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

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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.
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:

- **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).

- **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.
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
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North Africa
7. Libyan Drought and China’s Rescue
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### Scenarios (2019-2023)

#### Middle East

**Scenario 1: To the Brink of an Arab World War**

**Core scenario created on 22 June 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td><strong>Shi'ite alliance revived</strong>&lt;br&gt;In 2019, Iran completely pulls out of the nuclear deal. European efforts to stabilize the treaty have failed. Iran unilaterally 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.</td>
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<td>2019</td>
<td><strong>Nuclear arms race</strong>&lt;br&gt;In response to the Iranian nuclear revival and early signs of Iraq being drawn into a more and more threatening Shi'a alliance run by Tehran, Riyadh approaches the Pakistani government for help with a Saudi nuclear program. A constant stream of rumors about progress in both the Iranian and the Saudi nuclear programs further fuels already existing tensions in the region.</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td><strong>The crown prince fails</strong>&lt;br&gt;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.</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td><strong>Civil war in Iraq</strong>&lt;br&gt;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 militiamen 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.</td>
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<td>2021</td>
<td><strong>Repression in Saudi Arabia</strong>&lt;br&gt;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'a 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 rumors of clandestine Iranian military support to Shi'a underground groups in Saudi Arabia and, in turn, more repression by the Saudi security forces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td><strong>Iran-Saudi standoff</strong>&lt;br&gt;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.</td>
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**Governance breakdown and violent conflict**

- Armored 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.

**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.
How the Hashemites Lose Control of Jordan

Core scenario created on 22 June 2018

2019: Jordanians divided

In 2019, the Palestinian Authority is in deep financial trouble and cannot pay public sector wages. The Hashemites' King Abdullah II is helping them with a line of credit, but in its own fiscal situation, it is at once too little 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, descendents 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 countrymen, while most East Bankers see it as a waste of their taxes on a corrupt and ineffective institution.

Governance breakdown and violent conflict

Active radical militant groups in Jordan; potential breakdown of security governance and 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 see 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 Palestinian 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: An unholy alliance

In 2020, an ultra-hawkish Israeli government sees the Palestinian Authority as too weak to resist and, with 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.

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 assassimates 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.

2023: Hashemites contested and militants striving

Rumours that the assassins are military officers exacerbaton cracks within the army and security services. As Sunni radicals in Jordan begin to mobilize and manage to manipulate members of the royal 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.

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.

2023: 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].

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.

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.

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 moral legitimacy and upends one of the few unifying mechanisms linking West Bankers’ Palestinian solidarity with East Bankers’ religious conservatism.

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.
**Tipping Point 1: Major cuts to US military aid and force posture would destabilize brittle dictatorships such as Sisi's Egypt (see 2021) and create a power vacuum. The likely results would include both a nuclear arms race and a chaotic and further destabilizing jockeying for new alliances.**

**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.

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

**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**

**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.

**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 Trump tax cuts run out, and the dollar falls, the US begins a phased military withdrawal from the Middle East.

**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).

**2022**

**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

ISIL campaign against Yazidis 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.

**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.

**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 genocidal (violent conflict).**

**2023**

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**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.
- Discrimination, terror and genocide (violent conflict).
In 2019, the 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.

1. **2019: Trade war**
   - In 2019, the 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.

2. **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 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.

3. **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.

4. **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.

5. **2021: New oligarchs rising**
   - 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. The process do not witness any systematic election fraud.

6. **2022: Crackdown backfires**
   - 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.

7. **2021: Unpaid wages, mass protests**
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8. **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 turn, pursuing warmer relations with the EU and the US.

**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.

**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.

**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.”**
RUSSIA 2023: Oil and populism: rising together and 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 tensions as the people feel the higher prices at the pumps.

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 pressuring the government to step down.

2020: Crackdown Putin and Lukashenko try to secure their power by crackdowning on opposition movements. However, putting popular opposition leaders in jail only fans the flames of discontent, as do desperate assassinations of individual leaders.

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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.

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 2019, populism becomes a major political force. 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 pressuring the government to step down.

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2021: 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. 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.

In September 2021, Aliyev III and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jingpin sign a free trade agreement, further cementing China’s influence in the region. The hike in oil prices, China’s economic influence, and close collaboration with Turkey enables the Azerbaijani economy to flourish against the global trend.

2022: ‘Reunifications’ With Russia looking inward, Eastern Partnership countries develop plans to oppose the Kremlin, with trading few to no consequences. In 2022, the new Ukrainian president orders his troops to reconquer the ‘occupied’ Donbas [TP4]. 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.

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**Scenario 6: EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD Scenarios (2019-2023)**

**Tipping Point 1:** Putin’s resignation without the prospect of an immediate strong successor sparks enormous political uncertainty in Moscow. It is seen as a window of opportunity for aggressive 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, Akhkhia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh reignite.

**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 outorganize the old guard.

**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:** 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.

**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 defaulting 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.

**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 offer of joining NATO [TP2], 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.

**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:** 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:** 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.
Libyan Drought and China’s Rescue

Core scenario created on 18-19 February 2019

**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: 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: EU deadlock**
The number of refugees trying to reach Europe increases because the western 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.

**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: 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’.

**2023: The anti-Western alliance**
In 2023, at a summit in Ankara, Putin, Xi, Erdogan, 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 Deby, despite desperate attempts by the French and US commandos to organize the defence (violent conflict) [TP3].

**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 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.**

Goverance 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.

**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.**

**Tipping Point 3: The coup in Chad exemplifies how actors engaged in 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 (Deby’s Western allies) and tip a volatile local military balance to spark or escalate violent conflict.**

**2022-24: 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.
Scenarios (2019-2024)  
NORTH AFRICA

Scenario 8

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.

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 parties make claims to 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 spiralling 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 Sahab 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.

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.

TP2

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 mediators’ are to agree to respect Libyan sovereignty and stop interfering, initially sceptical about ceding ground to a strongman like Haftar, Aljiers acquiesces to the decision as its own leadership is threatened by popular protests and political deadlock over Bousefika’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: 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.

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. Internationally donor fatigue and institutional deadlocks in the EU and UN mean that discussions over a new humanitarian aid operation in Libya hang on for many months.

TP3

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 more severe. The lack of 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.

2022: 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 tribals or the radical Islamist groups competing for local power.

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 leaks, 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 means nor the management capacity to deal with this new crisis. Internationally donor fatigue and institutional deadlocks in the EU and UN mean that discussions over a new humanitarian aid operation in Libya hang on for many months.

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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.

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 ‘moderniser-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 polarised 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.

Tipping Point 2: The fragmentation crisis of 2022 has its roots in known weaknesses of the Tunisian state as well as the contentiousness 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.

2024: Tunisia collapsed
The situation deteriorates quickly and by 2024, the cornered putchists 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 cities. The energy industry is on hold, external debt is sky high, the tourism.

2023: Coup d’état
Faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges, Beji 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 protest.

2022: Last hope: Europe?
The growing economic disparities between the coastal regions and the south, combined with the humanitaria

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.

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, Hamma 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 ramping up the security forces, which only adds fuel to the fire and reinforces the popular perception that Hafedh is indebted to and was put in power through his father’s nepotism.

2019: Essebsi wins
In 2019, the relationship between Tunisian President Beji 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 #BejiGoToSocial media campaign, Nidaa Tounes wins the parliamentary majority and Hafedh is appointed prime minister, while the political landscape has become even more polarised.

2018: 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.

2017: Drought, austerity and strikes
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2015: Drought, austerity and strikes
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Scenarios (2019-2024)
Tunisia Between the Crescent and the Gun

Scenario 10
NORTH AFRICA
Scenarios (2019-2024)
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: Extremists in control

2019: Islamic superstar
The October 2019 election results come as a shock: Nidaa Toune's January split is revealed as having been fatal to both Nidaa Toune and Tahya Toune 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 Toune's leader Hafedh Caid Essebsi, is partly blamed for it, undermines Beji 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.

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.

2019: 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.

2020: No news from the West
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 Kasserine 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.

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**

**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**

**Breaking up big tech**

**Open source revolution**

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 them 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.

**2021**

**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 neighbourhoood, in particular, develops a flourishing start-up culture. Services that big tech corporations used to provide now decentralize 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 supportive push from their leaders, politicians in power in one of the Western Balkan countries are the first to employ deepfakes to discredit their opponents. Rising media literacy in the region, paradoxically, sparks over-confidence: by now undetectable with the natural eye, deepfakes play particularly well with an optimistic, self-assured target audience.

**2022-2023**

**Open source revolution**

Newly elected parliamentarians take back the White House, partially thanks to their platform of targeting big tech companies through new antitrust laws similar to the pre-Reagan period, breaking up the big tech corporations through the Digital Anti-Trust Act.

**Start-up boom**

**Deepfakes (alternative scenario)**

**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 deepfakes to discredit their opponents. Rising media literacy in the region, paradoxically, sparks over-confidence: by now undetectable with the natural eye, deepfakes 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 bypasses the candidate’s bubble of popular support, and the old-guard president snatches a narrow victory.

**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.

**2022-2023**

**Open source revolution**

**Deepfakes**

**Balkan deepfakes**

**2024**

**Start-up boom**

**Deepfakes (alternative scenario)**

**Rigged victory**

**Fraud uncovered**

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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 his people in support of his policies. 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: Oil for Chinese tech
Ourbaijan joins the Shanghai Coopera-
tion 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, Ourbaijan invests in cut-
cost education beginning. Scientific and tech literacy grow, fuelling the growth of a domes-
tic 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 Chinese state-owned enterprises. The ‘Father of the Nation’ hackathon takes 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: 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 Ourbaijans are critical readers of the domestic press and have lively political discussions, but they are mainly interested in a harmoni-
society in a self-reliant system in which the government and the corpora-
tive 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. Ourbaijans 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.

2022: ‘RoboDaddy’ everywhere, anytime
By mid-2021, 85 percent of Ourbaijans 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 Ourbai-
jan’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 surveil-
ance and predictive policing capabilities helped authorities track down criminals about to commit murder, or so the report claims.

2022: RoboDaddy: Biological agents (alternative scenario)
2019: Father of the Nation
2020: Oil for Chinese tech
2021: Ending the West;
2022: Introducing ‘RoboDaddy’
2023: Illusion of unity
2024: False convictions
2025: Escaping surveillance

2022: RoboDaddy: Baseline scenario
2019: Father of the Nation
2020: Oil for Chinese tech
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2022: Introducing ‘RoboDaddy’
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2022: RoboDaddy: Deepfakes (alternative scenario)
2019: Father of the Nation
2020: Oil for Chinese tech
2021: Ending the West
2022: RoboDaddy everywhere, anytime
2023: Mod disruption
2024: False convictions
2025: Escaping surveillance

2022: RoboDaddy: Artifical intelligence manipulation (alternative scenario)
2019: Father of the Nation
2020: Oil for Chinese tech
2021: Ending the West
2022: Introducing ‘RoboDaddy’
2023: Mode: Self-destruct
2024: False convictions
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Among the public, patriotism turns against the surveillance state, particularly the police and the justice system. Weekly protests develop into violent confronta-
tions, 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 impos-
sible, leading to partial breakdown of basic governance services particularly for citizens that first get rid of their devices, and the ones most dependent on them.
Closed Bubbles, Open Net: Baseline scenario

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 power 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, 2020: Neutral and open net
and unemployment due to automation. People across Europe and its neighbourhood agree they don’t want this, pressuring governments to ensure net neutrality and an open internet.

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 online gaming. International online communities in a still relatively unregulated internet become more important as people's social support networks.

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+ countries being particularly worried about how their own governments' use of Chinese technology affects their freedoms and lives.

2023: Rogue or neutral?
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Closed Bubbles, Open Net: Deepfakes (alternative scenario)

2020: Global protectionism
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.

2021: Neutral and open net
In Egypt, a 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 Chinese 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 exploits criminals to create false 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.

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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?

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

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Closed Bubbles, Open Net: Baseline scenario

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2023: Profit trumps trust
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 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.

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 population is systematically targeted. 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.
Scenarios for Governance Breakdown and Violent Conflict in the EU’s Neighbourhood