capabilities in their strategic documents.



**Figure 2.** Comparative table of the NATO member states' defence expenditure (2014-2023) in relation to their GDP, according to the 2% guideline set by NATO

Source: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/240314-def-exp-2023-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/240314-def-exp-2023-en.pdf)



**Figure 3.** The cover page of the EU Strategic Agenda (2024-2029)

**Source:** <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/strategic-agenda-2024-2029/>

Another important development in the field of European security and defence is the recent adoption on *27 June 2024* of the new *Strategic Agenda* (**Figure 3**) of the EU for the period 2024-2029 ([European Council, 2024](#)), which defines as the second of the three (3) pillars the creation of a "*A strong and secure Europe*" ([European Council, n.d.](#)), through:

1. Ensuring a coherent and effective external action,
2. Strengthening security & defence and the protection of citizens,
3. Preparing for a bigger and stronger Union; and
4. Pursuing an integrated approach to migration and border management.



**Figure 4.** The EU Commissioner for Defence and Space, Andrius Kubilius

**Source:** [https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/towards-new-commission-2024-2029/commissioners-designate-2024-2029\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/towards-new-commission-2024-2029/commissioners-designate-2024-2029_en)

Finally, another positive development in the field of European security and defence is the new composition of the European Commission announced on *18 July 2024* ([European Commission, n.d.a](#)), which includes for the first time a *Commissioner for Defence and Space*, a position held by Lithuanian Andrius Kubilius ([European Commission, n.d.b](#)). Among the tasks ([European Commission, 2024](#)) assigned to him by the President of the European Commission (Ursula von der Leyen) –who stressed the need to create a true *European Defence Union*, noting that the EU Member States will always be responsible for their armed forces– were the following:

1. The presentation of the White Paper on the Future of European Defence within one hundred (100) days.
2. The creation of a Single Market for Defence.
3. The definition of Defence Projects of Common Interest (DPCI), with an emphasis on the design and implementation of a European Air Shield and a joint cyber defence project.
4. Overseeing the implementation of the European Defence Industrial Strategy, the European Defence Industrial Programme, and the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence.
5. Strengthening the European Defence Fund.
6. Proposing an EU Space Law and European common standards and rules for space activities.
7. Propose the publication of a Space Data Economy Strategy.

## **8. In conclusion**

Taking into account the data presented in this article, it can be seen that EU-NATO relations have made remarkable progress, as NATO –while remaining the foundation of European defence– not only accepts but encourages the enhanced role of the EU in the field of security and defence. Contributing to this has been the increased US interest in the Indo-Pacific region ([EEAS, 2024](#)), the reduced desire of US manpower to join the US armed forces and, most importantly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as any direct NATO involvement in that theatre of operations would mathematically lead to a generalised conflict between East and West.

Regarding the re-election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency and the impact it may have on European security and defence, on the one hand, the future President's admission that the threats of US withdrawal from NATO and Russia's encouragement to attack the inconsistent allies of the US were a negotiating ploy, on the other hand, the



compliance of most European states with the defence spending threshold set by NATO suggests that there is no cause for concern regarding European security & defence.

Moreover, from the references cited, it is clear that the encouragement of European states to comply with this limit is expressed in the National Security Strategy published during the presidencies of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. It is just that the former's statements in this regard and his general behaviour were clearly more erroneous than that of the latter. The European leaders should therefore see this political change as an opportunity for further enhancing the Security & Defence sector, rather than as a threatening event..

Finally, the direction in which the EU should move in terms of European security and defence is reflected in the recent statement of the EU HR/VP *Josep Borrell* ([EEAS, 2024](#)), according to which:

*«[...] Defense, which means having military capabilities, will be at the heart of EU policies. Maybe it will be the third act of the EU project. [...] in the next step, the European project will be very much related with building a common security and defence [...] We have to build our common defence capacity. We have to take our own responsibility [...] NATO will remain absolutely irreplaceable. But inside NATO we have to build a strong European pillar [...].»*



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## About the author



Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Georgios KOUKAKIS has graduated from the *Hellenic Military Academy* (2002), the *Hellenic Army War College* (2020) and the *Hellenic Supreme Joint War College* (2023). He retired in 2024 on his own initiative, after serving for 22 years as a Leader and Staff officer in several Special Forces and Infantry Units, and as an Instructor in the Hellenic Airborne School and the Hellenic Infantry School.

He holds a Master of Arts in '*Governance, Development and Security in the Mediterranean*' from the Department of Mediterranean Studies of the University of the Aegean (Rhodes, Greece) –having graduated 1<sup>st</sup> among his Class with his dissertation focusing on the prospects of establishing a *National Security Council* (NSC) in the Hellenic Republic (Greece)– and an Adult Instructor of the Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning Center (CE-LLC) of the University of the Aegean (Rhodes, Greece).

He is also a Senior Analyst in the *Center for International Strategic Analyses* (KEDISA), a Research Associate of *HERMES Institute of International Affairs, Security & Geoeconomy* (I.I.A.S.GE.) and a member of the *Hellenic Institute of Strategic Studies* (HEL.I.S.S.), *ALLILONnet* the Global Network of Greeks and Friends of Greece for Solidarity in the Professional Field and the *Mercury Negotiation Academy* (MNA). He has participated as a speaker in several seminars and conferences regarding international relations in the fields of foreign policy, security and defense.

Many of his articles and research papers have been published in the '*Global Security and Intelligence Notes*' (GSIN) and the 'South and South East Asia Security Research Centre' (SSEASRC) Research Notes of the Buckingham Centre of Security & Intelligence Studies (BUCSIS), the '*HAPSc Policy Briefs*' Journal of the Hellenic Association of Political Scientists, the '*NRDC-GR Herald*' Journal of NRDC-GR, the '*Military Review*' Journal of the Hellenic Army General Staff (HAGS), the '*Cultural Diplomacy Journal*' of the Hellenic Institute of Cultural Diplomacy (HICD).

In addition to his involvement in academic research regarding international relations, Georgios is a columnist in a number of foreign affairs, geopolitics and international affairs websites such as '*Foreign Affairs - The Hellenic Edition*', '*Policy Journal*', '*Geopolitics & Daily News*', '*HuffPost Greece*', '*Liberal*', '*Infognomon Politics*', '*LEP*' and '*Active News*'.

He is the co-author of the book (In Greek) '**National Security: Myths and Reality**' that was published in April 2023, and the Academic Head of the Educational Programme (in Greek) "**Security Studies in the Mediterranean (BASIC)**" of the CE-LLC of the University of the Aegean.

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