



# Scenarios for Governance Breakdown and Violent Conflict in the EU's Neighbourhood

 **EU-LISTCO**

Europe's External Action and the Dual Challenges  
of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders

**VISUALIZING  
SCENARIOS**

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# Scenarios for Governance Breakdown and Violent Conflict in the EU's Neighbourhood

This booklet presents 13 scenarios for governance breakdown and violent conflict in the EU's neighbourhood which were created in the context of the EU-LISTCO research project.

Scenarios are plausible thought experiments about alternative future developments. Each is useful for learning something new about a topic and its uncertain future. Useful scenarios are not probable or likely from a current perspective because they necessarily diverge from current expectations. The usefulness of a scenarios lies in the eyes of its creators. To their authors, each offers new perspectives and a deeper understanding of the topics in question.

We hope this booklet helps readers learn something new, broaden their horizons and think differently about the scenario topics. We would, however, ask all readers to recognize the origin of the scenarios as briefly described below. This is crucial for their understanding, as the scenarios cannot and were never meant to offer a neutral perspective on future developments.



For more information:  
[www.eu-listco.net](http://www.eu-listco.net)

Visualizations based on the findings of the *'Report on Four Threat-Scanning Workshops'*, co-authored by Sarah Bressan, Johannes Gabriel, Philipp Rotmann & Dominic Seefeldt (GPPi).  
Visuals produced by Oriol Farrés (CIDOB).

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## The Origin of the Scenarios

The scenarios below are the result of four threat-scanning exercises with expert participants about potential governance breakdown and violent conflict in the European Union's neighbourhood. Each deliberately focuses on developments that may be considered surprising or even unlikely, but plausible. The chosen time horizon for each exercise was five years into the future (looking from 2018–19 ahead to 2023–24) in order to anticipate threats for the European Union in a way that is timely with respect to the dynamics of the policy process and the reaction speed of most relevant policy instruments for foreign services. The scenarios are intended to help enhance the EU's capacity to prevent these threatening developments or to prepare for them – a main concern of the EU-LISTCO project.

A small group of experts (between 8 and 15) participated in each of the four exercises, which were conducted in part online and in part at a workshop. The groups consisted of EU-LISTCO researchers with relevant regional or sectoral expertise, additional experts from Europe and the focus regions, and policymakers from cooperating foreign services (France, Germany, Italy, and the EU EEAS). The four workshops took place between June 2018 and May 2019 in Jerusalem, Berlin, Paris, and Brussels, and covered the following geographical and thematic areas:

- **Middle East:** In order to be open to a multitude of potential risk factors and threats, the exercise focused on the 'region between the Eastern Mediterranean and Afghanistan'. Starting in mid 2018, the looked ahead to 2023.
- **Eastern Neighbourhood:** This exercise focused on regional risks in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, including the countries of the EU's Eastern Partnership – which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine – and on the Russian Federation. Starting in late 2018, the exercise looked ahead to 2023.

- **North Africa:** This exercise focused on regional risks in the EU's southern neighbourhood, including in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Participating experts decided to build scenarios for Tunisia and Libya. Starting in early 2019, the exercise looked ahead to 2024.

- **Out-of-Control Technologies:** This exercise covered diffuse risks that are not geographically contingent or are non-territorial in nature. Namely, these risks are related to out-of-control technologies that have become independent of their origin and creators, whether by design or accident. Starting in early 2019, the exercise looked ahead to 2024.

Scenarios are produced in a structured group process, because only collectively can people break out of their individual mindsets, current expectations and common sense of what the future might hold. The scenarios are the result of a methodologically guided and facilitated process in which a diverse group of experts share and integrate their views, perspectives and knowledge in order to learn from each other and to explore plausible (not probable) future developments. The process and methodology that were utilized to create the scenarios are described in Sarah Bressan, Johannes Gabriel, Philipp Rotmann and Dominic Seefeldt's, "Report on Four Threat Scanning Workshops", EU-LISTCO Deliverable 2.3, August 2019 (available from the authors).

# Scenarios for Governance Breakdown and Violent Conflict in the EU's Neighbourhood

## **Middle East**

1. To the Brink of an Arab World War
2. How the Hashemites Lose Control of Jordan
3. Yankee Goes Home

## **Eastern Neighbourhood**

4. Russian Reboot
5. When Putin's Away, the Mice Will Play
6. Russian Red Button

## **North Africa**

7. Libyan Drought and China's Rescue
8. Libyan Drought and International Neglect
9. Tunisia's Vicious Cycle
10. Tunisia Between the Crescent and the Gun

## **Out-of-control Technologies**

11. DATA Revival
12. RoboDaddy
13. Closed Bubbles, Open Net

⇒ **Tipping Point 1:** An Iraqi government that is perceived to be firmly taking Tehran's side – rather than continuing its balancing act between Riyadh and Tehran – has enormously damaging effects on two levels: Domestically, it shatters the Sunni majority's as well as the many other minorities' fragile trust in a cross-sectarian polity that is committed to dealing fairly with all groups, and thus erodes the Iraqi state's legitimacy among most of its population. Across Sunni Arab states, it amplifies deep-seated fears of Iranian domination and thus fuels an escalatory spiral that would be very hard to control.

## 2019

### 2019: Shi'ite alliance revived

In 2019, Iran completely pulls out of the nuclear deal. European efforts to stabilize the treaty have failed. Iran unofficially restarts its nuclear weapons program. In reaction, an increasingly worried US administration bolsters the number of American troops in the region. Meanwhile, in Baghdad, protracted negotiations between political blocs produce an al-Sadr government that begins to maneuver Iraq slowly and, at first, informally into a Shi'ite alliance with Iran [TP1].

### 2019: Nuclear arms race

In response to the Iranian nuclear revival and early signs of Iraq being drawn into a more and more threatening Shi'ite alliance run by Tehran, Riyadh approaches the Pakistani government for help with a Saudi nuclear program. A constant stream of rumours about progress in both the Iranian and the Saudi nuclear programs further fuels already existing tensions in the region.

## 2023

### 2023: The standoff escalates

April 2023: Violent skirmishes at the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia claim the lives of several Saudi and Iranian soldiers. As Iran mobilizes more forces, there are attacks on Iranian critical infrastructure: electricity production, water supplies, and enhanced oil recovery. Iran holds Saudi Arabia responsible and hints at nuclear escalation, which gets the US involved and in turn triggers Russia to send 50 aircrafts to Iran. Israel calls up its reservists and the Israeli Defense Force alert is set to the highest level.

### 2023: Displacement and regional collapse

The region is on the brink of complete governance breakdown. Existing violent conflicts (e.g., in Iraq, Syria and Yemen) begin to escalate. Meanwhile, there is an increasing risk of violent conflict in countries like Lebanon, with the potential for mass displacement of tens of millions of people toward Europe (including the many who previously found safe haven in Lebanon).

### 2023: Europe has failed

The economic consequences for the region are devastating. Conflict prevention has failed once more, and European foreign policy makers are out of options: just coping with the refugee influx, the economic effects, and the politics of ensuring Israel's survival pushes EU governance to its limits and beyond. Peace and stability along Europe's southeastern neighbourhood will be out of reach for years to come.

## 2020

### 2020: The crown prince fails

By 2020, Mohammed bin Salman's talk of reforms in Saudi Arabia are increasingly seen as empty promises by the Saudi population. Rising unemployment leads to protests and civil unrest, particularly among disadvantaged populations such as the Shi'a in the Eastern Province, but also among elite groups previously marginalized by the crown prince.

### 2020: Civil war in Iraq

In Iraq, the formalization of the alliance with Iran is understood as cementing the claim of Shi'ite sectarian political blocs to power, contradicting all previous promises of cross-sectarian politics and putting the final nail in the coffin of failed post-ISIL reconciliation. In response to local armed protests across the country, in which angry young Sunni Arabs apparently link up with remnants of ISIL terrorist groups, Sadr's government formally invites Iranian military support to prevent a complete breakdown of security governance. Beefing up the numerous but militarily ineffective Popular Mobilization Forces, additional Iranian militias from the region move into Iraq, along with their Revolutionary Guard handlers, to control the mostly Sunni Arab protesters. This proves to be an explosive mix that quickly spawns a set of full-blown armed rebellions by Sunnis against a Shi'a-dominated state and its foreign allies. The call for help to Tehran, intended to restore control, has backfired and tipped Iraq back into insurgency [TP2].



## 2021

### 2021: Repression in Saudi Arabia

Due to the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen, tens of thousands of Yemenis – both Shi'a and Sunni – flee into Saudi Arabia. In 2021, furthered by the civil unrest and the challenges of managing the growing Yemeni refugee population in Saudi Arabia, Shi'ite refugees and Saudi Shi'ites suffer a series of atrocities. These reports become a rallying cry among Shi'a clerics across the region. There are rumours of clandestine Iranian military support to Shi'a underground groups in Saudi Arabia and, in turn, more repression by the Saudi security forces.

## 2022

### 2022: Iran-Saudi standoff

In response to several synchronized terrorist attacks against high-profile targets in Saudi Arabia in early 2022, the regime in Riyadh mobilizes forces along the Saudi-Iraqi border to prevent further "Iranian infiltration". Iran responds in kind, deploying larger IRGC formations to the Iraqi side of the border. With Iraq in a state of civil war – and all its neighbouring states involved in the conflict – tensions run high. Saudi and Iranian forces face each other at the border for a year. A single random border incident near Hafar Al-Batin leads to escalations in 2023 [TP3].

⇒ **Tipping Point 2:** If the government fails to provide security on its own and instead relies on official Iranian military support as a last-ditch effort to prevent a breakdown of security governance, the result is violent conflict in several of Iraq's regions. Even worse, bringing in Iran triggers a disproportionate Saudi response, and therefore heightens the risk of violent conflict at the regional level. With Iraq in a precarious state of political recovery from the war with the Islamic State, it would take little to tip the fragile balance back into violent conflict.

⇒ **Tipping Point 3:** The deployment of Iranian and Saudi forces at the Iraqi-Saudi border amid extreme tensions all but guarantees violent incidents and their spiralling out of control into a major regional war. Existing violent conflicts across the region escalate; simmering tensions spark additional violent conflicts.



### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

- Armed rebellion and insurgency in Iraq.
- Breakdown of nuclear non-proliferation regimes and nuclear arms race.
- Escalation of violent conflict in Iraq, Syria and Yemen and related governance breakdown.



## 2019

➔ **Trend 1:** The constitutive political bargain between the two key groups of Jordanian society – ‘East Bankers’ and ‘West Bankers’ – is under pressure, and tensions have surfaced every few years.

### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

Active radical militant groups in Jordan; potential breakdown of security governance and civil war.

### 2019: Jordanians divided

In 2019, the Palestinian Authority is in deep financial trouble and cannot pay public sector wages. The Hashemite Kingdom is helping them with a line of credit that, given its own fiscal situation, is at once too limited to make a major difference for Ramallah but sufficient to exacerbate Jordan’s domestic tensions between its two main population groups, so-called East Bankers who trace their lineage back to regional tribes, including Bedouins and Houranis, and so-called West Bankers, descendants of Palestinian refugees who arrived in Jordan after 1948 [Trend 1]. Most West Bankers support the loan as a means of solidarity with their Palestinian countrymen, while most East Bankers see it as a waste of their taxes on a corrupt and ineffective institution.

### 2023: Hashemites contested and militants striving

Rumours that the assassins are military officers exacerbate cracks within the army and security services. As Sunni radicals in Jordan begin to mobilize and manage to manipulate members of minor branches of the Hashemite family into verbal attacks on the government, Tehran and Damascus issue very similar statements in support of the Palestinian people against the Israeli annexation, openly calling out the incapacitated King Abdullah II for betraying the Palestinian cause. Global actors jump in and call for calm, but they are unsure what to do as the political, social and military schism opens up the country to the further entrenchment of radical militant groups, the breakdown of security governance, the legitimate creation of binding rules and quite possibly a full-scale civil war.

## 2019: Conservative backlash

Pushed by an initiative of Queen Rania, women are given equal citizenship. This is the final straw for some ultra-conservative demagogues who weave the loan and female citizenship into a divisive narrative of wealth being handed out, social hierarchy being compromised, and conservative values being abandoned to please Palestinians and women. Many East Bank conservatives rally to the firebrands, taking part in protests growing in numbers as the year goes by, while the Palestinian Authority becomes weaker and weaker.

## 2020

### 2020: An unholy alliance

In 2020, an ultra-hawkish Israeli government sees the Palestinian Authority as too weak to resist and, without any objection from Saudi Arabia, annexes settlements in the West Bank [Trend 2]. There are unconfirmed reports of Israeli-Saudi negotiations about custodianship of holy places in and around Jerusalem [TP1]. In response to ‘disrespectful’ comments from leading Jordanian politicians about repression in Saudi Arabia, Riyadh discontinues aid to Jordan, which in response pushes

back against the annexations and Saudi Arabia’s custodian role.

### 2020: Challenged custodianship

Amidst the deteriorating economic situation in Jordan, grievances between East Bankers (broadly speaking, the more established and conservative group, who stand to lose more from the end of Saudi patronage) and West Bankers (dominant in the private sector and thus far more affected by the whims of the economy, not to mention enraged about the Saudi-Israeli alliance against the Palestinian Authority) are exacerbated by the conflict with Saudi Arabia and the embarrassing weakness of the Hashemites in the face of the double Israeli and Saudi challenge to their claim to custodianship of Islam’s holy places in Jerusalem.

➔ **Trend 2:** The growing fragility of the Palestinian Authority and increasing pressure in Israel to abandon the two state solution and annex the settlements drive a wedge into Jordanian-Israeli relations. Jordan loses its prior direct and indirect influence over the Israeli government to moderate its policies.



## 2021

### 2021: Corruption scandal

In 2021, growing economic pains force Jordan to comply with strict World Bank conditions that hurt the lower-income population in particular. As a corruption scandal involving the queen’s real estate business breaks, a huge drop in investor confidence drags the economy further down while social grievances increase. In an attempt to regain the initiative, the court appoints a reformist East Banker as the new prime minister, only to be turned down in the most embarrassing way possible. At a press conference, the appointee publicly declines, implying that the Hashemites should clean up their own mess – a thinly veiled jab at the queen’s corruption scandal that is immediately amplified by conservative firebrands ‘worried’ about the country losing its moral compass. Abdullah II ends up appointing a West Banker prime minister who is tasked with implementing the unpopular World Bank reforms [TP2].

➔ **Tipping Point 1:** Israeli annexation of the West Bank settlements would be a critical juncture. Combined with the Hashemites’ claim to custodianship over the holy sites of Islam in Jerusalem being exposed as hollow, it deals a powerful blow to the dynasty’s domestic legitimacy and upend one of the few unifying mechanisms linking West Bankers’ Palestinian solidarity with East Bankers’ religious conservatism.



## 2023

### 2023: Attack on the king

On May 15, 2023, a bomb explodes in the centre of a huge military parade attended by the King and Queen of Jordan to celebrate the centennial of the Emirate of Transjordan. Days of botched crisis management due to the lack of trust between the newly appointed West Banker PM and the East Bank-dominated security establishment seal the fate of the Hashemites’ loss of control over Jordanian politics: once the court is forced to confirm the king’s survival (albeit severely incapacitated) and the queen’s murder, the West Bankers rally to ‘their’ king while East Bankers abandon the dynasty.

### 2021: East Bankers against the Hashemites

As polarization between East and West Bankers deepens, the court is losing support from its erstwhile East Bank constituencies. Retired East Bank military officers issue a joint statement critical of the Queen, blaming her corruption scandal for the economic crisis. The statement helps solidify the conservative protest movement among East Bankers against Palestinians, the corrupt and progressive queen, and Western meddling. One day, Israel assassinates a prominent figure in Islamist terror networks – a Jordanian tribal leader – on Jordanian soil. This is further evidence of the dynasty’s weakness, and escalates the East Bankers’ protests. Rumours of a military coup arise. In a desperate attempt to figure out who his supporters are, the king tries to reorganize the military.

➔ **Tipping Point 2:** An appointment that breaks with the long tradition of prime ministers being drawn from the East Banker elite ‘hurts’ East Bankers who feel already under siege from West Bankers and ‘their’ Palestinian Authority. In combination with economic pressure and a progressive queen, this undermines social trust and accelerates the loss of public legitimacy.



## 2019

### 2019: The Americans retreat

In her farewell speech in the fall of 2019, Angela Merkel calls out Donald Trump for his 'irresponsible' foreign policy, while sources close to her leak an unguarded remark in which she calls Trump 'a total idiot'. Domestically, Trump is under pressure since US debt has risen to \$25 trillion, the Israeli Prime Minister pronounced the Trump Peace Plan 'dead on arrival' only a month previously, and he is about to kick off his re-election campaign. He takes the opportunity to announce via Twitter that all US troops in the Middle East will be called home.

Ungrateful Angela is very unfair to the US... who had your and all of Europe's back all those years against the chaos in Middle East? MUST STOP! We will withdraw all troops from the Middle East immediately. Europe will pay their share...

12K 5.2K 20K

US Congress cuts military aid to the region – including Israel – by 50 percent. [TP1]



### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

- Breakdown of nuclear non-proliferation regimes and nuclear arms race.
- Critical gaps in basic service delivery; humanitarian crisis across the region.

ISIL campaign against Yezidis and others now seems merely a 'minor prelude'. With oil prices plummeting and the dollar at an all-time low, the region is in full humanitarian and economic crisis – right on Europe's doorstep.

## 2019: Disguised Nuclear aspirations

In response, Turkey, Israel, and Saudi Arabia each begin to discuss strategic autonomy openly. All three launch huge civilian nuclear programs 'to invest in a post-fossil future', a thin disguise that does nothing to stop the speculation about three-way nuclear breakout in the near to mid-term future.

## 2020

### 2020: Palestinian governance deteriorates

In 2020, the Palestinian National Authority collapses. To prevent governance breakdown and in response to domestic pressures, the Israeli government annexes settlements in and around Hebron, while Hamas takes over basic service delivery alongside international aid agencies in the rest of the West Bank.



## 2023: Collapse

The strengthened radical Islamic narrative has practical consequences on the street. A series of killings of aid workers and international civil servants leads international aid organizations, the European Union, and the United Nations to slowly withdraw from the region, leaving critical gaps in governance in their wake, particularly in terms of basic service delivery. Kurdish leaders and representatives of religious minorities across the region are busy touring the capitals of Europe in search of support against the 'coming genocide' at the hands of Islamic extremists – an image of the future compared to which the 2014

## 2023: Nuclear aspirations

'Liberated' from US hegemony, the Middle East is in the middle of a three-way nuclear arms race that takes place in the shadows but is clearly out of control. In addition to Israel's thinly disguised nuclear force, 'purely civilian' nuclear programs in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey appear to be competing with an energy and determination not fully explained by the region's new appreciation of climate change alone. Behind the scenes, journalists and analysts are whispering about impending live tests of nuclear weapons by any of the three regional powers, while governments are busy jockeying for position in volatile alliances.

## 2020: Isolationism continues

In the US, Trump is voted out of office, but isolationist politics continue under the new administration, as congress is gridlocked. As unemployment in the US hits a new high, the Dow Jones plummets, and the dollar falls, the US begins a phased military withdrawal from the Middle East.

## 2021

### 2021: Conservative Sunni alliance

In 2021, deprived of US budgetary aid for the military, Sisi and his regime fall to street protests and mass desertions from the security forces. After weeks of turmoil, the military announces elections which are held reasonably freely and bring a further radicalized Muslim Brotherhood (MB) back to power. The MB government in Cairo forms a new political alliance with Hamas, which is further strengthened in 2022, as Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, and Hamas are joined by like-minded parties in Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia. Turkey and Saudi Arabia have active and functioning civilian nuclear programs [TP2]. By the middle of the year, Turkey formally leaves NATO. In response, Israel and Saudi Arabia start negotiations on a formal regional security alliance [TP3].

## 2023

### 2023: 'Infidels gone'

4 July 2023: As the American flag is lowered for the last time in the handover ceremony of what used to be the US Navy's Fifth Fleet headquarters in Juffair, Bahrain, TV images of the stars and stripes in the evening sun on America's Independence Day are watched with deafening cheers on streets and public squares anywhere from Cairo to Tehran. 'We have won, infidels gone!', say the banners of ISIL supporters, whose latest political leader proclaims an 'Independence Day of the Arab World' as the United States hand over their second-to-last military base in the region (save 4,000 troops stationed in Qatar).

⇒ **Tipping Point 2:** The emergence of a broader crescent of elected Islamist governments might fall to its more radical elements. In such a case, massive human rights violations and attacks on aid workers could become increasingly normal (governance breakdown), as a result of which millions of people would move towards Europe's borders in fear of discrimination, terror and genocide (violent conflict).

⇒ **Tipping Point 3:** Turkey leaving NATO is read by the region's governments as a signal that Ankara is reverting to traditional power politics. Given the open historical wounds left by the Ottoman legacy across the Arab world as well as the more recent experiences in Iraq and Syria, many see this prospect as an additional reason to achieve effective deterrence capabilities directed at Turkey, in addition to other regional competitors. It therefore compels both an acceleration of the arms race and of the mushrooming of 'alliances of necessity' (e.g., Israel/Saudi Arabia).

## 2019

### 2019: Trade war

In 2019, Trump's trade war escalates further. Russia and China jointly impose higher tariffs on American exports. WTO-led negotiations reach an impasse as neither party is willing to move. The global economy suffers.

### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

Reconquering of territories by Ukraine, causing civilian and military casualties and a humanitarian crisis.

### 2019: Electoral fraud

2019 is also an election year in many Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Across the board, ballots are marred by irregularities. Civil society organisations in Ukraine heavily criticize Petro Poroshenko's victory, after his militant supporters disrupted opponents' rallies and were observed stuffing countless ballot boxes. Developments in Georgia, Moldova and Armenia mirror those in Ukraine. The election irregularities lead to a freeze of high-level dialogues with the EU and the 2019 EU-EaP summit is rescheduled.

## 2020

### 2020: EU cuts all funds

After the success of illiberal parties in the 2019 European Parliament elections, micro-financial assistance by the EU to EaP countries is ended in 2020.

### 2019: Recession pains

In combination with continuing EU sanctions, the trade conflict and the resulting global recession – through plunging energy prices as one of the most potent links – hurt both the Russian state and Russian oligarchs' access to their foreign assets.

### 2020: Russians take to the streets

The Russian state is increasingly unable to pay for its vast pension system and freezes the salaries of state employees. First protests arise in major cities. The rally 'round the flag phenomenon – which was bolstered by the Ukraine conflict and the annexation of Crimea – on which Putin's regime has capitalized no longer suffices to control the population. Russia's dormant civil society is ready to take action against the government – and just waiting for a leading figure.



⇒ **Tipping Point 1:** Putin's social contract is dead. Once Putin's government is no longer able to provide economic relief to the poor, it has to break the almost exclusively material social contract which underpins the highly personalized regime in Russia. The decision to brutally crack down on protests amplifies public discontent and drives opposition groups underground (security governance breakdown). Some of the new tech oligarchs take advantage of the collapse of Putin's legitimacy and that of his regime. They provide the missing leadership and organizing capabilities to transform undirected and easily controlled protests into a serious disruptive force. So long as the regime's mechanisms for buying loyalty remain inaccessible due to the continuing global recession, this threatens the regime's survival and increases the likelihood of governance breakdown in many sectors and many parts of the country.

## EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

## 2023

### 2023: Vultures circling

The United States sees the political turmoil as both a risk and an opportunity, and finally gives in to Polish and Baltic demands for US bases. Ukraine reclaims the Donbas 'People's Republics', which are now without Russian financial and military support. The reunification of Ukraine ends a long-standing war, but tensions are high as Russia has been challenged and defeated in its own neighbourhood [TP3].

⇒ **Tipping Point 3:** The Kremlin's preoccupation with domestic problems and the sense of political support by the US enables an aggressive government in Kyiv to try to reconquer lost territories (violent conflict), causing civilian and military casualties, a humanitarian crisis and additional tensions with Russia that might not accept defeat.

⇒ **Tipping Point 2:** A failure to pay wages in the security sector is the final nail in the coffin of a regime that has lost popular legitimacy. Significant xenophobia leads to discrimination and violence against minorities. However, social trust among the ethnic Russian, Orthodox Christian-dominated majority population remains high as events trigger historical memories of previous challenges of anarchy and civil war. In fact, once regime legitimacy is lost, high social trust might lead to a strong and cohesive civil society, which would make regime change more likely.

## RUSSIA

### 2023: Red revolution

By 2023, political assassinations and mysterious disappearances prevail. National and international media frame the movement as the 'Red Revolution' for its bloodiness. By January of 2023, it has become clear to Putin that his position is untenable. He accepts early elections, manages to negotiate immunity with the leaders of the protests, and is forced into exile. The early elections that make Pavel Durov president of the Russian Federation are seen as legitimate. OSCE observers invited to monitor the process do not witness any systematic election fraud.

### 2022: Unpaid wages, mass protests

In the summer of 2022, the Russian government fails to pay the wages of the armed forces [TP2]. This leads to mass desertions and some cases of ex-service members joining the protests are reported. A group of former police officers starts providing the organizers with equipment and knowledge about the government's crowd and riot control tactics.

## 2021

### 2021: New oligarchs rising

Newly emerging economic and industrial elites in Russia see an opportunity to oust Putin and the old post-Soviet oligarchs by reforming Russia in a way that both aligns with their economic interest and satisfies their political ambitions [TP1]. By late 2021, members of this elite start providing financial support to existing protest groups and organise them to join forces.

### 2021: Closing the hatches

Witnessing the instability in Russia, political leaders across the region are weary of revolutionary spill overs. In attempts to maintain order, they take measures to centralize power and halt good governance reforms, thereby disempowering civil society.

## 2022

### 2022: Crackdown backfires

Internet tycoon Pavel Durov has become the leading figure of a Russia-wide movement. Numerous other businessmen are leading local groups – first concentrated in western cities and later spreading east and to rural areas. This spread is accompanied by an increase in violence. Desperate authorities completely lose control over the population and protestors violently oppose oppression.

### 2022: China reaches out

China sees the opportunity and invites Eastern Partnership countries to its 16+1 and Belt and Road Initiative. Belarus is the only notable exception to the region's Chinese Turn, pursuing warmer relations with the EU and the US.



## 2019

**2019: Recession drives polarization**  
In 2019, the trade war between the US, the EU and China intensifies and creates a durably unfavourable global trading climate that heavily contributes to the start of a global recession. A long-standing feeling of discontent among populations that have not seen tangible benefits from globalization is amplified. Populist movements across the West exploit feelings of economic insecurity and a perceived loss of identity – partly created by increasing migration – to gain power.

In the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, the global recession leads to cuts in social spending, further aggravating poverty and increasing the polarization between wealthy local elites and poor populations. The gradual increase in oil prices exacerbates these tensions as the people feel the higher prices at the pumps.

## 2020

**2020: Opposition's rebirth**  
The feeling of general exasperation and exhaustion translates into Russian public discontent. Opposition leaders in Russia and in Belarus take advantage of the social unrest, politicize the movements, and start pressing the government to step down.

## 2020-2021: Baku looks East

As the Russian government is preoccupied with domestic turmoil, the Azerbaijani government is unhindered in deepening its ties with China. In September 2021, Aliyev III and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping sign a free trade agreement, further cementing China's influence in the region. At the same time, Baku is seeing the first returns on investment from the trans-Anatolian gas pipeline. The hike in oil prices, China's economic influence, and close collaboration with Turkey enables the Azerbaijani economy to flourish against the global trend.



## 2021

### 2021: Crackdown

Putin and Lukashenko try to secure their power by cracking down on opposition movements. However, putting popular opposition leaders in jail only fans the flames of discontent, as do desperate assassinations of individual leaders.

## 2022

### 2022: 'Reunifications'

With Russia looking inward, Eastern Partnership countries develop plans to oppose the Kremlin, with few to no consequences. In 2022, the new Ukrainian president orders his troops to reconquer the 'occupied' Donbas [TP2]. Although the first phase of the offensive causes a high number of military and civilian casualties, the lack of Russian support quickly forces the separatists to surrender. Acknowledging the ethnic and linguistic composition of Ukraine, and to avoid further humiliating the defeated, Kyiv grants the region increased political autonomy within a newly established Ukrainian Federation.

Emboldened by his economic prowess and by Ukraine's military success, Aliyev III takes to consolidating his power and decides to take back Nagorno-Karabakh through a bloody military offensive, along with changing the constitution and the legal status of the region.

⇒ **Tipping Point 1:** Once Putin's government is no longer able to provide economic relief to the poor, it has to break the almost exclusively material social contract which underpins his rule. The decision to brutally crack down on protests amplifies public discontent and drives opposition groups underground (security governance breakdown). Losing buy-in from key oligarchs sets the stage for a major and potentially very violent breakdown of the regime (which would result in a complicated constellation of governance breakdowns in different sectors and places).

### 2022: NATO deadlock

These major shifts in the geopolitical equilibrium are also facilitated by the inaction of NATO, which is blocked by the growing number of member countries with populist governments on both sides of the Atlantic. [TP2]

⇒ **Tipping Point 2:** The Kremlin's preoccupation with domestic problems as well as NATO's internal deadlock enable militant governments in Ukraine and Azerbaijan to start new military offensives to reconquer lost territories (violent conflict), causing civilian and military casualties, humanitarian crises, and disruptions in energy flows (in Azerbaijan).

## REST OF THE WORLD

### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

- Ukrainian military offensive to reconquer Donbas, causing military and civilian casualties.
- Military offensive and casualties in Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Security governance and security sector governance breakdown (see Schröder, 2018) in major Russian cities.

## EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

### 2023: EU stops aid

Not only the people of Russia are on the streets: so are those of other Eastern Partnership countries, especially in Belarus, where oligarchs are deserting the regime like in Russia. Regime collapse becomes a possibility. The media is reporting that EU financial assistance is going directly into the pockets of local elites, explaining respective leaders' disinterest in reforms. EU Commission President Weber terminates all financial aid programs to Eastern Partnership countries.

## RUSSIA

### 2023: Chaos looming in Russia

The economic crisis – despite the high oil prices – has left the Russian economy in dire straits. The Russian people are dissatisfied with everyday economic insecurity as well as Putin's perceived inability to restore Russian prestige. Large protest movements resume under new leadership from the oligarchic class, who feel that Putin's time is over. 1991-style chaos looms.



### 2022: Strongmen cling to power

In 2022, Putin declares a state of emergency in Russia and mobilizes the country's security forces to arrest 'every' opposition leader and dismantle the strongest fractions of the protest movements in order to restore stability. Meanwhile, Lukashenko alters the constitution in order to use emergency powers to 'pacify the country' thus following the same strategy [TP1]. It works: in both countries, the organized oppositions have their backs broken and cannot take effective collective action for some time.

However, the damage has already been done. The public is on the streets and even pro-government forces increasingly question the ability of the leadership to safely steer the country out of the crisis.

## 2023

### 2023: Oil and populism: rising together

Iran has closed the Strait of Hormuz, disrupting the global oil supply. The price of oil immediately skyrockets and then stabilizes at \$150 per barrel. The high oil price further exacerbates the global economic crisis. World politics are dominated by populist movements. The US is at the forefront of this development: Washington has almost completely upheld the 'America First' principle and retired from world affairs, focusing instead on internal administrative efforts to fix its domestic economy.



➔ **Tipping Point 1:** Putin's resignation without the prospect of an immediate strong successor sparks enormous political uncertainty in Moscow. It is seen and used as a window of opportunity for aggressive state and non-state actors in the region to turn long-standing territorial claims into new realities on the ground, including by (re-)starting violent conflicts.



**Governance breakdown and violent conflict**

Conflicts in Donbas, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh reignite.

**EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD**

**2023: Belarus goes West**

In a surprising turn of events, a pro-Western leader comes to power in Belarus, marking the end of Lukashenko's 27 year reign.

**2023: Armenia loses**

Armenia finds itself on the losing end of the geopolitical shift in Eastern Europe. Without Russian support, it is exposed to uncoordinated attacks from competing Azerbaijani forces. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict reignites and further undermines Russia's influence in its near abroad.

**2023: Stability over democracy**

Ukrainians, Moldovans and Georgians rally around their victorious leaders – presidents and prime ministers as much as the oligarchs behind them – who gain enormous legitimacy. Corruption becomes even more rampant, while EU-supported governance reforms stall. Increased stability, the resolution of the respective territorial conflicts, and popular satisfaction make sure that Brussels keeps quiet as democracy and transparency are further undermined.

**2019**

**2019: Russia's new oligarchs**

Falling oil prices put the Russian state and its ability to uphold its social contract under heavy strain. Simmering popular discontent is activated by a new generation of oligarchs who got rich in agriculture and manufacturing, and who uses the protests to challenge the old oil and gas oligarchs. As the economic sanctions imposed on the old elites by the EU are still in place, the new generation manages to mobilize financial assets faster and can therefore outspend and out-organize the old guard.

**2020**

**2020: Putin resigns**

The popular protests reach unprecedented levels, until the new oligarchs manage to convince Igor Sechin, Putin's right-hand man, and other key securocrats to abandon the president in favour of a new political settlement. Putin resigns in late 2020 [TP1].

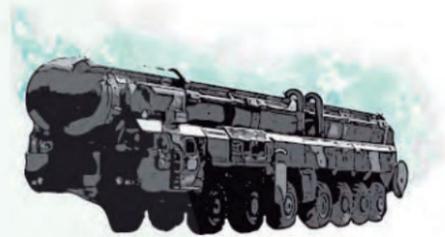
**2021**

**2021: Who's in charge?**

A period of turmoil follows. For months and months, the world is left wondering who is really in charge in Russia, as no successor to Putin is named. Behind the scenes, negotiations between the competing elite groups drag on and on. Meanwhile, the world is getting ever more nervous. 'Who controls Russia's nukes?' is becoming an ever more common headline in the global news. Islamists in the North Caucasus take advantage of the distraction of Moscow's security apparatus and step up their terrorist campaigns with covert support from Iran. Similarly to NATO and China, Iran sees Russian instability as a stepping stone for increasing its influence in the region.

**2021: NATO's nuke scare**

NATO members are increasingly desperate to see an end to the instability in Russia. They want a safe pair of hands in control of the Russian nuclear arsenal. With Islamist terrorism on the rise inside Russia, the fear of nuclear terrorism is palpable around the world: whoever controls the Red Button in Moscow has to be trustworthy.



**2022**

**2022: Russia's oil price shock**

An unexpected drop in oil prices to \$8 per barrel in January 2022 deals the final blow to the government's collapsing finances. Already struggling to pay pensions, the government has to print money to avoid ceasing payments altogether. Inflation quadruples within weeks and leads to far-reaching political consequences: protests re-emerge and swell rapidly in both their frequency and magnitude.

**2022: Saber-rattling**

By 2022, agricultural and manufacturing magnates in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia control the only functioning and cost-effective industries as the falling oil price has pulled the rug from under the old guard. They spend freely to buy political influence. In order to legitimize their power grab in the eyes of the public, they force their respective countries' political leaderships to solve unpopular territorial conflicts. Similarly, NATO finds a golden opportunity amidst the long moment of Russian instability and offers membership to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Pushed forward by the newly empowered oligarchs, and emboldened by the continuing turmoil in Russia [TP2] and the offer of joining NATO [TP3], all three governments launch military offensives to federalize their respective disputed territories by force. As Moscow remains distracted by domestic turmoil, its allies are left without Russian support and therefore vulnerable. Kyiv quickly restores control over the separatist parts of the Donbas, while Moldova annexes Transnistria and Georgia retakes control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

**2023**

**2023: Safety in Sechin**

The upcoming Russian elections attract international attention. After Vladimir Putin's unexpected resignation and months of political infighting, Igor Sechin emerges as the likely new president of the Russian Federation (albeit only after some back-channel facilitation by key NATO countries as well as China). NATO members signal their support for Vladimir Putin's former counsellor while taking advantage of the handover of power to increase its military presence in the South Caucasus.

➔ **Tipping Point 2:** Building on and far exceeding TP1 in impact, protracted domestic turmoil in Russia leads to previously stalemated conflicts gaining in heat as militant state and non-state actors seek to use the opportunity to create new facts on the ground (violent conflict).

➔ **Tipping Point 3:** NATO encouragement for offensive military action, if given inadvertently and potentially in ignorance about local political dynamics, may be the final straw for Eastern European governments to pick a military conflict with the respective separatist forces.



# Libyan Drought and China's Rescue

Core scenario created on 18-19 February 2019

⇒ **Tipping Point 1:** The catastrophic economic shock to the main humanitarian funders (primarily the EU) cripples aid actors to such an extent that they could not respond to a new crisis – especially one with challenging security and logistical conditions.

## Governance breakdown and violent conflict

- Violent conflict in Libya.
- Humanitarian crisis; food and water shortages.
  
- Armed opposition in Chad marches into N'Djamena, deposing President Déby.

## 2020

### 2020: Haftar's victorious march

After taking over the El Sharara oil field and the major southwestern city of Sabha, Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) marches into Tripoli and ousts the Presidency Council and the Government of National Accord (GNA). GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj flees to Italy.

### 2020: Droughts and militias

In the wake of Haftar's seizure of power, Southern Libya and parts of Egypt as well as other North African countries are hit by a drought that leads to severe food and water shortages. In Libya, thousands of people move north to the coast, where the new LNA government is overwhelmed by the looming humanitarian disaster while trying to fend off the pressure from southern militias trying to re-establish themselves on the coast.

### 2020: Empty aid pockets

The international aid community fails to attract sufficient funding to mount a costly new operation in an insecure Libya and benefit even low numbers of beneficiaries in need. The EU in particular is hit by a huge economic and social crisis that is triggered by an EU-US trade war and a 2019 crash of the Italian economy. Part of the resulting austerity agenda includes slashing humanitarian spending, which leaves Libya and other drought-affected countries to fend for themselves.

### 2020: Gulf in crisis

Due to a low oil price and stalled progress on the Saudi Vision 2030 and other key reform projects, the Gulf is equally inward-looking. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman lacks the funds to deliver on his ambitious promises and responds to growing popular opposition with massive crackdowns. The violent repression broadens opportunities for Islamist terrorists to interrupt oil production at the kingdom's main production sites (the main source of liberalization, modernization and the loss of the kingdom's moral compass, according to the terrorists' YouTube manifesto). The toxic mix of popular unrest, terror threats and state repression spills over to the rest of the Gulf, refocusing the Gulf regimes' military and security capabilities on domestic developments and leaving no attention or funds for their Libyan allies [TP1]. Global oil output declines.

### 2020: No refuge in Egypt

As coastal cities provide no refuge, but rather discrimination and violence, some Southern Libyan refugees begin to move toward Egypt. However, Libya's neighbour is occupied with its own crisis: The 2020 drought hits the country very hard and forces the regime to focus on the immediate needs of its own population, putting a lot of pressure on Egyptian public services and finances. With its favoured faction now in power in Libya, Cairo presses for stricter controls on both sides of the Libyan-Egyptian border to limit the number of people seeking to cross and to prevent 'jihadi infiltration'.

### 2020: EU deadlock

The number of refugees trying to reach Europe increases because the eastern border to Egypt is closed. The higher number of refugees leads to more polarization in the EU and further strains the relationships among EU members, who fail to agree on a common refugee policy.



⇒ **Tipping Point 2:** The longstanding failure to build effective institutions and integrate competing power centers into a sustainable political settlement makes Libyan governance dependent on a strong, charismatic leader. Once he loses power, governance breakdown follows.

## 2021

### 2021: The LNA loses control

In 2021, Khalifa Haftar's death breaks open the charade that was the LNA government [TP2]. A lack of international support, a progressive decrease in water supply, open fighting between militias, and the Libyan administration's lack of capacity leads to governance breakdown in Libya. Haftar's successor, former LNA Chief of Staff Abdel Salem Al-Hassi, struggles to impose his authority and effectively respond to the situation. The population is starving while tribal militias and jihadi groups from all parts of the country compete for dwindling resources along the coast. With a humanitarian crisis on the one hand, and territorial struggle between competing armed groups on the other, Al-Hassi effectively loses control of the country.

## 2022-24

### 2022-2024: China steps in

An increasingly insecure oil supply as well as the global ripple effects of the European economic crisis spark increased demand for Libyan oil in Asia, particularly in China. In 2022, China offers humanitarian assistance in exchange for the right to exploit Libyan oil fields. After weeks of talks with the LNA government, Chinese armed forces land in Libya to deliver aid as well as military assistance. By helping Abdel Salem Al-Hassi to regain control of and tighten his grip over the country, Beijing entrenches itself further. By the end of the year, Al-Hassi's LNA neutralizes all remaining pockets of resistance in Tripoli. Russia applauds the Chinese initiative while Western powers are left to witness a major power shift in the region and their corresponding loss of influence.

## 2024

### 2024: Libya is stable, thanks to China

By 2024, Libya adopts a Chinese-supported development model, which helps Al-Hassi keep water and food shortages to a minimum, thereby contributing to his legitimacy in the eyes of the Libyan population and the different tribes.

⇒ **Tipping Point 3:** The coup in Chad exemplifies how actors engaged in order competition at the global level could exploit one of the many simmering conflicts in ways that turn elements of the liberal order (elections) against its proponents (Déby's Western allies) and tip a volatile local military balance to spark or escalate violent conflict.

## 2023

### 2023: The anti-Western alliance

In 2023, at a summit in Ankara, Putin, Xi, Erdoğan, and Assad unveil an official anti-Western alliance. In a little-noticed part of the summit statement, they condemn the president of Chad for repeatedly postponing presidential elections that were meant to be held in 2021, and recognize a parliamentary opposition leader as Chad's interim president. A few weeks later, supported by Chinese special forces, Chad's armed opposition marches into N'Djamena and deposes the sitting president, Idriss Déby, despite desperate attempts by the French and US commandos to organize the defence (violent conflict). [TP3]



# Libyan Drought and International Neglect

Core scenario created on 18-19 February 2019

⇒ **Tipping Point 1:** Massive resource shortages and the absence of mitigating governance measures exacerbate conflict. In this case, the lack of attention to these effects leads to escalating violent conflict between the Tuareg and Tebu in 2024.

### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

- Food and water shortages; widespread disease; humanitarian crisis; complete governance breakdown.
- Violence between Tuareg and Tebu communities.
- Fighting over access to oil fields.

⇒ **Tipping Point 4:** In a system that depends on oil revenue to fund basic governance services, violent conflict around oil fields leads to a feedback effect: leakages contaminate vulnerable aquifers and oil production ultimately stops, which sparks comprehensive governance breakdown if no other governance providers step in.

⇒ **Tipping Point 3:** Very weak governance by a mix of competing state and non-state actors without any effective institutions turns into governance breakdown once the temporarily effective role of strong, charismatic leadership is lost. This tipping point is the result of a long-standing failure to build effective institutions and integrate competing power centres into a sustainable political settlement. (This tipping point is the result of the same factors that create TP2 in Scenario 7.)

## 2019

### 2019: Peace in Libya?

The results of the June 2019 Libyan general elections are contested. The polls are marred by irregularities and no candidate manages to secure a convincing majority. Several political camps claim victory. To add to the confusion, the head of the Libyan National Army, Khalifa Haftar, holds a press conference in his Tobruk headquarters and announces that he will not accept the election results. In order to prevent the situation from spiraling out of control, the United Nations (UN) steps in and brokers a power-sharing 'National Reconciliation Government' that includes all of the biggest factions of the Libyan conflict, including the one led by Haftar. The next few months are peaceful and encouraging. The population's and the international community's expectations are high.



### 2019: Crisis averted

Beginning in the autumn of 2019, a series of heat waves hit southern Libya. Major inland oases such as Ubari and Sabah dry up, causing water shortages and the disruption of food production [TP1]. The deterioration of the situation is camouflaged by the relative well-being of the coastal population and the appearance of political progress. The 'National Reconciliation Government' is stable and manages to effectively organize the provision of rudimentary public services along the coast, thus crafting an impression of slow and steady progress which dominates journalists' and embassies' reporting about Libya.

### 2019: A new beginning

The international community feels ready to turn the page after many difficult years and seeks to make the UN's temporary truce permanent at an international conference in Tripoli. Under the headline 'Libya 2020: A New Beginning,' a new constitution is to be ratified while 'foreign meddlers' are to agree to respect Libyan sovereignty and stop interfering. Initially sceptical about ceding ground to a strongman like Haftar, Algiers acquiesces to the decision as its own leadership is threatened by popular protests and political deadlock over Bouteflika's succession during 2019 and 2020. For Egypt, Haftar is a powerful ally in its fight against radical Islamist groups in the region, so his central role allows Cairo to stand back. In his concluding

speech, the new defence minister and de-facto power behind the no-name prime minister, Khalifa Haftar, celebrates the start of a new era of stability and prosperity for Libya. The international community considers the Libyan case closed, withdraws the UN political mission and reduces diplomatic attention. [TP2]



## 2021

### 2021: Climate crisis

In 2021, the climate crisis in southern Libya worsens. Week after week brings new heat records. In June, mercury soars to 59°C in many parts of the country. Food and water shortages become severe and the basic needs of people in the south are no longer met (sectoral, regional governance breakdown). The number of people leaving their homes inland to move to the coast grows by the day, straining the government's resources and jeopardizing public service provision even in the coastal cities. The slums around Tripoli, Misrata and Benghazi expand rapidly.

⇒ **Tipping Point 2:** Premature withdrawal of international support and attention exacerbates the limitations of information collection and analysis regarding key developments outside the central geographic regions, and on other issues than those considered most political. It also creates long lead times for mandating, funding and physically establishing a new aid operation once the need becomes apparent.

### 2021: Libya abandoned

The catastrophic handling of the situation reveals the Libyan bureaucracy's limitations. The initial optimism about the new political regime is quickly replaced by the realization that, without international support, it neither has the financial means nor the management capacity to deal with this new crisis. International donor fatigue and institutional deadlocks in the EU and UN mean that discussions over a new humanitarian aid operation in Libya drag on for many months.



## 2023

### 2022-2023: Reliance on oil backfires

Haftar's death also sparks open factional fighting over who gets to physically control the Libyan oil fields (violent conflict) [TP3], which leads to multiple oil leakages, polluting fossil waters in the oil crescent [TP4]. As a result, in early 2023, oil production is put on standby in an attempt to prevent another ecological catastrophe, which would further aggravate the water shortages. However, without the oil revenue, the government is unable to provide any governance services or even pay its own salaries, leaving members of militias and the security services as well as big parts of the population to fend for themselves (comprehensive governance breakdown).

## 2022

### 2022: Backsliding into disaster

Haftar's death in early 2022 fundamentally changes the dynamic between the governmental factions and precipitates a major political crisis that ultimately leads to the crumbling of the National Reconciliation Government. The political turmoil further postpones international engagement as additional actors must be consulted for security assessments. This coincides with the most severe heat wave to hit the country yet. Shortages in the south become even more severe. The lack of food and clean drinking water causes the outbreak of multiple diseases, leading to thousands of deaths while international aid operations remain stymied by the constant shifts in militia control in the coastal cities. In addition, resource scarcity reignites violent conflicts between the southern Tuareg and Tebu communities. Those fleeing the violence start swelling the ranks of climate refugees trying to reach the already overcrowded coastal cities. In addition, more and more migrants from Libya's southern neighbours cross the border and make their way to the coastal areas for the same reasons.

## 2024

### 2024: Failed state

By 2024, Libya is in a situation similar to Somalia at the worst point of its recent history, with only a few pockets of effective governance left in the biggest coastal cities. In the south, the violent conflict between the Tuareg and Tebu escalates as resources become scarcer. The National Reconciliation Government is in place on paper only, as the economic meltdown has left state institutions without any resources. Governance in cities is provided by a growing number of non-state actors, be it tribes or the radical Islamist groups competing for local power.

# Tunisia's Vicious Cycle

Core scenario created on 18-19 February 2019

➔ **Tipping Point 1:** The combination of major domestic economic problems and an austere international climate that precludes any relief leaves no room for policy mistakes such as the one made by the prime minister. The country is pushed into a downward spiral that chips away at all the sources of resilience.

### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

- Food and water shortages, humanitarian crisis.
- Violent conflict between autonomy movements and the central government.

## 2019

### 2019: Essebsi wins

In 2019, the relationship between Tunisian President Beiji Caid Essebsi and his Prime Minister Youssef Chahed is at its all-time worst. After Chahed's split from the ruling Nidaa Tounes party in January, the president's son Hafedh Caid Essebsi emerges victorious from the leadership battle. Despite a sizeable anti-Essebsi movement and a successful #BeijiGoesTrump social media campaign, Nidaa Tounes wins the parliamentary majority and Hafedh is appointed prime minister, while the political landscape has become even more polarized.



### 2019: Unpopular reforms

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) lowers its global growth forecast from 3.6 percent in 2019 to 3.0 percent for 2020. Against the backdrop of a looming global recession, donors are reducing their aid to Tunisia, while the few private foreign investment projects stall. With the economy under growing stress, Hafedh – in a bid to style himself as Tunisia's 'modernizer-in-chief' in the image of Saudi Arabia's Mohammed bin Salman – pushes forward the budget consolidation measures introduced by Youssef Chahed. The political debate is bitter and the legislative process rushed [TP1]. The parliament is more polarized than ever and popular backlash is immediate. The Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) declares a

general strike in January 2020 to protest the freeze of public sector wages, the privatization of national companies and the severe price hikes on consumer goods.

## 2020

### 2020: Up in arms

The public debate is tainted by accusations of corruption and intimidation. In February 2020, the respected investigative news blog *Inkyfada* publishes evidence that the recently disappeared leader of the Popular Front, Hama Hammami, was in fact assassinated for political reasons. The political left is up in arms and many Tunisians turn out to protest. After several high-profile

self-immolations, every political force except Nidaa Tounes tries to capitalize on the protests, including many Islamist figures (some of whom are suspected to support international terrorist groups). The government is cornered. After initial attempts to negotiate with the unions fail, localized crackdowns against Islamist rallies begin to spread to other kinds of protest, which are met with force. The Hafedh government reacts by backing the security forces, which only adds fuel to the fire and reinforces the popular perception that Hafedh is incompetent and was put in power through his father's nepotism.

### 2020: Terrorists return

In addition to the economic and political crises, intelligence agencies fail to monitor and manage ISIS returnees from Syria and Libya. Islamist terrorist organizations use the turmoil to their advantage. They launch a series of attacks on government buildings and protestors, claiming dozens of lives and further weakening public trust in, and the legitimacy of, the government.



## 2024

### 2024: Tunisia collapsed

The situation deteriorates quickly and by 2024, the cornered putschists have ramped up the repression further. The country has broken apart: many provinces are in open rebellion against the central government (violent conflict), and the remnants of the state forces are stretched thin by fighting the rebels and brutally quelling the protests in the cities. The energy industry is on hold, external debt is sky high, the tourism sector has collapsed, and the agricultural sector is heavily affected by the drought. The population suffers from a general lack of opportunities, very low income, and increasing food prices leading to starvation and localized conflicts over resources, particularly in the inland provinces where basic services are in many places unavailable as the fighting makes international aid deliveries unpredictable. The aid provided to the government by the Gulf countries is exclusively used to keep the coastal cities (and thereby the support base of the military government) afloat.

➔ **Tipping Point 3:** The military coup sets up political miscalculations on the part of the ruling generals (here: increasing repression is expected to restore control). As the previously limited insurgent/repressive violence between security forces and opposition groups escalates, the risks of real governance breakdown and violent conflict increase.

## 2023

### 2023: Coup d'état

Faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges, Beiji Caid Essebsi declares a nationwide state of emergency and decides to postpone the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections until stability is restored. Tired of the mismanagement of the situation by the civilian leadership and sensing the potential fragmentation of the country, a group of high-ranking military officials stage a coup [TP3]. Despite the resulting public outrage, the first weeks of military rule appear successful. The army muzzles opposition voices, cracks down on protestors and consolidates its power. The size of public demonstrations dwindles as Human Rights Watch reports dozens of deaths every week. However, due to the intensity of the repression, the coup fails to gather sufficient support even within the armed forces. Countless soldiers and officers are court-martialed for disobeying commands and many others desert in support of the protesters.

### 2022: Last hope: Europe?

The growing economic disparities between the coastal regions and the south, combined with the humanitarian consequences of the droughts, lead to a rapid increase in the number of displaced people moving northward. Millions of middle-class and lower middle-class Tunisians lose faith in the system, and most of them try to move to Europe. For all but a few, the only way to do so is illegally. Supported by existing smuggling networks, hundreds of thousands arrive in Spain, Portugal, on Greek islands, and in the Western Balkans in 2023 alone, with several times that number of Tunisians expected to follow.

## 2022

### 2022: The flames of unrest

In the Gafsa region, youth groups occupy the Compagnie des phosphates and start debating the creation of an 'Autonomous People's Republic'. People are fed up with the central government. Inspired by the example of places like Jemna, where local residents had rejected government planning and formed a cooperative to sell their crops directly (Abderrahim 2016), they want to take their destiny into their own hands. A similar grassroots cooperative movement develops in Tataouine and Kebili where, after a year-long blockade of the oil and gas extractive sites, protestors form popular committees to discuss the establishment of local direct democracy. Governmental forces sent to dismantle the movements face fierce opposition and struggle with the intensity of the mobilization, while the absence of international media and observers enables increasingly violent repression that only fans the flames of unrest and leads to armed clashes and even full-scale battles, as some of the grassroots autonomy movements are taken over by well-armed Islamist groups. [TP2]

## 2021

### 2021: Drought, austerity and strikes

In 2021, a series of heat waves hit the country, causing droughts, decimating crops and triggering widespread food and water shortages. After a brief rebound in the production of phosphate, recessions in some of Tunisia's new Asian markets also lead to a drop in demand for Tunisian phosphate, sending the country's export industry into a tailspin and exacerbating the economic crisis. The country's biggest producer, the Compagnie des phosphates de Gafsa, sees its production drop to under two million tons annually, from a production level of 5 million tons in 2014 (USGS 2014). The government responds to the crisis with new austerity measures, prompting the UGTT to call a new general strike. Despite the terrorist threat, the anti-austerity movement manages to mobilize large crowds of people in the country's major cities. In Tunis alone, more than 200,000 people take to the streets.

➔ **Tipping Point 2:** The 'fragmentation crisis of 2022' has its roots in known weaknesses of the Tunisian state as well as the contestation of its political and economic order, but the government's mismanagement of the crisis closes the door on a cooperative path toward more inclusive institutions. Instead, government legitimacy and social trust are destroyed, putting the country on a path toward protracted violent conflict.



➔ **Tipping Point 1:** The breakdown of a functioning political process that provides access to power for all major stakeholder groups and produces binding decisions unleashes centrifugal forces previously kept at bay by the political system.

## 2019

### 2019: Islamic superstar

The October 2019 election results come as a shock: Nidaa Tounes's January split is revealed as having been fatal to both Nidaa Tounes and Tahya Tounes as no clear parliamentary majority emerges. The rise of a new fundamentalist Islamist party makes headlines as it manages to secure 20 percent of the seats in parliament. His party's loss and the fact that his son, Nidaa Tounes' leader Hafedh Caid Essebsi, is partly blamed for it, undermines Beiji Caid Essebsi's prospects for reelection as president. The leader of the fundamentalist party, a charismatic newcomer who amassed millions of followers with his Islamist YouTube channel, takes the country by storm and wins the presidential election by the narrowest of margins.

## 2023

### 2023: Civil war and martial law

In reaction to the military crackdown on terrorist organizations, thousands of Tunisian jihadists return in 2023 to fight the Tunisian armed forces. Civilians are caught in the crossfire and as the conflict goes on both of the warring factions start losing popular support. The military government secures Tunis and the coastal cities and manages to re-establish and recentralize rudimentary public services. The capital now serves as the headquarters for a UN humanitarian mission. The aid, however, cannot reach large swaths of the population as the frontlines are constantly shifting and many of the Islamist groups actively target aid workers. Along with the counter-terrorist operations on the Libyan border and in the mountains, the counter-insurgency operation against left-wing autonomy movements in Gafsa and Tataouine continues. Political parties are banned and their leaders are in custody. Martial law is in force and military tribunals pay little attention to the rule of law.

### Governance breakdown and violent conflict

- Violent attacks by Islamist groups.
- (Counter-)insurgency war between left-wingers in Gafsa/Tataouine and Islamist government.
- Public service breakdown.
- Coup and violent conflict between security forces and opposition groups.
- Humanitarian crisis; no humanitarian access to regions of conflict.



### 2019: Rule by decree

The post-Jasmine Revolution establishment is discredited and the political parties that emerged from the heterogeneous protest movements do not agree on anything. They fail to form a government, prompting the president to take action and push for a government founded on 'Islamic values'. Enthusiastic at the outset, Ennahda splits over the more radical rhetoric used by the president, with one faction joining him and the other going underground. Without a functioning government, the new president decides to rule by decree [TP1]. In January 2020, using a very broad and controversial interpretation of a clause of Article 6 of the 2014 constitution that commits the state to "the protection of the sacred and the prohibition of all violations thereof," he introduces his understanding of Sharia law.



## 2022

### 2022: Critics and allies

While Western countries issue a vague call for the re-establishment of the constitution and a democratic transition, Algeria, Egypt and Russia applaud the coup and the military's anti-Islamist agenda. Turkey and Qatar continue to support Ennahda's underground structures in order to lay the groundwork for the party's eventual return.

## 2021

### 2021: Economic crisis

The economic situation becomes untenable. Unemployment reaches new heights, with more than 17 percent of the population without a job. The value of the dinar plummets, with an inflation rate of more than 15 percent. International aid is suspended because of suspicions of rule of law violations and human rights abuses. The president uses the international aid cuts to frame the economic crisis as a Western attempt to bring his democratically elected government to its knees. His strategy proves effective: more and more Tunisians support radical religious groups. Radical Islamism is gradually becoming mainstream, while secular and moderate voices are increasingly sidelined and local affiliates of international terrorist groups are unofficially brought into the political system.

### 2021-2022: Coup d'état

Ultimately, the new president fails to win the loyalty of the military leadership. Capitalizing on his overwhelming support from an increasingly radicalized population he tries to bully the generals into submission, which proves to be a costly mistake. In 2022, Tunisian special forces storm the presidential palace in Carthage and the Parliament in Le Bardo by order of the chiefs of staff. The president and his allies are taken into military custody. The all-military 'Executive Council for the Prosperity of Tunisia' appears on television to dissolve the parliament and suspend the constitution. In the following weeks, the armed forces launch a series of coordinated attacks on terrorist groups in order to take back control over the key economic assets around the country [TP2].

### 2021: Extremists in control

In addition to serving as symbols of anti-Western resistance, the groups assist the president's movement with the provision of public services in underfunded areas. Ansar al-Sharia is active in coastal cities and Tunis, AQIM covers Kassereh and the mountainous region, while ISIS is in control of the territories bordering Libya, where it builds a new nucleus for its caliphate. To further consolidate his power, the president makes the redistribution of finances to regional administrations conditional upon their allegiance. In dissident regions, Islamist groups conduct attacks on local governments to force them into submission while helping the population survive and thus gaining, or forcing, people's loyalty.



### 2021: Counter-insurgency

To counter this trend toward national and local Islamic authoritarianism, radical left-wing organizations based in Gafsa and Tataouine develop armed branches and launch attacks against radical Islamic groups. Violent skirmishes take place across the country, claiming hundreds of lives and forcing thousands of people to leave their homes.

### 2021: Public sector breakdown

A massive internal displacement crisis disrupts most public services, as a majority of public sector workers are displaced. In some places, waste does not get collected; in others, sewage systems are no longer maintained, hospitals are short in staff and public sector wages are paid late and in a chaotic manner. From month to month, the random pattern of localized and sector-specific governance breakdown expands and changes as new services break down or non-state forces, functioning parts of state institutions or parastatals (like the many state-owned companies) take over some governance functions.

### 2021: No news from the West

Private messages from the West to the generals are contradictory: the US and France push for the military to move against all groups with terrorist connections, even without orders from the Islamist commander-in-chief. And as the crisis unfolds, their hints at an 'Egyptian solution' become increasingly obvious. At the same time, the UK, Germany, Italy, and other EU countries publicly and privately support civilian control.

➔ **Tipping Point 2:** The military coup sets up political miscalculations on the part of the ruling generals and an escalation of violence between security forces and various opposition groups, increasing the risks of governance breakdown and violent conflict.

## DATA Revival: Baseline scenario

### 2019

#### 2019: Digital natives

The 2019 European parliamentary elections result in a coalition of the political left. Reacting to the rise of right-wing populism and disinformation, the newly elected parliamentarians put a strong focus on the dangers of (purposeful) disinformation through digital media. Operating on the assumption that technical fixes cannot solve the technologically created problems, they set up an education fund to enhance media literacy in Europe and its neighbourhood. These actions strengthen nascent movements of digital natives, especially in the Balkans. Europe's eastern neighbourhood soon sees active societal efforts to fight for changes in environmental regulations and measures to protect (digital) privacy.

### 2020

#### 2020: Breaking up big tech

Meanwhile, the Democrats in the US take back the White House, partially thanks to their platform of targeting big tech companies through new antitrust laws that are tailored to address the challenges posed by large technology-driven corporations. Encouraged by this, the European Commission introduces a data tax, while the US Congress pushes through antitrust laws similar to the pre-Reagan period, breaking up the big tech corporations through the Digital Anti-Trust Act.

### 2021

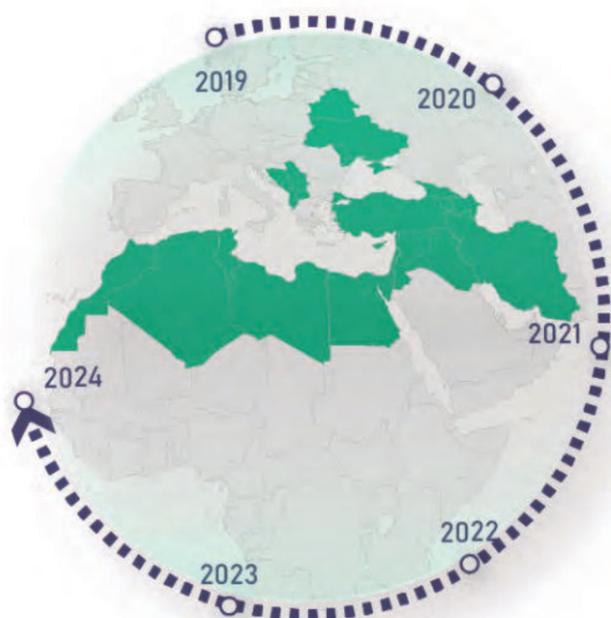
#### 2021: Open source revolution

With corporations weakened and the international movement of digital natives strengthened, open source approaches are on the rise. The movement announces a global education revolution that makes use of the new government funds for media literacy training as well as opportunities for open education enabled by Massive Open Online Courseware and the learning-by-doing environments created by the movement itself.

### 2022

#### 2022-2023: Start-up boom

By 2022, the Digital Anti-Trust Act has unleashed a boom for freelance work and small and medium enterprises, particularly in well-educated and media-literate societies with many unemployed young people. The EU's eastern and southeastern neighbourhood, in particular, develops a flourishing start-up culture. Services that big tech corporations used to provide have now decentralized and many small businesses emerge. Employment rates rise rapidly and many formerly dissatisfied people can see a path for improvement. Critical voices who call the economic boom superficial go unheard by both its many beneficiaries among the population at large and the movement of digital natives that counts maintaining a single, unified internet as part of its success story. Governments and large private corporations are struggling to find common ground, since the movement of digital natives has gained substantial political influence. In 2023, Eastern European governments plan to introduce measures of technologically driven public surveillance, only to be stopped in their tracks by the now powerful movement of digital natives. Capitalizing on a groundswell of public support from their role in paving the way for growth and new hope for many, the movement chooses the fight for digital freedom and privacy as their next political battleground. For the time being, it succeeds.



## DATA Revival: Artificial intelligence (alternative scenario)

#### 2019: Digital natives

#### 2020: Breaking up big tech

#### 2020: Digital propaganda 2.0

Initially unnoticed by the public, both the Russian-supported separatists in Eastern Ukraine and the central government in Kyiv begin to upgrade their respective strategic communications campaigns with state of the art technology powered by artificial intelligence. Suddenly, software churns out fabricated video material about violence and atrocities, and distributes via personalized social media postings with rapid, previously unimaginable speed. The images and sounds are so accurate that the average user does not recognize their artificiality. Used initially only to

shore up popular support among the respective domestic populations and to undermine political cohesion on the other side, the sudden spikes in speed and quality generate a feedback cycle in which each side reacts ever faster to the other, relying on ever-greater levels of automation. For particular types of disinformation, they begin to even delegate the complete loop of analyzing enemy media, generating targeted counter-propaganda and feeding it to the public to deep neural networks.

#### 2020: Reigniting war

Targeted at young Ukrainian men between 20 and 24 years of age on either side of the line of control, the AI onslaught creates a 'wag the dog'

situation that brings its own fantasy to life: while 'digital immigrants' (aged 40+), their news websites and TV channels barely catch on to what is happening, thousands of young men organize as vigilante groups and escalate a war in the Donbas that had stalemated over the last few years. People buy weapons on the dark net, link up with fellow fighters over social media, and venture to defend their communities by fighting the enemy.

## DATA Revival: Deepfakes (alternative scenario)

#### 2019: Digital natives

#### 2020: Breaking up big tech

#### 2021: Open source revolution

#### 2022-2023: Start-up boom

#### 2024: Balkan deepfakes

With populations enjoying a third year of solid growth and starting to demand more transparency and accountability from their leaders, politicians in power in one of the Western Balkan countries are the first to employ deep fakes to discredit their opponents. Rising media literacy in the region, paradoxically, sparks over-confidence: by now undetectable with the natural eye, deep fakes play particularly well with an optimistic, self-assured target audience.

#### 2024: Rigged victory

Only weeks before the presidential election, as the liberal reformist opposition leader has a 23 point lead over the president in the polls, a respected media outlet publishes a 'leaked' video in which the opposition candidate is seen to personally accept a suitcase full of cash from a well-known organized crime figure in exchange for a promise not to prosecute him or his 'business interests'. The video bursts the candidate's bubble of popular support, and the old-guard president snatches a narrow victory.

#### 2024: Fraud uncovered

In the months after the election, digital forensics activists finally prove that the videos are indeed deepfakes. Some of the new small- and medium-sized tech

companies and parts of the flourishing local open source community helped make the analysis possible. The scandal leads to a short spat within the president's inner circle, after which his closest confidante and minister testifies under oath that the president personally ordered him to 'drown [the opposition leader] in dirt', paid for with government funds. In the face of angry public protests, the entire government resigns and new elections are scheduled. The newly educated and economically flourishing society proves resilient enough in the face of the 'Deepfake Crisis'. While there was plenty of low-level violence amid the protests and a dozen opposition activists were heavily injured by riot police, the country avoids both governance breakdown and violent conflict.

## RoboDaddy: Baseline scenario

2019

### 2019: Father of the Nation

In late 2019, the president of Ourbaijan is re-elected and humbly accepts the title 'Father of the Nation,' given to him by passionate supporters. In his inaugural address, he warns against Western imperialism and interference, and urges his population to stand together, praising corporate-state fusion as the secret to a self-reliant and thriving economy.

2020

### 2020: Oil for Chinese tech

Ourbaijan joins the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in order to sell natural resource rights, especially for oil drilling, to China and to attract Chinese capital. At the end of 2020, thanks to an oil rush and growth in exports to China, large-scale investment in cutting-edge education begins. Scientific and tech literacy grow, fuelling the growth of a domestic tech sector which thrives, not least as a result of the considerable support from and rapid transfer of skills and resources by Chinese tech companies and the Chinese state. 'Code for the Nation' hackathons take place around the country. Hackathon winners get access to Chinese capital to develop domestic technology according to the Chinese model. This includes the country's own Rednet networking protocol and Application Programming Interface (API) as well as a domestic operating system similar to Linux.

2021

### 2021: Ending the West

To support the development of the domestic tech base with Chinese backing and to protect it, the government of Ourbaijan introduces a 66 percent 'Google tax' in 2021. There is strong mutual reinforcement between the technological developments and strong patriotic and nationalist sentiments in Ourbaijan. Most Ourbaijanis are critical readers of the domestic press and have lively political discussions, but they are mainly interested in a harmonious society in a self-reliant system in which the government and the corporate sector work closely together for the common good. The public willingly rises up against Western big tech, which they see as the extended arm of a West that has for a long time only pursued imperialist self-interests. Ourbaijanis are proud that control over technology and society has returned to its own strong leaders. The nation's best hackers track down the few remaining dissident cyberterrorists and separatists, selling them out to the police.

### 2021: Introducing 'RoboDaddy'

By mid-2021, the artificially intelligent personal assistant 'RoboDaddy' is introduced as a freely available service for all citizens of Ourbaijan. Its use is widespread, with voice assistants and smart devices connected to RoboDaddy in every home and on most mobile devices. Having appeared so quickly on the stage amidst a very new local digital ecosystem, RoboDaddy is considered by the Western press to be a knockoff of Chinese technology, licensed to Ourbaijan as part of the Belt and Road Initiative – 'Western disinformation' that every device linked to RoboDaddy is 'thankfully protected from'.

2022

### 2022: 'RoboDaddy' everywhere, anytime

By 2022, 85 percent of Ourbaijanis use 'OurChat', which is based on WeChat and integrated in the RoboDaddy operating system. RoboDaddy switches its default search engine and cloud storage to the domestic services 'DaddaKnows' and 'DaddaHeaven'. Thanks to the developing tech base, the Father of the Nation marks Ourbaijan's achievement of full technological and economic self-reliance with a public holiday. Society unites in harmony and patriotism, which some young people express by burning down the capital's Apple store in a violent anti-Western protest. The president's family buys the largest mobile phone operator and domestic broadcasting companies. The foreign press is comprehensively censored. On New Year's Eve, the Ourbaijani press leads with the headline 'RoboDaddy saves first life' after the AI's surveillance and predictive policing capabilities helped authorities track down criminals about to commit murder, or so the report claims.

2023-24

### 2023-2024: Copying China's success

In late 2023, the popular campaign 'Google Go Home' leads to the ban of Western tech vendors. Thanks to RoboDaddy, crime rates are at an all-time low. With preventive detention of dissidents spiking in 2024, the last separatist holdouts join the national hacker guard against Western liberalism. The self-sufficient web 'R-Net' is fully operational, entirely independent from other parts of the internet, and incompatible with TCP/IP. Self-reliance also proves successful economically: the economy flourishes on state-corporatism. Society is united behind the Father of the Nation, and the economy is booming with Chinese backing. The tech-economic miracle is built with China's technology and money, but with an Ourbaijani face on it and paid for with Ourbaijani oil money.

## RoboDaddy: Deepfakes (alternative scenario)

### 2019: Father of the Nation

### 2020: Oil for Chinese tech

### 2021: Ending the West

### 2021: Introducing 'RoboDaddy'

### 2022: 'RoboDaddy' everywhere, anytime

### 2022: Tech's dark side

Aided by technological progress in Ourbaijan, an open-source deep fake generator becomes readily available. It is better, more efficient and easier to use than previous technology. While the government's grip on the populous country has tightened by the following year, hacker groups turn against the government by launching viral videos that claim to expose RoboDaddy as 'fake software' (by showing footage of huge digital sweatshops where people answer RoboDaddy queries) and the country's purported self-reliance as a lie (by

showing the president meeting Mark Zuckerberg in one video and Sundar Pichai in the next).

### 2022: Eroding trust

Later that year, newspapers reveal that relatives of the president make millions creating forged audio-visual material of VIPs for blackmail. This undermines public trust in the government and sparks an internal power struggle among the ruling elite. Meanwhile, the deep fake hackers are keeping busy, feeding deep fake videos to the RoboDaddy-powered surveillance and crime prevention system, which leads to a series of false convictions as well as inexplicable dismissals of charges against high-profile public figures framed by deep fakes.

### 2022: Escaping surveillance

Among the public, patriotism turns into deep cynicism, and some hooligans' anti-Western rage turns against the surveillance state, particularly the police and the justice system. Weekly protests develop into violent confrontations, with security governance breaking down for a dozen hours per week. Many people destroy their RoboDaddy devices to escape the surveillance as well as the waves of 'revelations' distributed by the hacker groups. Without RoboDaddy, however, access to most social services such as healthcare, pensions and social support as well as paying taxes becomes impossible, leading to partial breakdown of basic governance services particularly for city populations who were the first to get rid of their devices, and the ones most dependent on them.

## RoboDaddy: Artificial intelligence manipulation (alternative scenario)

### 2019: Father of the Nation

### 2020: Oil for Chinese tech

### 2021: Ending the West;

### 2021: Introducing 'RoboDaddy'

### 2022: 'RoboDaddy' everywhere, anytime

### 2023: Illusion of unity

By 2023, trust in the RoboDaddy system seems limitless. RoboDaddy data is admissible as legal evidence in court. In February, two high-speed trains collide, claiming hundreds of lives. It turns out that the RoboDaddy-based system of automated decision-making was confused by ordinary visual signals put up by separatist dissidents. A call for caution about the reliability of the RoboDaddy AI system by victims'

families spreads across Ourbaijani social media. At the same time, people are worried that society is not as united as it seemed.

### 2023: Mode: Self-destruct

A few months later, people start reporting the breakdown of refrigerators, TVs and PCs in their homes. It turns out that a poorly integrated mix of software in the country's largest power-grid – rumoured to be patched together from Chinese and Russian suppliers – causes malfunctions that destroy electrical equipment. The authorities are not able to handle the situation and it gets out of control, eventually rendering multiple hospitals inoperable. The collapse of important infrastructure that relies on

electricity and high tech undermines popular belief in Ourbaijan's technological self-reliance and the economy.

### 2024: False convictions

In January 2024, police arrest an elderly lady for alleged murder, although her grandchildren claim the recordings used as evidence were misattributed to her. Reports about false convictions based on RoboDaddy audio evidence multiply. Respected tech experts claim that random individuals were tagged with audio clips that were actually recorded elsewhere and at another time.

## RoboDaddy: Biological agents (alternative scenario)

### 2019: Father of the Nation

### 2020: Oil for Chinese tech

### 2021: Ending the West;

### 2021: Introducing 'RoboDaddy'

### 2020-2021: Biotech promise

Scientists in China report a breakthrough in advanced gene-editing capabilities based on the CRISPR DNA shredder. Thanks to advanced research, they claim it is now possible to screen and treat fetuses against a range of hereditary diseases. After negotiations, the tech-enthusiastic Ourbaijani government accepts an offer from a Chinese gene editing start-up to apply their technology in Ourbaijan starting in 2021. Pregnant women across the country get access to low-cost treatment.

### 2022: Biotech peril

An increasing number of doctors report that newborn babies show signs of severe brain damage a few weeks after birth. All evidence points towards the gene editing as the primary cause. In the populous country of Ourbaijan, almost every citizen is in some way related to people affected. Mothers, fathers and grandparents start panicking and try to leave the country with their pregnant relatives and newborn babies to seek treatment outside of Ourbaijan. Rumours spread about other new medical technologies and treatments. People stop using the public health system and the wealthy leave the country to get private treatment abroad, while most Ourbaijanis seek their luck with underground doctors without proper training or equipment. Health governance in Ourbaijan breaks down and does not recover for years.

## Closed Bubbles, Open Net: Baseline scenario

2020

### 2020: Global protectionism

The global economy is in decline. Trade conflicts are still ongoing. China focuses on the need for domestic growth in the face of rising debt and slows down foreign direct investment as well as its One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR) plans, retreating from investment commitments in Europe's neighbourhood. It turns out that Europe is not able to fill the investment vacuum that China's retreat from OBOR leaves in its neighbourhood. Trade unions across Europe's neighbourhood lose trust and influence. Inequality grows and the social gap widens. The West looks inward as well, wrestling with job losses and unemployment due to automation. The US threatens to withdraw from the IMF.

### 2020: Neutral and open net

Netflix is blocked by Chromecast, which fuels the debate about net neutrality. People across Europe and its neighbourhood agree they don't want this, pressuring governments to ensure net neutrality and an open internet.

2021

### 2021: Online bubbles

People's media literacy across the EU's neighbourhoods is low, but trust in online and offline media is high. Due to widespread inequality, society is fragmented. People retreat into bubbles. While older generations focus on their local religious communities, younger people escape into the virtual worlds of augmented reality gaming. International online communities in a still relatively unregulated internet become more important as people's social support networks.



2023

### 2023: Risky surveillance

Ukraine, Turkey and Tunisia acquire a more efficient and comprehensive online censorship system from China. The program's launch causes an internet breakdown in the three countries, blocking younger people from accessing the virtual bubbles they have become so reliant on. Critical civil society groups that had gained support after the revelations around the Chinese social credit system capitalize on the widespread discontent and organize mass protests and sit-ins. The population turns to the traditional media and journalism, which experience a renaissance. Governments begin to fully understand the risks posed by Chinese technology. Afraid of another Arab Spring or colour revolution, some governments even shut down their Chinese surveillance and censorship systems, though it remains the stuff of popular rumours and conspiracy theories whether or not this is actually true.

### 2023: Rogue or neutral?

This new environment allows organized crime to flourish. A huge dataset with the names of people in YouTube videos is leaked. While some are only embarrassing, others are clearly incriminating. Organized crime takes advantage of governments' paralysis and starts blackmailing people. Police and intelligence services in the EU's neighbourhood want to use the data for their purposes, but governments are wary of people's scrutiny and another technological failure that fuels public discontent. So they ban its use by authorities. In 2024, the UN endorses the Net-Neutrality Pact. Even Ukraine joins the pact and Belarus starts tearing down censorship firewalls.

2022

### 2022: Blowing the whistle

By 2022, advanced facial recognition in YouTube videos enables the identification of people who feature in videos uploaded to the platform. The EU announces its new net neutrality law, which gains massive public support around the world. A whistleblower reveals that the Chinese social credit system has an additional component: a monitoring system that allows the tracking of people in real time during situations like protests and riots. This causes a public outcry around the world, with people in the 16+1 countries being particularly worried about how their own governments' use of Chinese technology affects their freedoms and lives.

## Closed Bubbles, Open Net: Deepfakes (alternative scenario)

### 2020: Global protectionism

### 2020: Neutral and open Net

### 2021: Online bubbles

### 2022: Blowing the whistle

### 2023: Egypt's deepfake revolution

In Egyptian society, people focus their entire social lives on local religious communities. In 2023, a series of videos of government officials and members of the elite is leaked. In one of the videos, General Al-Sisi secretly meets a Christian pastor and converts to Christianity. In another video, men wearing Christian symbols abduct a group of Muslim women to sell them as sex slaves. The leaked YouTube dataset - the largest deepfake training dataset in the world - was a game changer for creating deepfakes. But the population is not aware of the extent to which advanced deepfake technology enables criminals to create

fake videos and thus are absolutely traumatized by the videos, in which the elites seem to sell out the population to foreign players and betray the Muslim population in a massive conspiracy.

### 2023: Trust breakdown

Dissatisfied with the economic situation and hysterical about the videos, the many unemployed people take to the streets to protest. Religious minorities, particularly Christians, are targeted by vigilante groups, but they also turn their anger and violence against the government, which has completely lost the populations' trust: even if not every one of these outrageous videos can be legitimate, people think, who can still be trusted?

### 2023: Sisi's surveillance state

The Sisi government bets on the full force of the Chinese real-time monitoring system and makes use of the leaked YouTube facial recognition data. Access to social media is blocked, because there is no way to tell real from fake videos and images. Protest leaders mysteriously disappear. While the government tries to suppress protests, the situation escalates. Protests turn violent and the security forces respond in kind. This entirely changes the course of events and convinces governments that they need to make use of technology to stay in control. Net neutrality is definitely off the table. With the scarce public resources diverted to establishing a full-scale 21st century surveillance state, other areas of public services and governance suffer.

## Closed Bubbles, Open Net: Artificial intelligence (alternative scenario)

### 2020: Global protectionism

### 2020: Neutral and open net

### 2021: Online bubbles

### 2022: Blowing the whistle

### 2023: Virtual reality

A new virtual reality online game, a mix of Pokémon Go and Fortnite, is popular with young people across North Africa and the Levant. Unemployed and suffering from dire economic conditions in crowded urban centres, they are happy to at least have access to cheap mobile technology, which is their gateway into the world of online gaming. People wander through the streets, to real places which have a function in their online game.

### 2023: Disrupted order

Suddenly, imams of local Muslim communities start reporting incidents of young people without proper clothing walking into mosques, shouting and running around. It turns out that the virtual reality game's script suddenly lures people into holy sites, leading to lynchings and revenge violence between ethnic and sectarian

communities. In the same game, people are systematically directed to deserted areas only to be robbed and sometimes beaten or killed, completely overstressing police resources.

### 2023: Profit trumps protection

Based on the scale and organization of the scam, as well as the sophistication required to infiltrate the game system, it becomes clear to people that this must be an organized crime plot. The game developers in California find no recognizable pattern and fail to track down the manipulation of their game, which appears only to affect particular countries whose languages they do not understand. Still, at this early stage of the company, these countries represent a massive chunk of its customer base that brings in lots of revenue and the next funding round is looming. So the management refuses to take the game offline for these countries until the vulnerability is found and fixed, leaving hundreds of thousands of players across North Africa and the Levant vulnerable, and much bigger urban populations on

### 2023-2024: Radical infiltration

As urban mosques are now frequently disturbed, more and more urban Muslims stop going and rather take part in virtual reality prayer services that see rapidly growing rates of participation. Within a year, millions of people participate in massive virtual reality prayer experiences every day. Friday online prayers led by popular preachers easily reach tens of millions across North Africa and the Levant. In 2024, a tech-savvy radical Islamist group uses AI technology to inject minor changes in the audio channel of popular sermons, playing up polarizing and militant messages that lead to a wave of apparently unrelated militant acts by young men in urban centres across the Arab world. Security governance capacities are quickly stretched to the limit, both open riots and covert terrorist attacks become more and more common. Without operational leaders or an agenda, the events do not fit the category of violent conflict, but by 2025, the numbers of violent deaths per country and year begin to reach the 1,000 mark.

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