

DGAP REPORT

Three Scenarios for Europe's Conflict Landscape in 2030



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BUILDING THE SCENARIOS

In September 2020, the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) conducted an expert workshop on the future of conflict for Europe. Participants from across the continent were invited to develop forward-looking scenarios for crises impacting European security up until 2030.

The aim and purpose of this undertaking was to test a foresight methodology for developing an EU Civilian Capability Profile for EU crisis management. An important first step for this exercise was to sketch out a panorama of conflicts that the EU could be confronted with in and around 2030. Subsequently, the scenarios provided the foundation for an exercise in strategic planning. During follow-up sessions in October 2020, we established capability areas for possible civilian CSDP missions for the scenarios. Details and lessons learned can be found in [the accompanying Policy Brief](#).

The foresight methodology that was used does not claim to predict the future, but rather to develop a probable version of the future. Exploring a well-thought-out possible future is an opportunity to improve early warning, more efficiently allocate resources, and future-proof overall decision-making. Therefore, this methodology can help the EU and its member states make long-term decisions about the future of EU civilian crisis management and its role in the EU's external action toolbox. For this purpose, we tweaked a classic foresight methodology to accommodate our field of interest, and transferred it online due to the coronavirus pandemic.

To ensure the relative likelihood that the EU would mandate a civilian mission and deploy experts in the crisis scenarios, we assigned to each working group a region with geographical proximity to Europe. Additionally, we made sure that the scenarios were diverse in terms of conflict type and theatre (urban, network and regional) in order to set the stage for the development of a comprehensive EU Civilian Capability Profile 2030. The three scenarios our participants developed depict a wide range of conflict aspects, ranging from nuclear waste fallout to the online distribution of deep-fake videos and the fight against propaganda narratives; from geopolitical clashes between major powers to confrontation with armed non-state groups and organized activist protests;

from the consequences of climate change and government failure through cyber and financial warfare to state repression and surveillance with AI technology; from threats to cultural heritage and humanitarian issues to maritime security and freedom of navigation. This variety provided a robust foundation for the second step: capability derivation.

We would like to extend our gratitude to all our participants who, with their expert knowledge and inspiring ideas, made this exercise a success. Without their contributions and readiness to test this methodology, we could not have ventured into these unknown waters. It is thanks to them that we can present these scenarios and evaluate our experience in [this Policy Brief](#).

The workshop series was conducted as part of a project financed by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

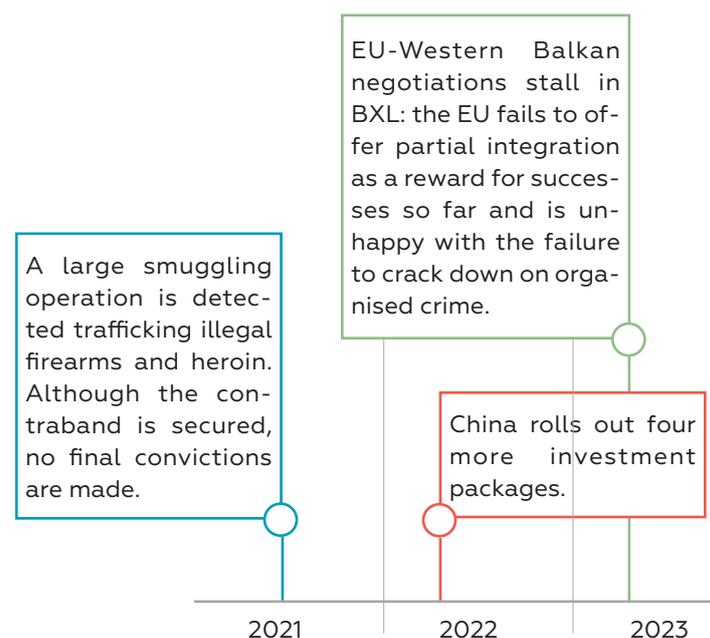
Scenario I: Networked Conflict in the Western Balkans

A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE: WHAT DOES 2030 LOOK LIKE?

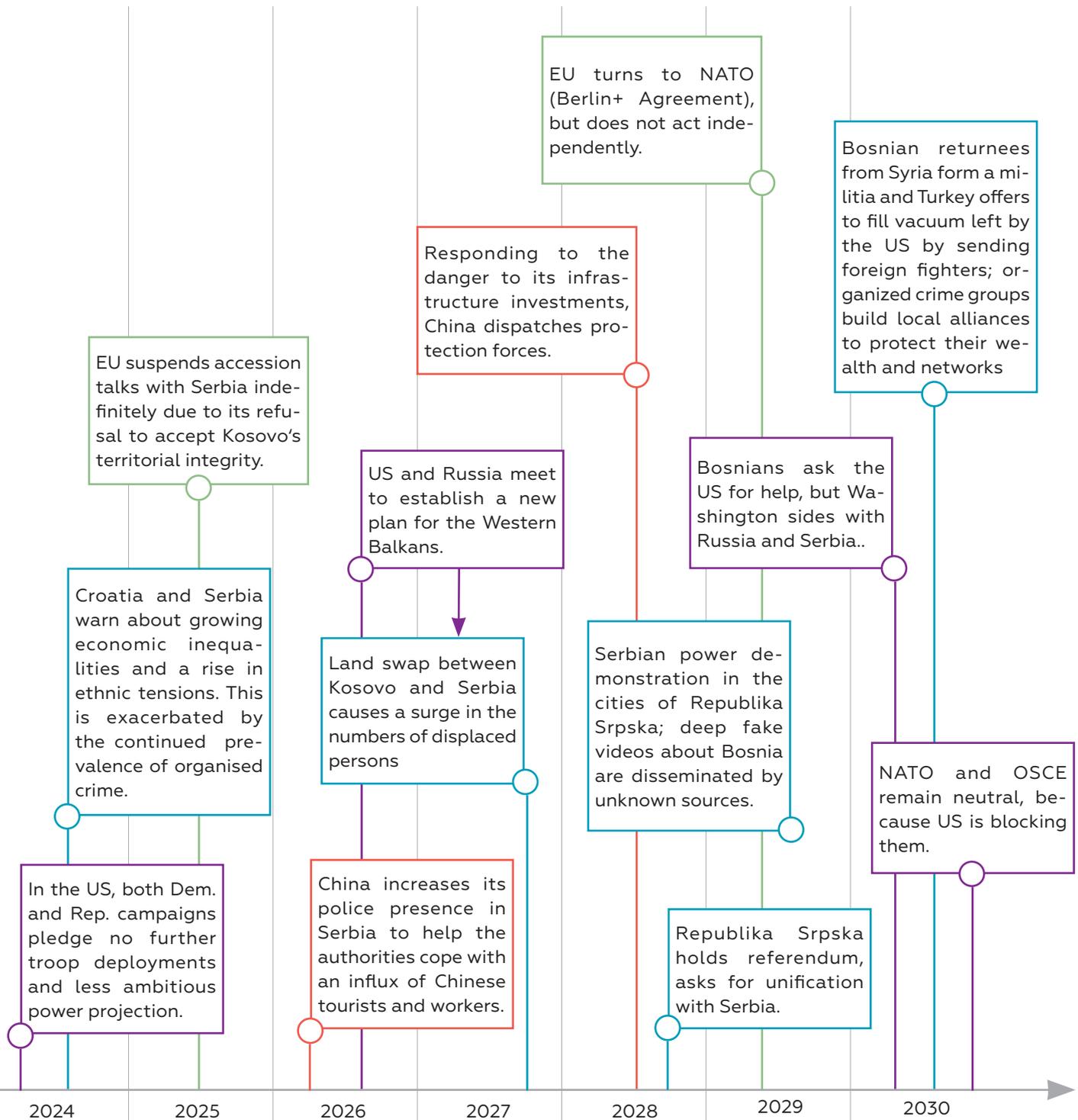
In the year 2030, many different actors are active in the Western Balkans. Russia and the US have come to a new agreement for the region involving, inter alia, a land swap between Kosovo and Serbia. As a result, Bosnia's Republic Srpska entity holds a referendum on independence, before requesting unification with Serbia. Serbia promptly engages in demonstrations of power in cities across Republika Srpska. Simultaneously, a slew of deep fake videos about Bosnia appear online, but it proves difficult to attribute responsibility. In response, Bosnians, some of them returnees from Syria, form a militia in self-defense and turn to the US for assistance. However, earlier in the 2020s, the US denied Bosnia accession to NATO, and now it sides with Russia and the Serbs in order to protect its Balkan agreement. Instead, Turkey offers help and sends fighters. China also deploys protection forces to safeguard the infrastructure projects it has been pursuing in the country for many years. Organized criminal networks form different local alliances to protect their wealth, or act independently to secure their future economic activities. At this point, the conflict is not yet openly violent, consisting only of sporadic clashes. Still, many groups are armed and ready to fight, and there is huge potential for further escalation. Displaced persons and civilians risk being at the mercy of the fighting.

DRIVERS: WHICH UNDERLYING DEVELOPMENTS LEAD TO THIS SCENARIO FOR 2030?

- **Regional Governance:** Insufficient political response to urbanization and demographic change, combined with brain drain to further increase inequality and poverty. High levels of corruption and organized crime weaken governance, and cause grievances and discontent amongst different groups.
- **EU Action:** The rapprochement process is stalling in most areas. Conflicting historic narratives among Serbs and Bosnians remain a spoiler, and do not allow for ethnic depolarization.
- **Chinese Power Projection:** China proves its global ambitions by increasing its reach and presence on Europe's doorstep. It signs investment deals to expand its geopolitical sphere of influence. The US remains a systemic opponent.
- **US Power Projection:** The US regards China as a rival for influence, resources, and alliances on the global stage, but is hesitant to match Chinese engagement. To mitigate costs, it cooperates with Russia where their interests align, and where doing so allows the US to demonstrate power vis-à-vis China. As a result, NATO is weakened.



A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE: HOW DO THESE EVENTS COME ABOUT?



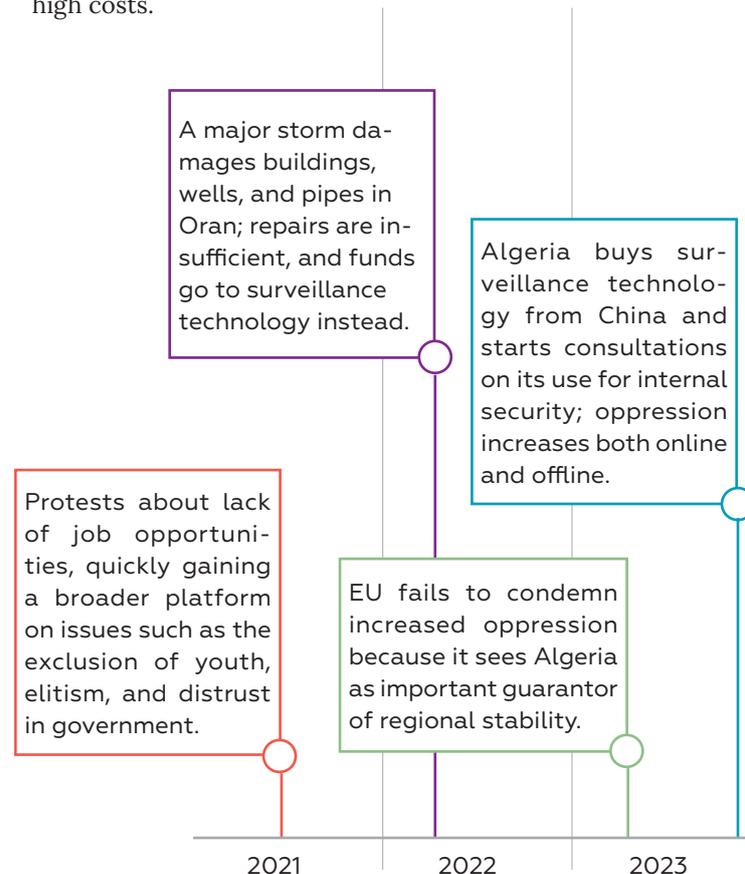
Scenario II: Urban Conflict in Northern Africa

A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE: WHAT DOES 2030 LOOK LIKE?

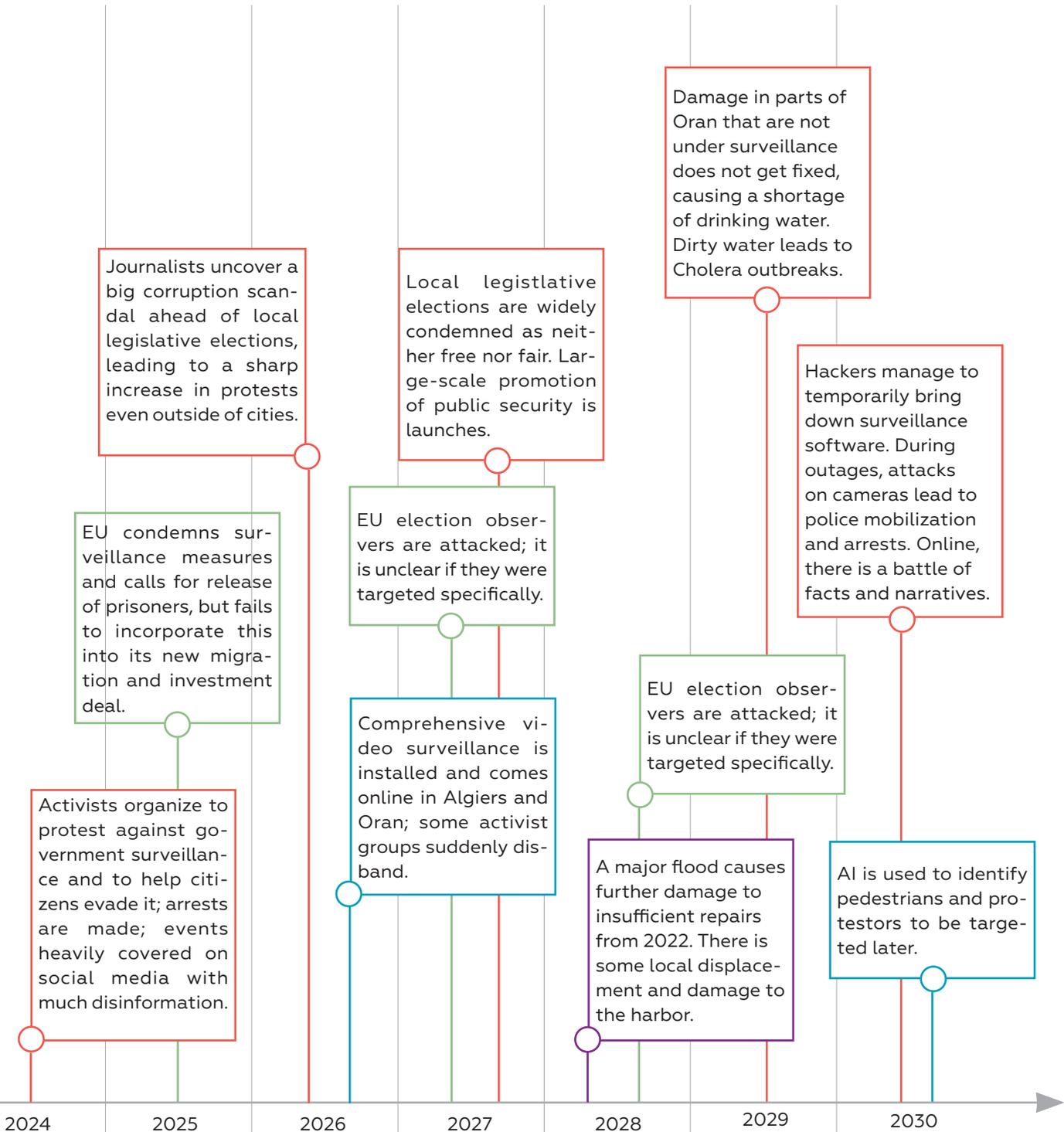
In 2030, the city of Oran in Algeria is divided, with ongoing street protests flaring up, and violence escalating between protesters, vigilante groups, and police. All major public places and streets have surveillance technology installed. Apartment blocks where protesters and dissidents are known to hide are closed off and lack sufficient access to clean drinking water. Cases of Cholera have been reported, but people living in dissident blocks are denied access to hospitals and fear arrest due to AI face recognition. Hackers sometimes manage to take down the surveillance system. When this happens, activists try to attack cameras, but the police are on stand-by. Outages are also used to smuggle water, food, and other supplies into the closed-off areas of the city. Occasionally, the government turns a blind eye, not wanting the situation to escalate further and compromise Oran as a trading center. Online, there is a battle of facts and narratives that neither side is winning.

DRIVERS: WHICH UNDERLYING DEVELOPMENTS LEAD TO THIS SCENARIO FOR 2030?

- Government Repression:** With a lack of economic success as a main pressure point, the government increases oppression. It also employs surveillance technology and invests heavily in being able to track and trace dissidents. This approach leads to continuously hardening fronts as many people are excluded from political participation. Sudden police crackdowns on opposition groups result in sporadic violence.
- EU Action:** EU policies towards conflict areas such as Iraq, Yemen, Libya focus on counterterrorism and stability rather than reform because these are the only topics on which member states can find agreement. With only minimum engagement in conflict management, the EU remains a bystander in many crises. Within the EU itself, minorities are insufficiently well integrated.
- Civil Society:** Inequality and poverty lead to polarization and frustration. A lack of economic opportunities politicizes the youth, and insufficient access to basic services radicalizes different societal groups. Social media is used to fight against the government's narrative of public security, and to organize activism.
- Climate Change:** The high impact of climate change puts a heavy strain on resources, and leads to an increase in extreme weather events such as storms, droughts, and floods. The latter result in damages with high costs.



A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE: HOW DO THESE EVENTS COME ABOUT?



Scenario III: Regional Conflict in Northern Europe

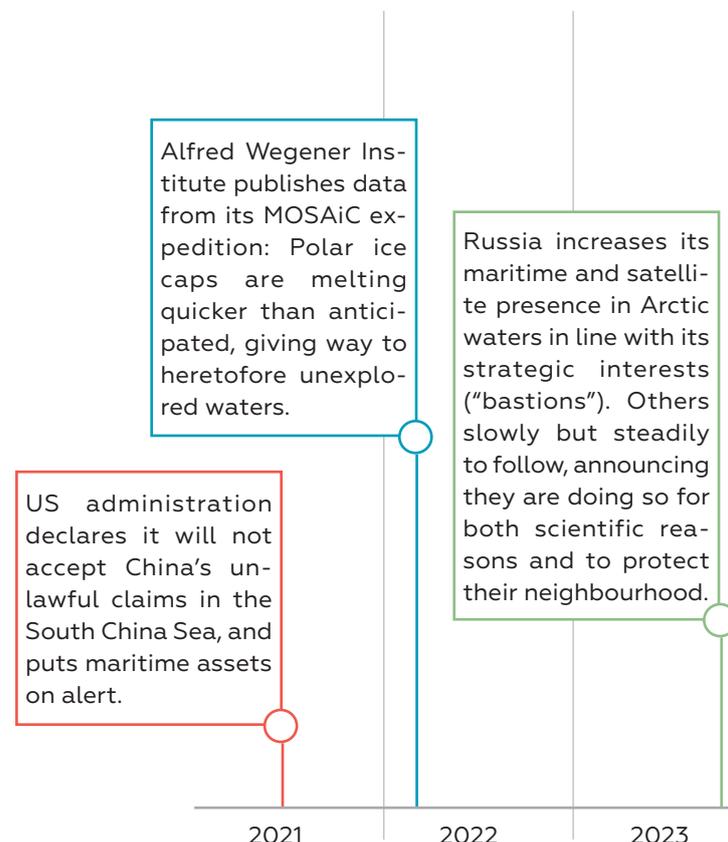
A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE: WHAT DOES 2030 LOOK LIKE?

In 2030, the Arctic waters to the north of Europe are a crowded place. Polar ice caps have melted even faster than anticipated, allowing for exploration in relation to trade routes, general research, and geopolitical influence. China, Russia, the US and to some extent European powers are all present and active in the Arctic. After a submarine collision that leads to nuclear leakage, there is little reliable information on who is responsible or what the ecological, legal, and other consequences are, and all sides hold each other responsible. Russia, in line with the logic of its "protective power of the Arctic" narrative, establishes itself as the only country looking out for Northern Sami people and helps them to deal with the fallout on Norwegian soil. NATO, weakened by the continuous, opportunistic US-Russian alliance vis-à-vis China, fails to back Norway up. Russia prepares for a referendum on introducing Russian jurisdiction over an area populated primarily by Northern Sami.

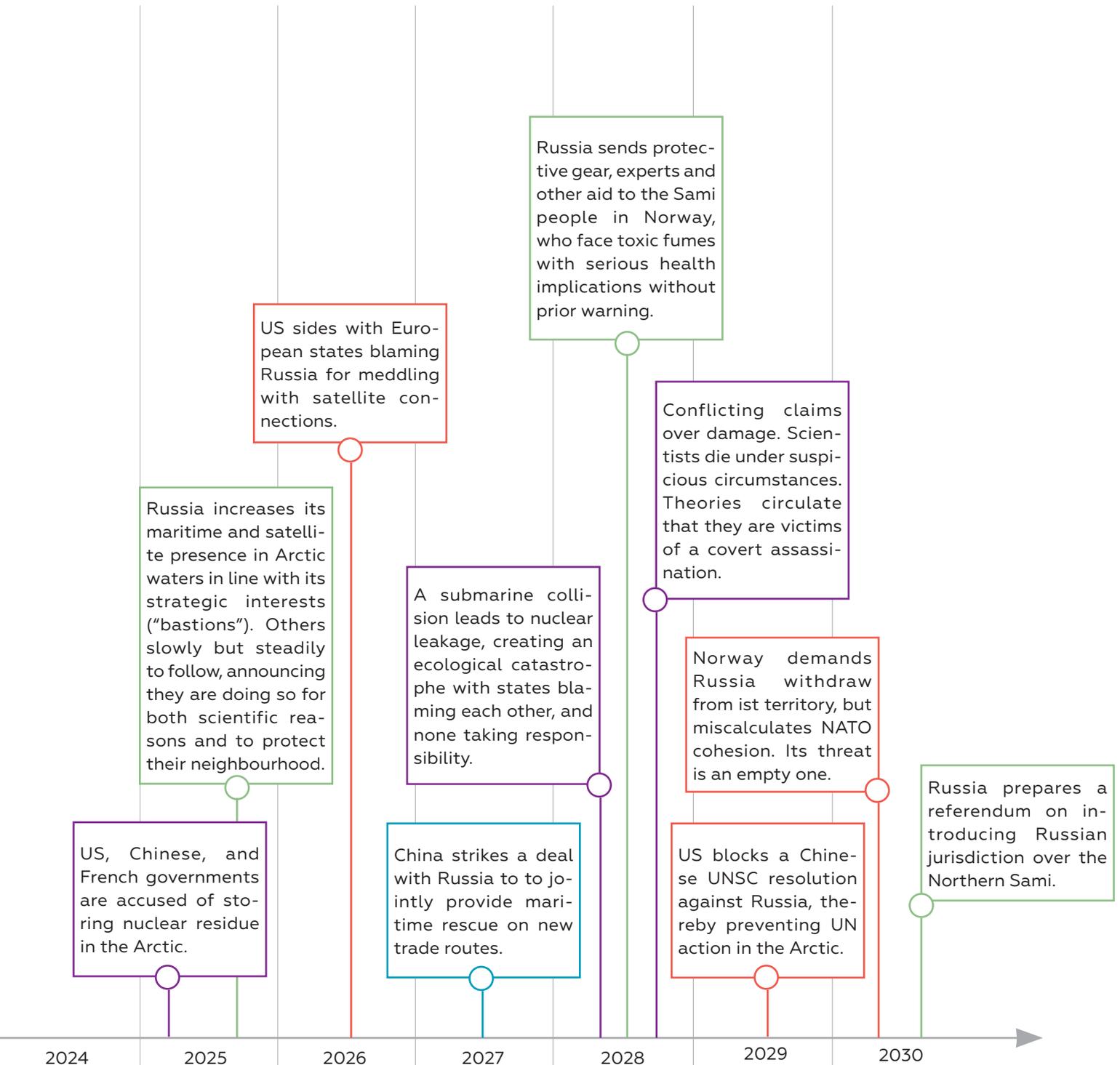
DRIVERS: WHICH UNDERLYING DEVELOPMENTS LEAD TO THIS SCENARIO FOR 2030?

- **Climate Change:** Polar ice melts even faster than anticipated, giving way to unexplored waters and new opportunities in the Arctic. Uncertain prospects lead to a general climate in society that is receptive to the exploitation of fears, for example regarding resource stress. Nuclear energy is favored over coal. There is no permanent solution to storing atomic waste.

- **Russian Narrative:** There is increased geopolitical competition between China and the US. Russia opportunistically plays them off against each other, hoping this will help the country stay relevant. It juxtaposes its actions with a narrative about its sense of mission and rightful place in the world.
- **US Power Projection:** The US regards China as a rival for influence, resources, and alliances on the global stage, but is hesitant to match Chinese engagement. To mitigate costs, it cooperates with Russia where their interests align, and where doing so allows the US to demonstrate power vis-à-vis China. As a result, NATO is weakened.
- **Politicization of the Arctic:** States race to deploy new technologies for reasons of prestige, as well as the opportunities for power, trade, and research that they might yield. This leads to an increasing desire to contest maritime law, for example rules relating to fishing rights and the freedom of navigation. Satellite reconnaissance rises in importance.



A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE: HOW DO THESE EVENTS COME ABOUT?



PARTICIPANTS

The organizers would like to thank all participants for bringing their expertise and experience to the table and engaging in this discussion. We extend our sincere gratitude for the time and energy invested throughout the scenario-building exercise before, during and after the workshops.

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Please note that the whole exercise consisted of two rounds of workshops. While there was big overlap in participation, some experts partook in only the scenario-building or the capability derivation exercises. We are grateful to everyone who participated in whatever capacity, and credit them in the [Policy Brief](#). For precision, this list names all those who participated in the first round of scenario-building.

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