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The “Gray Waters” Doctrine of War: The Collapse of Navigation Safety and Geopolitical Fracture in the Black Sea

On July 22, 2026, an asymmetric drone attack targeting the Turkish-flagged cargo ship M/V Reyhan Sarı as it sailed in the international waters of the Black Sea an attack that resulted in the death of a sailor once again highlighted the dangerous state of the region’s security architecture. The tension that began with the Russia-Ukraine war has, at this stage, evolved beyond a clearly defined interstate conflict; it has transformed into a full-fledged “gray zone” battlefield dominated by autonomous systems, unmanned aerial and maritime vehicles, and attacks of unknown origin. In this new theater, where affiliations are blurred and rules of engagement are disregarded, the direct targeting of civilian commerce creates not only a threat to coastal states but also a global and systemic spiral of insecurity that encompasses freedom of navigation, global logistic routes, and regional stability. The asymmetric security vulnerability in the Black Sea goes beyond isolated attacks,

creating an exponentially growing “multiplier effect” on all regional and global actors. For coastal states such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye, this situation means that their territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) are effectively becoming insecure, the principle of regional sovereignty enshrined in the Montreux Convention is being eroded, and the risk of an undesirable hot conflict on NATO’s eastern flank is escalating. On the other hand, while the crisis triggers more asymmetric responses from the warring parties out of fear of losing control, on a global scale, it subjects NATO to a difficult test between “deterrence” and “avoiding direct involvement in conflict.” This wave of instability in the Black Sea directly threatens the overall security of the international system by undermining food, energy, and logistics supply chains across a vast geography stretching from the Western alliance to the Global South. The most immediate and devastating repercussions of the asymmetric security crisis in the Black Sea are undoubtedly being felt in global supply chains and financial markets. The loss of navigational safety in this basin which serves as the main transit corridor for strategic commodities such as grain, fertilizer, coal and crude oil is leading to a global logistics gridlock. The targeting of commercial vessels by “unknown” drones and autonomous systems has led international insurance giants to designate the region as a “High War Risk Zone” under increasingly



stringent conditions; meanwhile, skyrocketing war risk premiums and soaring freight rates are triggering new inflationary pressure on a global scale. As a result, the Black Sea is transforming into a global economic flashpoint where logistics costs have reached sky-high levels, shipowners are forced to reroute or pass on risk premiums to prices, and food and energy supply security is being directly undermined particularly import-dependent regions such as Africa and the Middle East.

The escalating threat posed by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) of unknown origin in the Black Sea is effectively bringing an end to freedom of civilian navigation and undermining the global security and logistics architecture. Unless urgent and coordinated international security protocols are implemented, the Black Sea will become a massive hub of instability for all global actors, with the costs growing heavier by the day.



Houthi Tanker Attacks in Yemen and Saudi Arabia's Security Dilemma

The attacks carried out by the Iran-backed Houthis, who targeted two large Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea and increased their attacks on commercial vessels around the Bab al-

Mandab Strait, have once again brought regional security risks to the forefront. Following the attacks, US President Donald Trump made strong statements against the Houthis and Iran, which he accused of supporting them, while the United Nations expressed concern over the renewed escalation of tensions. During the same period, Saudi Arabia issued a nationwide high-level security alert for the third time against possible missile and drone attacks and increased the readiness level of its air defense systems. UN reports and international assessments also indicate that Yemen's fragile security environment carries the risk of turning into wider conflicts again. The Houthis remain one of the most influential proxy actors supported by Iran in the region. Considering the importance of the Bab al-Mandab Strait for global maritime trade, Houthi attacks in this area affect not only Saudi Arabia but also international energy transportation and global trade flows. This situation demonstrates that the tensions between Iran and the United States are not limited to direct confrontation between the two countries but are spreading to different fronts through regional actors. Therefore, Yemen continues to be one of the most sensitive areas of regional competition. Following these developments, Saudi Arabia's response will be one of the most important issues shaping the future of the crisis. In recent years, Riyadh has aimed to maintain the fragile ceasefire with the Houthis and focus on its economic transformation program,



Vision 2030. However, the targeting of oil tankers has once again placed security concerns at the center of Saudi Arabia's priorities. At this stage, Saudi Arabia is likely to strengthen its defense capabilities while also trying to avoid a direct escalation with Iran by keeping diplomatic channels open. The repeated security warnings issued by Riyadh show that the Kingdom has increased its preparedness against possible attacks but remains cautious about entering into another direct military confrontation. At the same time, the possibility that renewed conflicts in Yemen could expand beyond its borders and affect regional security through other Iran-aligned actors, such as Hezbollah, remains a significant concern. From an economic perspective, security problems in the Red Sea directly affect trade routes using the Suez Canal and global energy transportation. Rising risks in maritime security increase insurance and shipping costs, creating additional pressure on energy markets and negatively affecting regional trade. In particular, Egypt's Suez Canal revenues and the export security of Gulf countries are directly influenced by these developments. In conclusion, the Houthi attacks against Saudi oil tankers have once again demonstrated that the conflict in Yemen has consequences beyond its national borders. Continued insecurity in the Red Sea affects not only regional countries but also global energy markets and international maritime trade. In this process, Saudi Arabia's ability to balance security measures with diplomatic efforts

will be a key factor in determining both the stability of the Red Sea and the future course of regional tensions.



The Effects of the Middle Eastern Conflict on Asia's Energy Security and Economic Stability

The continuing conflict in the Middle East is causing economic issues outside the region. The attention was on military developments, but Asian economies also became some of the most affected because of their dependence on Middle East's energy supplies. According to Reuters, concerns over attacks on major shipping routes have pushed Asian liquefied natural gas-LNG prices to their highest level in four months. This showed how quickly geopolitical tensions can affect regional economies. Countries such as China, India, Japan, and South Korea import a large portion of their oil and LNG from the Middle East. This makes energy security a strategic issue because any interruption in maritime routes can directly affect industrial production and economic stability. The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most important maritime chokepoints and the Strait of Malacca connects Middle Eastern energy



supplies with East Asian economies. Risks around the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb caused shipping costs and delivery times to increase, and showed how problems in maritime routes can directly affect energy trade. According to the International Energy Agency-IEA, many Asian countries already started to change their energy strategies before the current conflict because of concerns on energy dependence. Japan has increased its focus on nuclear energy, and South Korea widened its LNG storage capacity to reduce supply risks. These policies show that Asian countries are moving from short-term crisis management to long-term energy strategies. According to Reuters, governments and companies are looking for safer and more flexible LNG contracts to reduce the risks.

The economic effects are not limited with the energy industry. Higher fuel prices increase transportation and production costs and this can cause higher inflation risks. Reuters reported that oil prices are now above 100 US dollars per barrel because of concerns about shipping routes. The impact is different depending on countries' economic structure. Countries with large manufacturing sectors like South Korea and Vietnam are especially at risk because they depend heavily on exports, imported raw materials, and maritime transportation. According to Reuters, the World Bank estimates that continuing conflict could reduce global economic growth to 1.3% in the worst-case scenario.

One of the main causes affecting how Asian economies respond to the crisis is energy dependence. China faces higher costs when oil prices rise because it is the world's largest crude oil importer. India is also vulnerable because it imports most of its crude oil. For China and India, energy security is not only an economic issue but also a strategic priority because both want to maintain growth and increase their regional influence. They are reducing these risks by diversifying energy suppliers and building stronger maritime partnerships. India's latest agreements with Australia, Indonesia, and New Zealand also reflect this strategy.

The conflict has also strengthened the connection between economic policy and national security. The crisis encourages investment in energy diversification, renewable energy, nuclear power, and regional cooperation. The long-term consequence of the conflict will not only be higher energy prices but also a transformation in how Asian countries understand economic security.



USA–Saudi Arabia Nuclear Agreement: The 123 Agreement



On 22 July 2026, the United States and Saudi Arabia signed an agreement on nuclear cooperation. The agreement covers cooperation in the field of civilian nuclear energy. However, Donald Trump emphasized that the United States would not permit uranium enrichment activities that could pave the way for the development of nuclear weapons. On 23 July, Trump further announced that the agreement would not automatically enter into force, making Saudi Arabia's accession to the Abraham Accords a prior condition. This development suggests that the agreement is not just an energy cooperation arrangement but also a strategic instrument designed to achieve wider geopolitical objectives.

From Israel's perspective, the agreement can be evaluated from two different way. At first sight, Saudi Arabia's gain of civilian nuclear capabilities may be perceived as a potential security concern, particularly in light of previous statements by Saudi officials regarding Israel's nuclear capabilities. However, Trump's decision to condition the agreement on Saudi Arabia's participation in the Abraham Accords transforms what could have been a strategic disadvantage for Israel into a potential diplomatic advantage. By improving relations with Israel through the normalization process, Saudi Arabia's nuclear capabilities would be less

likely to be perceived as a direct threat to Israeli security. Moreover, Saudi Arabia's accession to the Abraham Accords could strengthen Israel's international legitimacy and contribute to reducing the diplomatic isolation it has experienced in recent years. From Saudi Arabia's perspective, although the agreement represents an important step toward diversifying its energy resources, it also offers the prospect of deepening strategic cooperation with the United States and strengthening its position against Iran. These potential benefits may encourage the Saudi leadership to overlook the political costs associated with accepting the condition of joining the Abraham Accords. If this occurs, the agreement could not only contribute to alleviating Israel's international isolation but also increase the likelihood of the Palestinian issue becoming less central in the process of Arab-Israeli normalization.

In conclusion, if Saudi Arabia accepts the conditions put forward by Trump, the agreement will undoubtedly represent an important development in terms of expanding the Saudi Arabia's alternative energy sources. Nevertheless, when viewed from a broader geopolitical perspective, the agreement is likely to reinforce Saudi Arabia's dependence on the United States in the field of civilian nuclear energy while serving the wider strategic objectives of both USA and Israel by increasing their diplomatic influence and reshaping the regional political landscape.



The Trump–Aoun Summit and the Balance of Power in the Middle East

The meeting between United States President Donald Trump and Lebanese President Joseph Aoun at the White House on 21 July was important not only for relations between the two countries but also for the security balance on the Israel-Lebanon border and Iran's influence in the region. The announcement that the United States would restart direct flights to Lebanon for the first time in about forty years, along with Washington's renewed support for Lebanese state institutions, shows that the Trump administration wants Beirut to become an important diplomatic partner again.

The main topic of the meeting was Israel's military presence in southern Lebanon and the future of Hezbollah. According to Reuters, President Aoun told Trump that "Israel's complete withdrawal from Lebanese territory is an urgent requirement for restoring the country's stability and state sovereignty." At the same time, the Lebanese government argued that there should be no armed groups outside the control of

the state. It also presented Washington with a plan to place Hezbollah's weapons under state authority. After the meeting, Trump said that the United States would continue to support Lebanon and announced that he had ordered the restart of direct commercial flights to the country. However, he did not give a clear statement about Israel's complete withdrawal from southern Lebanon. This shows that Washington wants to continue supporting the diplomatic process while keeping its pressure on Israel within certain limits. Al Jazeera also noted that Trump made symbolic gestures but did not make a firm commitment regarding Israel's withdrawal. According to Axios, the United States plan is not only to maintain the ceasefire but also to encourage Israeli forces to withdraw from certain areas, allow the Lebanese army to take control of those areas, and gradually reduce Hezbollah's influence. The "pilot areas" created under this plan are seen as confidence-building measures between the parties. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio also said that a strong and sovereign Lebanese state is the only legitimate security actor that can replace Hezbollah. This statement clearly shows Washington's main strategic goal. However, there are still serious challenges. Israel is not willing to withdraw completely unless Hezbollah's military capability is fully removed, while it is still uncertain whether Hezbollah will agree to disarm. According to The Guardian, the recent tensions between Israel and the Lebanese army before the meeting show that



the security situation on the ground remains fragile. In addition, the tensions between the United States and Iran during the same period have made Lebanon part of a wider regional competition. Overall, the Trump–Aoun meeting was not just a routine diplomatic meeting to improve relations between the two countries. It was a broader discussion that included several connected strategic goals, such as Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, strengthening the sovereignty of the Lebanese state, limiting Hezbollah's military power, and reducing Iran's influence in the region. For this reason, the meeting at the White House can be seen as more than a short-term diplomatic event. It may become an important step in shaping a new security framework in the Middle East.



Record Level of Immigrant Employment in the EU

As of 2025, the immigrant population residing in the European Union has reached 64.2 million, marking the highest level in the last fifteen years. The rapid increase of 24 million from the 2010 figure of 40 million signals a political and economic transformation.

market policy rather than merely a matter of migration management.

From an international relations perspective, this situation goes beyond the classic push-pull model and is directly linked to the structural labor shortages facing EU member states. According to data from late 2025, the number of job vacancies across the Union exceeded 3.2 million, while Germany saw its labor shortage rate reach a record high. In this context, the rise in immigrant employment can be interpreted as a mechanism to offset the supply-demand imbalance. Indeed, the employment rate for immigrants hit a historic peak of 68.2% in 2025, marking a 0.4 percentage point increase compared to the previous year. While this figure is approaching the EU's overall employment rate of 76.1% (for the 20–64 age group), a significant gap remains.

From a political science perspective, a striking point is that, despite this structural need, migration policies have increasingly shifted toward a restrictive stance. During this same period, the number of new migrants entering the EU fell to a four-year low in 2024, while deportation orders hit a ten-year high. This situation clearly illustrates the tension between economic rationality and political rhetoric. While the labor market deepens its reliance on migrant labor, public pressure and the rise of populist political actors are driving governments toward harsher border policies.



This demonstrates that migration management in Europe no longer operates within a coherent framework at either the national or EU level; rather, it is shaped at the intersection of conflicting policy domains—such as the economy, security, and identity politics.

Furthermore, the issue of highly educated immigrants being employed in jobs below their qualification levels indicates that the EU is failing to effectively utilize its pool of talent. Barriers related to the non-recognition of degrees and professional licensing requirements lead to productivity losses at both the individual and macroeconomic levels. Consequently, the record rise in immigrant employment within the EU reflects a structural dependency shaped by an aging population and labor shortages, rather than a short-term cyclical fluctuation. However, this dependency has not yet translated into a governance model aligned with political rhetoric.



**Great Power Competition at the ASEAN Summit:
Balancing Between the United States and China**

The ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, held in Manila, the capital of the Philippines, was no longer just a diplomatic platform for discussing Southeast Asia's regional issues. This year, it became one of the main centers of global geopolitical competition. The meeting between United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi helped prepare the diplomatic ground for the expected Trump–Xi Jinping summit. At the same time, tensions in the South China Sea, the crisis in Myanmar, the war in Ukraine, and the growing conflicts in the Middle East were discussed as major security issues.

According to Reuters, Rubio told ASEAN countries that the United States remains committed to the Indo-Pacific region. He also said that Washington's efforts to improve relations with China would not mean ignoring its allies in the region. This statement gave important reassurance to ASEAN countries, especially after recent claims that the Trump administration had shifted its foreign policy focus toward the Middle East and Europe. During Rubio's ninety-minute meeting with Wang Yi, the two sides also discussed preparations for the Trump–Xi meeting planned for September. China, on the other hand, sees ASEAN as a key diplomatic area for protecting its regional influence. According to the reports, Wang Yi stressed that the United States should



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respect China's "core interests." He also made it clear that China's position on Taiwan and the South China Sea would not change. China's ongoing maritime disputes with the Philippines remain one of the main security issues on ASEAN's agenda. Even so, both Washington and Beijing appear willing to continue diplomatic dialogue and avoid direct conflict. This shows that both sides are trying to keep their competition under control. One of the most important parts of the summit was the growing impact of developments in the Middle East on the Indo-Pacific region. According to AP News, Rubio said that Iran's pressure on the Strait of Hormuz threatens not only the Gulf region but also Asian economies that depend heavily on energy imports. He stressed that protecting freedom of navigation and energy security is very important for the global economy. As a result, the impact of the Middle East security crisis on the regional economy became one of the main topics discussed at the ASEAN meetings for the first time.

The civil war in Myanmar and the continuing tensions in the South China Sea also remain major security problems that ASEAN has struggled to solve. Countries in the region want to continue their economic relations with China while also keeping the security support of the United States. This situation is putting pressure on ASEAN's long-standing policy of maintaining a balance between the major powers.

Overall, the meetings in Manila showed that

ASEAN is no longer only an organisation dealing with Southeast Asia's regional issues. It has become an important platform where US-China strategic competition is managed, energy security is discussed, and global crises are addressed through diplomacy. The messages from Rubio and Wang Yi about continuing dialogue may help keep tensions under control in the short term.



EU-China Diplomacy: High-Stakes Beijing Talks and the Ukraine Pressure Point

As global trade rules, tech competition, and security dynamics undergo a major rewrite, diplomacy between the European Union and China has crossed another critical threshold. A senior delegation from the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) recently wrapped up an extensive official visit to Beijing and Shanghai. Coming at a time when economic interdependence and geopolitical friction are both peaking, these high level meetings naturally drew worldwide attention, sitting right at the crossroads of Transatlantic strategy and Eurasian power balances.

CIA documents declassified by the Donald Trump administration have brought the issue of election integrity allegations in Venezuela back to the international agenda. According to the documents reported by the BBC, it is estimated that Venezuela's electoral system—including its technical infrastructure—has theoretically possessed the capacity to alter vote counts by approximately 1.5 million votes since 2012. Consequently, these documents should be treated as intelligence indicating clear manipulation of election results and, more specifically, the electoral system itself. To understand the election controversies in Venezuela, it is important to examine the political history of the Bolivarian movement. Bolivarianism is a political ideology named after Simón Bolívar—the hero of Latin American independence—and is based on the Trade imbalances and geopolitical rivalries dominated the agenda, alongside rising tariffs, supply chain vulnerabilities, and restrictions on semiconductor chips. While Brussels continues to push its "de-risking" approach, aiming to minimize strategic exposure without severing economic ties entirely, Beijing urged its European counterparts to steer clear of protectionist trade measures. Throughout the talks, both sides closely weighed each other's economic moves while quietly exploring potential avenues for cooperation on green transition initiatives and mutual market access.

Beyond the trade disputes, the most pressing item on the table was Russia's war in Ukraine.

Throughout their meetings in Beijing, European lawmakers pressed Chinese officials to leverage their political and economic influence over Moscow to help bring about a lasting ceasefire. Western capitals remain deeply concerned about how China's ongoing commercial ties with Russia shape the trajectory of the war. Beijing, for its part, reiterated its standard position: framing itself as an outside party to the conflict while advocating for a negotiated diplomatic resolution. Engagements at this level remain essential for managing friction between two of the world's largest economic engines. Even as intense competition plays out across tech and trade, keeping lines of communication open helps stabilize the broader relationship. Ultimately, the expectations set out by European lawmakers in Beijing highlight a simple reality: the future of global commerce and international security will depend heavily on how these diplomatic exchanges unfold in the months ahead.