

I. Key general developments in the region

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There were three countries with active armed conflicts on their territory in Europe in 2021: the low-intensity interstate border conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan for control of Nagorno-Karabakh (see below), and the low-intensity, internationalized, subnational, armed conflict in Ukraine.¹ In Ukraine, the collapse of peace talks and a second large-scale Russian military build-up near Ukraine's borders in late 2021 raised fears of the simmering conflict boiling over into a major interstate armed conflict (see section II).

Although most of Europe has been relatively peaceful for at least the past two decades, two main areas of tension remain (as explained in more detail below): persistent tensions between Russia and most of the rest of Europe; and several long-standing unresolved conflicts, especially, but not limited to, the post-Soviet space and the eastern Mediterranean.

As was the case in 2020 the impact of Covid-19 on the two armed conflicts in Europe appeared minimal, although the pandemic's direct and indirect impacts on conflict dynamics and European security more broadly may take years to unfold. In addition to large numbers of deaths, the pandemic continued to require restrictions on freedom of movement, although both mortality rates and policy responses to Covid-19 varied widely between European countries.²

There were 19 multilateral peace operations in Europe in 2021, one more than in the previous year. The Russian–Turkish Joint Monitoring Centre (RTJMC) opened in Azerbaijan and the OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk was discontinued. The number of personnel deployed increased by 0.6 per cent, from 8063 on 31 December 2020 to 8108 on 31 December 2021.³

The interstate armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan

Having flared up again in 2020, the interstate Armenia–Azerbaijan armed conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh was nominally ended by a Russian-brokered truce in November 2020.⁴ The six weeks

¹ For conflict definitions and typologies see chapter 2, section I, in this volume.

² See e.g. Emric, E. and Niksic, S., 'As deaths rise, vaccine opponents find a foothold in Bosnia', *AP News*, 30 Sep. 2021; and Higgins, A., 'In Romania, hard-hit by Covid, doctors fight vaccine refusal', *New York Times*, 8 Nov. 2021.

³ On the European Union's civilian crisis management in Europe and beyond see Smit, T., 'Strengthening EU civilian crisis management: The civilian CSDP Compact and beyond', *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security* no. 2021/5, Nov. 2021. For a full list of multilateral peace operations see chapter 2, section III, table 2.6.

⁴ On the history of the conflict see *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 127–29; and Broers, L., *Armenia and Azerbaijan: Anatomy of a Rivalry* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2019).

of fighting had resulted in Azerbaijan regaining control of about a third of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as most of the adjacent territories.⁵ However, while the truce largely held in 2021, the situation remained unstable, with battle-related deaths from sporadic clashes and ceasefire violations keeping it above the threshold for an armed conflict. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), there were 57 conflict-related deaths in 2021 (24 in Armenia and 33 in Azerbaijan), compared to over 7000 in 2020.⁶

Renewed clashes in 2021

Under the November 2020 ceasefire agreement, Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to the deployment of 1960 Russian peacekeepers. In January 2021 Russia and Turkey opened a joint ceasefire-monitoring centre in Azerbaijan, using drones to track violations.⁷ The ceasefire was largely preserved in areas where military personnel were stationed. Between January and June 2021, for example, only 33 cross-border clashes took place, compared to 2600 during the same period in 2020.⁸ These clashes mainly occurred where there were no Russian forces, including along parts of the Azerbaijani–Armenian border. With opposing Armenian and Azerbaijan military positions only 30–100 metres apart—before the 2020 war, they were hundreds of metres apart—the front line’s new topography is more unstable.⁹ Border clashes and ceasefire violations escalated significantly in July 2021 and again in November.¹⁰

In January 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted the first post-war meeting between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, with an agreement reached to create new transportation infrastructure aimed at ‘unblocking’ the region’s many closed borders.¹¹ While representatives from Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan met again in August to discuss progress on transport and communications issues, little other diplomatic progress was made during the year. In particular, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk process remained in limbo after Azerbaijani President Ilham

⁵ On the armed conflict in 2020 see *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 129–32. On the role of arms transfers in the conflict see Wezeman, P. D., Kuimova, A. and Smith, J., ‘Arms transfers to conflict zones: The case of Nagorno-Karabakh’, SIPRI Topical Background, 30 Apr. 2021.

⁶ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), ‘Dashboard’, accessed 21 Jan. 2022.

⁷ ‘Russia and Turkey open monitoring centre for Nagorno-Karabakh’, Reuters, 30 Jan. 2021.

⁸ Holcomb, F., ‘Armenia and Azerbaijan: Ceasefire largely holds, but tensions remain’, in ACLED, *Mid-Year Update: 10 Conflicts to Worry About in 2021*, Aug. 2021, pp. 20–22.

⁹ International Crisis Group, *Post-war Prospects for Nagorno-Karabakh*, Europe Report no. 264 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 9 June 2021), p. 7.

¹⁰ ‘Armenia, Azerbaijan report casualties after renewed fighting on border’, RFE/RL, 17 Nov. 2021.

¹¹ Balmforth, T. and Soldatkin, V., ‘Putin hosts first post-war talks between leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia’, Reuters, 11 Jan. 2021; and Kucera, J., ‘Leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan hold first post-war meeting’, Eurasianet, 11 Jan. 2021.

Aliyev declared the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict ‘resolved’.¹² During the United Nations General Assembly on 24 September 2021, the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs (France, Russia and the United States) convened the first meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers since the war.

Outlook

Fundamental questions remain regarding Nagorno-Karabakh’s status, who will provide security and services for its residents, how to manage humanitarian aid, and whether the ceasefire will hold. Talks have yet to begin on addressing post-war issues, including demarcation of the new borders between Armenia and the regions reclaimed by Azerbaijan in the 2020 war, and other measures aimed at stabilizing the situation on the ground. As such, Nagorno-Karabakh is likely to remain an area of low-intensity conflict and tension at least for the medium term.

Tensions between Russia and the West

Tensions persisted throughout 2021 between Russia and most of the rest of Europe and the USA over issues as diverse as cyberattacks, Ukraine (see section II), the treatment of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the political crisis in Belarus, and strengthening bilateral security cooperation between China and Russia.¹³ There are competing explanations for this political–military climate of mistrust.¹⁴

In February, the European Union (EU) imposed travel bans and asset freezes on associates of Vladimir Putin in response to the jailing of Navalny

¹² International Crisis Group (note 9), p. 4. For a brief description and list of members of the OSCE Minsk Group see annex B, section II, in this volume. On the history of the Minsk Group process see Remler, P. et al., ‘OSCE Minsk Group: Lessons from the past and tasks for the future’, ed. Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, *OSCR Insight 2020: Corona, War, Leadership Crisis* (Nomos: Baden-Baden, 2020); and Guliyev, F. and Gawrich, A., ‘OSCE mediation strategies in Eastern Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh: A comparative analysis’, *European Security*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2021), pp. 569–88.

¹³ See e.g. Sanger, D. E., Perlroth, N. and Barnes, J. E., ‘As understanding of Russian hacking grows, so does alarm’, *New York Times*, 2 Jan. 2021; and Chan, M., ‘Afghan crisis draws China and Russia closer on Central Asian stability as both step up army drills’, *South China Morning Post*, 27 Aug. 2021. On these geopolitical divisions within arms control for biological and chemical weapons, see chapter 12, sections II and IV, in this volume.

¹⁴ On the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the USA/Europe see *SIPRI Yearbook 2018*, pp. 11–12; *SIPRI Yearbook 2019*, pp. 18–19; and *SIPRI Yearbook 2020*, pp. 114–15. See also Stent, A., *Putin’s World: Russia Against the West and With the Rest* (Twelve: New York, 2019); Orenstein, M. A., *The Lands in Between: Russia vs. the West and the New Politics of Hybrid War* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2019); Hill, F., ‘The Kremlin’s strange victory: How Putin exploits American dysfunction and fuels American decline’, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2021; and Sarotte, M. E., ‘Containment beyond the Cold War: How Washington lost the post-Soviet peace’, *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2021. On increases in military expenditure in Europe see chapter 8, sections I and II, in this volume.

for alleged parole violations.¹⁵ In March the USA applied sanctions on seven senior Russian government officials and 14 entities associated with Russian biological and chemical agent production in response to allegations of Russian cyber espionage and the poisoning of Navalny.¹⁶ In April the US government announced extensive new sanctions on 32 Russian entities and individuals, and formally attributed the 2019–20 SolarWinds hacking attack to the SVR (Sluzhba Vneshney Razvedki), Russia's foreign intelligence agency. Additionally, 10 Russian diplomats were expelled from the Russian embassy in Washington, DC.¹⁷ In response, Russia expelled 10 US diplomats and blacklisted eight US officials.¹⁸ Further tit-for-tat expulsions took place later in April between Russia and Czechia over an espionage row.¹⁹

Belarus

The internal governance crisis in Belarus that began in August 2020 continued in 2021, as did the deepening of ties with Russia.²⁰ One of year's most serious incidents occurred in May, when Belarus forced a plane flying through Belarusian airspace while carrying prominent opposition journalist Roman Protasevich—along with approximately 170 other passengers—to land in the capital, Minsk. After the plane landed, Protasevich was arrested by Belarusian authorities. The EU responded by closing European airports to Belarus's state airline and advising the carriers of member states to avoid Belarusian airspace.²¹ The continuing crackdown of dissidents in Belarus sparked further EU and US sanctions.²² In retaliation, the Belarus government provoked a migrant crisis by transporting refugees to the Lithuanian and Polish borders.²³

¹⁵ Emmott, R. and Siebold, S., 'EU to impose sanctions on Russians over Navalny by March summit, diplomats say', Reuters, 18 Feb. 2021.

¹⁶ Holland, S. and Mohammed, A., 'US imposes sanctions on Russia over poisoning of Navalny', Reuters, 2 Mar. 2021.

¹⁷ Sanger, D. E. and Kramer, A. E., 'US imposes stiff sanctions on Russia, blaming it for major hacking operation', *New York Times*, 15 Apr. 2021; and White House, 'Fact sheet: Imposing costs for harmful foreign activities by the Russian government', 15 Apr. 2021.

¹⁸ Roth, A., 'Russia expels 10 US diplomats as part of retaliation for sanctions', *The Guardian*, 16 Apr. 2021; and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Foreign Ministry statement on measures in response to hostile US actions', 16 Apr. 2021.

¹⁹ Cameron, R., 'Spy row revs up Czech–Russian tensions', BBC News, 8 May 2021.

²⁰ On the political crisis in Belarus in 2020 see *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 122–24; and 'The protest movement in Belarus: Resistance and repression', *Strategic Comments*, vol. 27 no. 2 (2021), pp. i–iii.

²¹ Troianovski, A., 'Belarus is isolated as other countries move to ban flights', *New York Times*, 24 May 2021; and 'Having hijacked a Ryanair plane, Belarus draws closer to Russia', *The Economist*, 26 May 2021 (Updated 27 May 2021).

²² On the expanded EU arms embargo on Belarus see chapter 14, section II, in this volume.

²³ Pempel, K., 'Poland to build fence, double troop numbers on Belarus border', Reuters, 23 Aug. 2021; Nielsen, N., 'EU ready to impose more sanctions against Belarus', *EU Observer*, 6 Oct. 2021; and Talmazan, Y., 'Suffering of migrants intensifies amid standoff on Poland–Belarus border', *NBC News*, 10 Nov. 2021. On the role of military technologies used to track and control refugees on the EU's borders see Ahmed, K. and Tondo, L., 'Fortress Europe: The millions spent on military-grade tech to deter refugees', *The Guardian*, 6 Dec. 2021.

Russia's support for Belarus was a key factor in sustaining President Alexander Lukashenko's government. At a summit between President Putin and President Lukashenko in September 2021, for example, it was reported that progress had been made towards integrating the two countries' economies.²⁴ The meeting was followed by the quadrennial Zapad-2021 military exercises (focused on Russia's Western Military District and Belarus), which were much more of a joint Russian–Belarusian effort than previous iterations, leaving Western analysts concerned that the exercise might lead to a more permanent Russian military presence inside Belarus.²⁵

Militarization and diplomacy

The actions of Russia described above, along with other long-standing political tensions, have led to several highly militarized and contested security contexts both within Europe and further afield, including confrontations in Africa, the Arctic, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).²⁶ In the communique for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Brussels on 14 June 2021, for example, 'Russia's aggressive actions' were highlighted as a key threat to transatlantic security. The leaders of NATO countries committed to updating the alliance's strategic concept with the aim of considering new threats and clarifying that Article 5 of NATO's founding treaty—which establishes the principle of collective defence for the alliance—applies to threats in space and cyberattacks.²⁷ EU member states were also working on a new defence policy, the so-called 'strategic compass', which is due to be adopted in 2022.²⁸

A further deterioration of relations between NATO and Russia occurred in October, when the latter announced it would end its diplomatic engagement with NATO in response to the alliance's expulsion of eight Russian diplomats alleged to be undeclared intelligence officers.²⁹ Post-cold war efforts in building trust between Russia and NATO had centred on the 2002 NATO–Russia Council (NRC) and the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act.³⁰ However, after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014, NATO suspended all

²⁴ Roth, A., 'Putin and Lukashenko move to integrate economies of Russia and Belarus', *The Guardian*, 9 Sep. 2021.

²⁵ Whitmore, B., 'Concerns mount over Russia–Belarus military exercises', Atlantic Council, 28 July 2021; Kofman, M., 'Zapad 2021: What we learned from Russia's massive military drills', *Moscow Times*, 23 Sep. 2021; and Johnson, R., 'NATO's big concern from Russia's Zapad exercise: Putin's forces lingering in Belarus', *Breaking Defense*, 4 Oct. 2021.

²⁶ Lee, M., 'US, Russia at odds over military activity in the Arctic', AP News, 20 May 2021.

²⁷ Brussels Summit Communiqué, Issued by the heads of state and government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021, Press Release (2021) 086, 14 June 2021.

²⁸ EU External Action Service, 'A Strategic Compass for the EU', Factsheet, 15 Nov. 2021.

²⁹ Kramer, A. E., 'Russia breaks diplomatic ties with NATO', *New York Times*, 18 Oct. 2021.

³⁰ Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security Between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France, 27 May 1997. For a summary of the NATO–Russia Council see annex B, section II, in this volume.

practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia. While some channels were left open for dialogue on Ukraine and other matters, the general view within NATO was that Russia no longer accepted the principles enshrined in the Founding Act, such as national sovereignty and the inviolability of borders.³¹ With the suspension of Russia's diplomatic mission to NATO, the avenues for NATO–Russia dialogue narrowed even further.

The decay of confidence-building measures in Europe is also symbolized by the crisis in European arms control, which includes the termination of the 1987 Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty), the withering of the Open Skies regime, and the lack of progress on the 2011 Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures.³² This has meant that incidents of military brinkmanship—such as occurred between Russian forces and a British warship near Crimea in June 2021—are at greater risk of military escalation.³³

Nonetheless, there has been room for diplomacy on certain issues. Most significantly, the USA and Russia were able to extend the New START nuclear agreement in February 2021 by five years following talks between President Joe Biden and President Putin.³⁴ Similarly, senior US and Russian diplomats met in May, and despite serious differences struck an optimistic tone about potential future cooperation on combating the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change, the nuclear programmes in North Korea and Iran, and the Afghanistan war.³⁵ In June Biden and Putin met in Geneva for their first face-to-face summit since the former took office, in an attempt to arrest deteriorating relations. The admittedly low bar set for the meeting seemed to be met, with both sides agreeing to keep talking about arms control and strategic stability.³⁶

EU leaders have also struggled to define a common agenda on managing their disagreements with Russia.³⁷ A French–German proposal for a separate EU–Russia summit to open space for dialogue on issues such as climate change, energy, health, and the fight against terrorism and organized crime

³¹ See e.g. Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Polish foreign policy strategy 2017–2021', p. 2; and British Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 'Seventh anniversary of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea: UK statement', 4 Mar. 2021.

³² For a summary of the INF Treaty see annex A, section III, in this volume. On the Open Skies Treaty see chapter 13, section III, and annex A, section II, in this volume. For a summary and other details of the 2011 Vienna Document see annex A, section II, in this volume.

³³ Sabbagh, D. and Roth, A., 'Britain acknowledges surprise at speed of Russian reaction to warship', *The Guardian*, 24 June 2021.

³⁴ See chapter 11, section I, in this volume.

³⁵ Pamuk, H., 'Blinken, Lavrov agree to work together despite differences', Reuters, 19 May 2021.

³⁶ Troianovski, A., Matsnev, O. and Nechepurenko, I., 'Biden and Putin say the talks went well, but divisions remain on issues like cyberattacks and human rights', *New York Times*, 16 June 2021; and Braw, E., 'The Biden–Putin meeting: Every little helps', European Leadership Network Commentary, 2 Sep. 2021.

³⁷ See e.g. Borrell, J., 'My visit to Moscow and the future of EU–Russia relations', EU External Action Service, 7 Feb. 2021.

was dropped following criticism from other EU member states, particularly Poland and the Baltic states.³⁸ Instead, a new review of EU policy towards Russia (in the context of the developing EU strategic compass and closer cooperation with NATO) suggests a dual-track of push back/containment and engagement.³⁹

Russia sets out security demands

In December 2021 relations between the West and Russia worsened again, with further tit-for-tat expulsions of US and Russian diplomats, and US intelligence assessments that Russia was preparing to invade Ukraine (see section II)—which Russia denied.⁴⁰ A further round of joint Russia–Belarus military exercises announced in late December 2021 (and due to take place in Belarus in February 2022) raised additional concerns that Russia might also attack Ukraine’s northern flank from Belarusian territory.⁴¹

Many Western analysts considered Russia’s triggering of a new crisis with Ukraine as being due, at least in part, to a desire to force a wider security shift with the West.⁴² Seemingly to this end, on 17 December 2021 Russia released two draft security agreements—one with NATO and the other with the USA—which set out a number of proposals, including: (a) an end to NATO military activity in member states in central and eastern Europe that joined the alliance after 1997; (b) no further expansion of NATO membership, particularly to Ukraine; (c) no intermediate or shorter-range missiles deployed close enough to hit the territory of the other side; (d) no military exercises of more than one military brigade in an agreed border zone; (e) an agreement that parties refrain from considering each other as adversaries and attempt to resolve disputes peacefully; and (f) a prohibition on the deployment of nuclear weapons outside of national territories.⁴³ While most of the proposals were both not new and seriously at odds with the views of most Western countries,

³⁸ Siebold, S., Emmott, R. and Baczyńska, G., ‘France and Germany drop Russia summit plan after EU’s east objects’, Reuters, 25 June 2021.

³⁹ European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, ‘Joint communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council, On EU–Russia relations—push back, constrain and engage’, JOIN(2021) 20 final, 16 June 2021.

⁴⁰ Simmons, A. M. and Mauldin, W., ‘Russia expels some US diplomats in latest tit-for-tat action’, *Wall Street Journal*, 2 Dec. 2021.

⁴¹ ‘Russia, Belarus announce plans for more joint military drills’, RFE/RL, 30 Dec. 2021.

⁴² See e.g. Melvin, N., ‘The West surrendered its strategic ambiguity in the Black Sea’, RUSI Commentary, 21 Dec. 2021; and ‘Russia’s menacing of Ukraine is unlikely to induce NATO to retreat’, *The Economist*, 8 Jan. 2022. For an explanation of Russian motives see Trenin, D., ‘What Putin really wants in Ukraine’, *Foreign Affairs*, 28 Dec. 2021; and Gromyko, A., ‘What is driving Russia’s security concerns?’, European Leadership Network Commentary, 20 Jan. 2022.

⁴³ Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees’, draft, unofficial translation, 17 Dec. 2021; and Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘Agreement on measures to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’, draft, unofficial translation, 17 Dec. 2021.

their detailed elaboration in this format underlined Russia's intention to seek change the European security framework.⁴⁴

Senior Russian officials stressed that failure to endorse the documents would lead to an unspecified but serious 'military-technical' response. Despite this, there was very little in the texts that was likely to be accepted by either the USA or NATO.⁴⁵ On 21 December NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced, 'Any dialogue with Russia needs to be based on the core principles of European security and to address NATO's concerns about Russia's actions. And it needs to take place in consultation with NATO's European partners, including with Ukraine'.⁴⁶ Similarly, a senior US official said, 'There are some things that we're prepared to work on and that we do believe that there's merit in having a discussion . . . There are other things in those documents that the Russians know will be unacceptable'.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, agreement was reached to discuss the proposals with Russia in three separate meetings in January 2022: a USA–Russia bilateral meeting on 10 January; a meeting of the NRC on 12 January; and in the broader format of the OSCE on 13 January.

Unresolved conflicts

There are several long-standing simmering or frozen conflicts in Europe, especially in the post-Soviet space where five de facto statelets claiming independence from Soviet Union successor states—Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Trans-Dniester, and the portions of Ukraine's Donbas now controlled by Russian-backed separatists—remain unrecognized by most states around the world.⁴⁸ Similar conditions apply in Cyprus, Northern Ireland and the Western Balkans.⁴⁹ In these conditions of neither war nor peace, seemingly minor disputes can quickly escalate. In the Western Balkans in September 2021, for example, NATO peacekeepers stepped up patrols along the Kosovo–Serbia border amid heightened tensions between

⁴⁴ Baklitskiy, A. A., 'Putin's demand for security guarantees: Not new and not to be taken literally, but not to be ignored', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 14 Jan. 2022.

⁴⁵ 'Putin warns of "military-technical" response to Western "aggression"', *Moscow Times*, 21 Dec. 2022; and Podvig, P., 'Russia threatened a "military-technical" response for unmet demands. What could that mean?', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 18 Jan. 2022.

⁴⁶ Joint press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Prime Minister of Romania Nicolae Ciucă, 21 Dec. 2021.

⁴⁷ US Department of State, 'Telephonic press briefing with Dr Karen Donfried, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs', 21 Dec. 2021.

⁴⁸ On frozen conflicts see Klosek, K. C. et al., 'Frozen conflicts in world politics: A new dataset', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 58, no. 4 (2021), pp. 849–58.

⁴⁹ On Northern Ireland see Edwards, A. and McGrattan, C., 'Ireland, 2021: A century of insurgency, terrorism and security challenges', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 32, no. 4–5 (2021), pp. 587–97; Dixon, P., 'Bringing politics back in: Interpretations of the peace process and the security challenge in Northern Ireland', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 32, no. 4–5 (2021), pp. 812–36; and 'Northern Ireland's unhappy centenary', *The Economist*, 17 Apr. 2021.

the two countries over a minor motoring regulation dispute.⁵⁰ Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina in late 2021, Serbian leadership took steps to undermine federal institutions, sparking the worst political crisis in 20 years.⁵¹

Security challenges in the eastern Mediterranean

There are also serious and complex security challenges in Europe's southern neighbourhood and beyond.⁵² One of the most significant areas of tension in 2021 continued to be in the eastern Mediterranean, where Turkey was pitted against Cyprus and Greece, and the disagreements continued to draw in the EU, Egypt, Libya, and other states with geopolitical and economic interests in the region. Turkish–Western relations have deteriorated over multiple issues, including oil and gas exploration, maritime delimitation, the wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria, migration, Turkey's democratic backsliding, stalled EU membership negotiations, and the long-standing Cyprus conflict.⁵³

Bilateral Greek–Turkish talks aimed at addressing some of these underlying issues started in 2002 but broke down in 2016 after 60 rounds of meetings. At least three separate strands of exploratory talks resumed in the first half of 2021. First, on 25 January 2021, Greece and Turkey resumed exploratory talks on maritime issues.⁵⁴ Second, talks within the NATO-led 'deconfliction' process initiated in 2020 continued.⁵⁵ Third, talks resumed on attempting to resolve the Cyprus conflict. The foreign ministers of Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom (Cyprus's three guarantor powers) joined Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot representatives for UN-led talks in Geneva.⁵⁶ None of these talks registered a significant breakthrough, however, and the UN Security Council, in renewing the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus mandate in July, called on leaders of the two Cypriot communities to 'free' the technical committees 'from obstructions in their work' and 'to empower them to . . . enhance intercommunal contacts'.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Butcher, J. and Boffey, D., 'Tensions rise at Kosovo border as number plate row escalates', *The Guardian*, 2 Oct. 2021.

⁵¹ 'International envoy warns of Bosnia breakup amid tensions', Euronews, 2 Nov. 2021; and MacDowall, A., 'A neglected crisis in Bosnia threatens to boil over', *World Politics Review*, 23 Nov. 2021.

⁵² On armed conflicts in Afghanistan, MENA and sub-Saharan Africa see, respectively, chapter 4, section III, and chapters 6 and 7, in this volume.

⁵³ For an overview of the multifaceted dispute see International Crisis Group, *Turkey–Greece: From Maritime Brinkmanship to Dialogue*, Europe Report no. 263 (International Crisis Group: Brussels, 31 May 2021). For developments in 2020 see *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 125–26.

⁵⁴ Ozerkan, F. and Akkoc, R., 'Greece, Turkey hold first crisis talks since 2016', *Digital Journal*, 25 Jan. 2021.

⁵⁵ 'Turkey, Greece complete 9th round of NATO technical talks', *Daily Sabah*, 7 Feb. 2021.

⁵⁶ Smith, H., 'Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders to hold talks on resuming peace process', *The Guardian*, 26 Apr. 2021.

⁵⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 2587, 29 July 2021.

Relations between Greece and Turkey were further strained by new developments in their bilateral arms race.⁵⁸ Over the course of 2021, Greece entered into significant new military cooperation arrangements with France, Israel and the USA, while Turkey deepened military cooperation with Spain.⁵⁹ Turkey's intricate foreign policy positions also posed complexities within the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. For example, Turkey has worked both with and against Russia in northern Syria, has different interests from Russia in the South Caucasus, and has been involved in multiple disagreements with NATO allies, especially over the procurement of an advanced missile defence system from Russia.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Karagiannis, E., 'The coming naval arms race in the Eastern Mediterranean', Royal United Services Institute Commentary, 22 July 2021; and *SIPRI Yearbook 2021*, pp. 317–18.

⁵⁹ 'France and Greece hedge their bets with a new defence pact', *The Economist*, 2 Oct. 2021; Carassava, A., 'Greece, Israel seal \$1.6 Billion defense deal', VOA, 8 Jan. 2021; Pamuk, H., 'Blinken says renewed US–Greece defense deal to advance stability in Eastern Mediterranean', Reuters, 15 Oct. 2021; and Michalopoulos, S., 'Greece fumes over new Spain–Turkey armament deal', Euractiv, 19 Nov. 2021.

⁶⁰ See e.g. 'Turkey says Greek–French defense pact harms NATO alliance', AP News, 1 Oct. 2021; 'Turkey and Russia: Are they rivals or cooperating competitors?', *Times of India*, 11 Oct. 2021; and Miller, Z. and Boak, J., 'Biden tells Erdogan US and Turkey must avoid crises', AP News, 31 Oct. 2021.