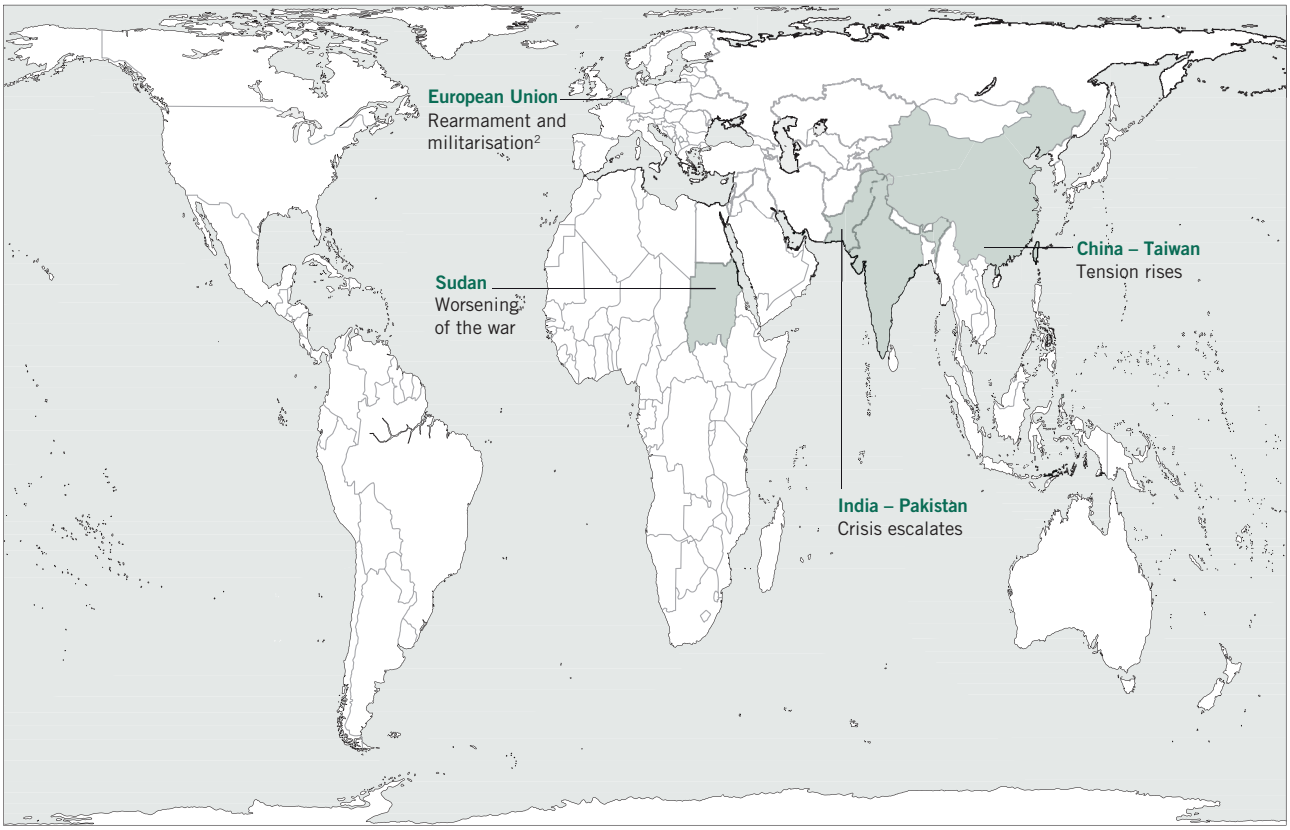
5. Risk scenarios

Drawing on the analysis of the armed conflicts and socio-political crises around the world in 2024,[1] in this chapter the UAB's School for a Culture of Peace identifies four contexts that may worsen and become sources of greater instability and violence in 2025 or even further into the future due to their conditions and dynamics. The risk scenarios refer to the evolution of the civil war and humanitarian crisis in Sudan; the potential for large-scale armed conflict between India and Pakistan in a context of unresolved historical disputes; the rising political and military tensions between China and Taiwan and the dispute between China and the US over the latter's stance towards Taiwan; and the militaristic escalation in the EU, especially through the ReArm Europe plan, which creates risks of escalating tensions in the continent, among other consequences.

Map 5.1. **Risk scenarios**



1 The analysis of each context is based on the yearly review of the events that occurred in 2024 and includes some important factors and dynamics of the first four months of 2025.

2 The risk scenario on the militaristic escalation in Europe is shown on this map in a simplified manner for graphical representation purposes. Not all EU member countries have been marked, just Belgium as it is the country that hosts the headquarters of the main EU institutions.

5.1. Sudan on the brink of collapse: civil war, humanitarian crisis and failed diplomacy

Since 13 April 2023, Sudan has been plunged into a devastating civil war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), under the command of Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also known as Hemedti. The spread of violence across virtually the entire country and the growing involvement of community militias and regional armed groups have turned the conflict into a fragmented and highly localised war that is difficult to contain.

Recently, even though the Sudanese Army has partially regained Khartoum and other areas, the RSF is still holding on to crucial regions such as Darfur and Kordofan. These regions are not only strategically vital due to their size and resources, but also because of their symbolic and identity-related value. The persistence of the RSF in Darfur has given rise to concerns about a de facto partition of the country, where two parallel governments could become established: one dominated by the Sudanese Army in the north and another dominated by the RSF in the west.

The war has triggered one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world, with approximately 30 million people (more than half the Sudanese population), in need of urgent aid. Food insecurity affects 26 million, with 14 zones at risk of imminent famine between June and September 2025. The healthcare system is in ruins and one in three hospitals has stopped operating. Malnutrition menaces over 4.9 million pregnant women and children. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) warned that it has only received 21% of the funds needed to cope with the situation, reflecting a critical shortage in international commitment. The war has also plunged the country into the greatest forced displacement crisis in the world, with over 12 million internally displaced people and more than four million refugees in neighbouring countries. The situation in West Darfur is particularly grim, with reports of genocide and war crimes committed by the RSF.

The war in Sudan has triggered one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world

There is a real possibility that the conflict might spill over to neighbouring countries. This is not only because the massive flows of displaced people could destabilise Chad, Egypt, South Sudan and other bordering countries, as the UN warns, but also due to the growing tension between the warring parties and neighbouring states that are backing the other side, such between the Sudanese Army and Chad due to Chad's support for the RSF.

In this context, the Sudanese conflict is evolving towards a geopolitical power struggle in North Africa and the Sahel. Iran has bolstered its support to the Sudanese Army, whilst the United Arab Emirates (EAU) and other actors stand accused of arming the RSF. This indirect intervention has turned Sudan into a chessboard for regional and international powers, prolonging and intensifying the conflict. China and Russia have played an ambivalent role in the UN Security Council. Although both countries voted to extend the weapons embargo on Darfur in 2024, Russia blocked a broader resolution proposed by the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone that called for an immediate ceasefire and negotiations.

Different attempts at mediation since 2023 have failed. Talks in Jeddah, Bahrain and Geneva have been intermittent and marked by absences, unacceptable preconditions and irreconcilable agendas. In March 2025, the RSF participated in negotiations in Switzerland, but the Sudanese Army did not attend, arguing that its minimum conditions (such as the RSF's withdrawal from civilian areas) had not been met. The international community, led by the United States, Saudi Arabia, the African Union (AU) and the UN, has continued to push for a diplomatic solution. The Paris summit in April 2025 secured $2.1 billion in committed humanitarian aid, but efforts to resume the peace negotiations have been consistently hindered by the parties' lack of political will.

On 4 March 2025, the RSF established what it called the "Government of Peace and Unity" with Hemedti as chair of the Presidential Council. This government has been widely rejected for lacking democratic legitimacy and for resulting from military force rather than from civilian consensus. In contrast, the Sudanese Army and its allies have promoted a political transition proposal led by the "National Forces Coordination" coalition, which advocates for a three-year transitional government with civilian and military involvement. However, the fragmentation of political actors and mutual distrust have prevented any tangible progress toward unified governance from being made.

Faced with this situation, various potential scenarios are emerging in the country. The one most likely in the short and medium term is that the conflict will continue with episodes of intermittent violence. The lack of any lasting ceasefire, the fragmentation of

actors and foreign support for both sides make any immediate resolution difficult. The consequences will include increased displacement, famine, institutional weakening and the risk of the total collapse of the Sudanese state. There is also a threat that the war could lead to a de facto partition of the country, given that the RSF controls much of the west and south and the Sudanese Army maintains its hold over the north and centre, which could lead to an entrenched territorial divide. This situation could prompt the practical establishment of two parallel power structures that would hamper any kind of national reconciliation in the future. A third scenario, which is not yet feasible, is to achieve a negotiated solution as the only viable path to lasting peace. However, it requires conditions that currently do not exist, such as mutual trust, sustained pressure from key international actors (especially those who fund or arm the warring parties) and a roadmap accepted by both civilians and the military. So far, diplomatic efforts have failed to yield any significant progress.

In short, expectations for resolving the conflict in Sudan in 2025 are low. The war has not only destroyed lives and cities, but it has also fragmented the country's political, social and economic fabric. The international community must redouble its efforts to exert effective pressure on the actors involved, impose restrictions on arms sales and promote an inclusive transition with the meaningful involvement of civil society. Barring a drastic change in the current dynamics, such as the military collapse of one side or the other or a concerted, large-scale diplomatic intervention, Sudan risks entering a protracted spiral of violence similar to what Somalia suffered for decades. Time is running out. Sudan not only needs peace: it needs justice, reconstruction and a viable future for the millions of people currently living between hunger, war and exile.

5.2. Rising political and military tensions between China and Taiwan

Political and military tensions between China and Taiwan increased significantly in 2024 and the first half of 2025, as did the confrontation between China and the US over the latter's stance towards Taiwan. China's pressure on Taiwan grew dramatically after William Lai Ching-te won the Taiwanese presidential election in January 2024. Some analysts argue that China's military activity around Taiwan and in the Taiwan Strait has steadily increased since 2020, particularly following the visit to Taiwan by then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in August 2022, and that tensions between China and Taiwan are at their highest point since 1996, when Beijing fired missiles off the coast of Taiwan, coinciding with Taiwan's first democratic elections after decades of authoritarian rule by the Kuomintang. In response to Beijing's increased activity, Lai Ching-te's new government also increased military spending and announced the development of its defence capabilities, stepped up military exercises, rolled out new national security measures and strengthened its defence ties with the US and other countries. The new US administration of Donald Trump increased the rhetoric against Beijing while explicitly expressing its commitment to the defence of Taiwan. Although on several occasions in 2024, former President Biden had said that his administration was willing to defend Taiwan militarily in the event of an invasion of the island or if Beijing sought to alter the status quo in the region through force, the Trump administration's greater assertiveness in this regard raised suspicions in Beijing about whether such a commitment represented a departure from the policy of "strategic ambiguity" that Washington had followed until then. In 1979, the US terminated its Mutual Defence Treaty with Taiwan, recognising the government of the People's Republic of China as the legitimate representative of China and adhering to the "One China" principle. Since then, successive US administrations have been "strategically ambiguous" (avoiding explicit commitments to Taiwan's military defence) with the goal of deterring both Chinese military aggression against Taiwan and Taipei's declaration of independence.

China's pressure on Taiwan increased dramatically after William Lai Ching-te won the Taiwanese presidential election in January 2024

In 2024, Taipei reported more than 3,000 incursions by Chinese military aircraft near Taiwan, an 80% increase over the previous year and the highest number since such activity began to be documented. Similarly, in April 2025, the head of the US Indo-Pacific Command declared that China's aggressive military actions near Taiwan, which he described as rehearsals and not as simple exercises, increased by 300% in 2024 compared to the previous year. In addition to the substantial rise in the number of Air Defence Identification Zone violations, or median line crossings, in the Taiwan Strait, and the growing routine presence of ships and aircraft around Taiwan, in 2024 China conducted three rounds of a large-scale military exercise, Joint Sword-2024, in Taiwan's contiguous zone, the maritime area below its territorial waters, extending 12 to 24 nautical miles from the coast. In the third round, in December, China deployed around 90 ships between Japan's southern islands and the South China Sea. Several analysts considered it the largest naval operation in the previous three decades. In April 2025, the Chinese government also conducted large-scale live-fire military exercises involving air and naval forces around Taiwan. Called Strait Thunder 2025, these exercises simulated a blockade of the island and the neutralisation of critical Taiwanese infrastructure and targets. Beijing released videos of Taiwanese port cities being hit by rockets and ballistic missiles. In response, Taipei sent aircraft and ships and deployed land-based missile systems. Several analysts said that the exercises were aimed not only at demonstrating China's ability to block or invade Taiwan, but also at showing that it could block or counter potential aid from US allies in the region, such as Japan and the Philippines. The Taiwanese government also blasted an unprecedented rise in submarine cable cutting to disrupt communications in Taiwan and isolate it from information, as well as cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns aimed at fuelling scepticism about the reliability of US assistance to Taiwan, the competence of Lai Ching-te's government and the Taiwanese military's effectiveness.

Alongside its military activity, Beijing also stepped up political pressure on Taiwan. In recent years, senior government officials and Xi Jinping have repeatedly said that the "peaceful reunification" of Taiwan with mainland China is one of their top priorities, but they have repeatedly warned that they would not renounce the use of force if necessary. In February 2025, the Chinese defence minister said that Beijing could not guarantee that it would renounce the use of force in response to activities aimed at achieving Taiwan's independence or foreign interference and added that the seizure of Taiwan would occur sooner or later. Beijing has publicly stated that a declaration of independence by Taiwan would lead to a military invasion of the island, and this is reflected in its domestic legal system. However, some analysts argue that this scenario is highly unlikely, because there is no social majority in Taiwan supportive of such a declaration and because both Taipei and the US are aware of the consequences that doing so would entail. Furthermore, Taipei believes that any declaration of independence is unnecessary because Taiwan already enjoys de facto independence. According to some sources, Beijing is aware of the difficulties of

achieving peaceful reunification, as there is neither a social majority in Taiwan supporting reunification, nor have successive Taiwanese governments shown any political will to address the issue. However, Beijing has placed so much emphasis on reunification that inaction, or failure to achieve reunification, could damage its credibility. Given this scenario, many analysts argue that Beijing's strategy involves pressuring Taiwan for peaceful reunification whilst simultaneously preparing for military intervention. In fact, although Beijing has never mentioned a date for achieving reunification, some sources have placed a possible invasion of the island as early as 2027. Along these lines, in April 2025, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs John Noh said in the US House of Representatives that Xi Jinping had ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to be ready to invade Taiwan in 2027.

In response to China's increased political pressure, military activities and "grey zone actions" (acts of military intimidation and harassment that fall short of being considered acts of war), the Taiwanese government took various forms of action in 2024 and the first quarter of 2025, such as the reinstatement of compulsory military service (which in 2024 was extended from four months to one year); the holding of its first war drill against China in January 2025 to test Taiwan's ability to withstand an attack or blockade, in a scenario of cooperation between China, Iran, North Korea and Russia; and the establishment of the Whole-of-Society Defense Resilience Committee to strengthen its response in crisis situations. Along the same lines, in March 2025, the Taiwanese president declared China a "hostile foreign force" and announced several measures to counter what he condemned as China's growing infiltration into the Taiwanese government, society and military, such as tightening restrictions on people travelling to China and reinstating military courts for cases such as espionage.

The final factor that raised tensions between China and Taiwan was the growing assertiveness of the US administration and the escalating rhetoric between China and the US over the issue. During the 2024 US election campaign and in the early months of the Trump administration in early 2025, some in Taiwan expressed surprise and concern at the lukewarm and ambiguous way in which Donald Trump spoke about his ties and commitments to Taiwan. Indeed, Trump was quite clear in calling for Taiwan to substantially increase its defence budget. Given these statements, some analysts suggested that Trump could bring about a significant shift in US foreign policy towards Taiwan from that of his predecessors. However, as 2025 progressed, several senior US officials made forceful statements against China and demonstrated their willingness to prevent Beijing from unilaterally and forcibly altering the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. For example, in May 2025, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth warned that a Chinese military attack on Taiwan could be imminent and called on his Indo-Pacific allies to ramp up defence spending to strengthen deterrence against Beijing. Hegseth said that any Chinese attempt to invade Taiwan would have devastating consequences for the Indo-Pacific and the world, warning that the US did not seek conflict with China, but that it would not allow its allies and partners to be subordinated to China either. Hegseth accused China of seeking to become the hegemonic power in Asia, of harassing Taiwan and other countries in the South China Sea and of using its cyber capabilities to attack critical infrastructure in the US. In a similar vein, US Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs John Noh told the US House of Representatives that Xi Jinping had ordered the PLA to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027. Noh warned that to counter the growing threat posed by China in the Indo-Pacific region, the US must reestablish deterrence with credible military forces. The head of the US Indo-Pacific Command also warned that China was surpassing the US in air, sea and ballistic capabilities, whilst Australia's defence minister said that China has undertaken the largest military buildup in the world since the end of the Second World War.

Some analysts have also speculated that the Trump administration will drastically increase arms sales to Taiwan, far exceeding sales during its first term (estimated at around $18.3 billion, according to Reuters) and those during Biden's term (around $8.4 billion, according to the same source). Despite not having any formal diplomatic ties (due to the "One China" policy), the US is Taiwan's main arms supplier. Furthermore, the Trump administration is reportedly pressuring Taiwan to increase defence spending to 3% of its GDP. Beijing has expressed strong opposition to both the growth in US arms transfers to Taiwan and the expansion of Taiwan's military budget. China has repeatedly demanded that the US stop interfering in what it considers an internal affair and creating new sources of tension in the region. In fact, in a telephone conversation with Trump, Xi Jinping urged the US to handle the Taiwan issue prudently to prevent "Taiwanese separatist forces" from dragging China and the US into the dangerous terrain of confrontation or even conflict.

Although any military escalation by Beijing against Taiwan seems unlikely in the short term, as well as any scenario of direct confrontation between the US and China over the issue, Beijing has significantly increased political and military pressure on Taiwan in recent years, and particularly since the January 2024 presidential election, repeating that it could use force to achieve the goal of reunification. Taiwan has also announced its intention to clearly increase its defence capabilities, whilst the US has said that it is willing to act decisively to prevent Beijing from unilaterally altering the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.

5.3. India and Pakistan on the brink of a full-scale armed conflict

After several years of tense calm in relations between India and Pakistan, an attack in Kashmir carried out on 22 April 2025, by the armed opposition group The Resistance Front brought both countries to the brink of a full-scale armed conflict. Twenty-six men were killed in a shootout in the Kashmiri tourist town of Pahalgam, almost all of them Indian tourists from other parts of India, though the victims also included a Nepalese tourist and a local worker. Considered an offshoot of the armed group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which emerged in 2019 after Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of its statehood, The Resistance Front claimed responsibility for the attack in a Telegram message, although days later it published a statement on its website denying its involvement. The group had previously carried out attacks against non-Kashmiri residents in the state, many of them migrant workers from other parts of India, to protest what it sees as an attempt by Indian authorities to demographically transform Jammu and Kashmir. In recent years, the Indian government has removed various constitutional protections that reserved government jobs and land ownership for the local population, provoking opposition from the Muslim Kashmiri population.

India and Pakistan faced off militarily for several days in 2025 in the largest escalation of the conflict between the nuclear powers in recent decades

In response to the attack on 22 April, the Indian government took several diplomatic measures, including suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, which governs the shared use of the waters of the Indus River by India and Pakistan, expelling Pakistani diplomats (all defence attachés) and ordering Pakistani visitors with certain visas to leave the country within 48 hours. Pakistan retaliated with reciprocal actions and also closed its airspace to India—a move that the Indian government then mirrored. There were also exchanges of fire along various parts of the Line of Control, the de facto border dividing both countries.

After several days of diplomatic and rhetorical escalation, amid growing international concern over rising tensions between two nuclear powers, India finally decided to respond militarily to the crisis and launched Operation Sindoor on 7 May. The operation targeted nine sites in Pakistan (in the province of Punjab) and in Kashmir, which India described as operational bases for Pakistani terrorist groups. India conducted airstrikes against what it said were headquarters of the armed groups Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Pakistan considered these attacks an act of war and reported that 31 people had been killed, including women and children. Pakistan claimed that it had downed several fighter jets in the Indian state of Punjab and reports of Pakistani drone strikes in several Indian cities spread on social media. India asserted that its military action in response to the Pahalgam attack was fully supported by the United Nations, referring to the Security Council statement on the 22 April attack.[3] Whilst the Indian government said the attacks only targeted "terrorist infrastructure", Pakistan said mosques and other buildings had been hit.

In the days that followed, the conflict escalated considerably with reciprocal attacks and mutual accusations. India carried out more airstrikes against Pakistani military installations in various locations, including the city of Rawalpindi, located 15 km from the capital, Islamabad, and home to the headquarters of the Pakistani Armed Forces and the military airport. The targets included the Nur Khan airbase in the city, located near the headquarters of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division Force, which oversees and protects Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, though the nuclear warheads are spread across the country. India claimed that it was retaliating against Pakistani attacks. On 10 May, the Pakistani government launched Operation Bunyan ul-Marsoos, attacking several Indian military installations, as New Delhi later acknowledged. As a result of the violence during the days of conflict, India reported that 21 civilians and five soldiers had died and Pakistan stated that 40 civilians and 11 soldiers had lost their lives.

The escalating violence and the risk of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal being compromised led to several diplomatic appeals from different governments demanding that the parties agree to a ceasefire, especially Washington. While US Vice President JD Vance had previously ruled out involvement in the crisis, the nuclear risk prompted a change in Washington's diplomatic position. On 10 May, both sides announced a ceasefire, effective immediately. Shortly before the announcement by the Indian and Pakistani governments, US President Donald Trump had reported on the ceasefire agreement on his social media platform, Truth Social, though neither India nor Pakistan made any reference to the US administration when publicly proclaiming the agreement. The US State Department's official announcement indicated that it was a US-facilitated ceasefire. Since the beginning of the conflict, several governments, including those of the US, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Türkiye, had held talks with Indian and Pakistani representatives to try to de-escalate the tension.

3 International Crisis Group, *Pulling India and Pakistan Back from the Brink,* Statement, International Crisis Group, May 2025.

The crisis between both countries was the most serious since the armed conflict in 1999 and came after several years of de-escalation of violence. However, the two historical rivals also experienced a serious crisis in 2019 that included episodes of violence. Since then, the Indian government changed its approach to the situation in Kashmir, downgrading its administrative status by removing its statehood and dividing it into two union territories: Jammu and Kashmir on the one hand and Ladakh on the other. Violence in Indian-administered Kashmir had significantly decreased in recent years and the Indian government had publicly declared the conflict virtually over. However, in 2023 and 2024 there were attacks against non-indigenous people that were similar to the one in Pahalgam, though less severe, and many had warned of the risk of such attacks escalating. Compared to the 2019 crisis, the conflict in spring 2025 ran a greater risk of turning into a large-scale, open confrontation. The military response from both sides was greater than on previous occasions and the danger of nuclear weapons and facilities being added to the equation also increased significantly, to the point that it motivated various international actors to play a more significant and assertive role. This was especially true of the United States, which had previously chosen to stay out of the crisis. Historically, India has rejected any internationalisation of its rivalry with Pakistan and this time it publicly stated that the ceasefire agreement had been reached bilaterally. Not only was the nuclear issue at stake, but for the first time both countries used military equipment such as drones in their clashes, leading to a more rapid escalation than on previous occasions. Furthermore, India stuck to its policy of responding to terrorist attacks with high-intensity military counterattacks and indicated that any action by actors operating from Pakistan would be considered an act of war.

Despite the enormous risks and further escalation in the confrontation between India and Pakistan, a ceasefire was finally agreed upon and has held up, even though both sides have accused each other of violating it. Communication channels between military authorities and security advisors from both countries have remained open, though it has not been publicly reported that the dialogue has progressed beyond issues related to the ceasefire. Whilst there is an opportunity for broader talks that could enable de-escalation and the establishment of confidence-building measures, as occurred previously in the history of the relationship between both countries, this does not appear to have happened thus far. The role of international actors in pushing for expansion of the dialogue would be fundamental, especially at a time when the internationalisation of the conflict has made it possible to avoid an open confrontation of greater intensity and unpredictable consequences for the region. The rebalancing of alliances in the region amid the geopolitical struggle between the US and China has also produced a new scenario. This comes on top of years of high-intensity tension between China and India over border disputes and China's rapprochement with Pakistan (some of the weapons Pakistan used to retaliate to Indian attacks were Chinese), making the crisis between India and Pakistan even more complex.

Thus, whilst the opportunity to transform the conflict through dialogue remains open, India and Pakistan have crossed red lines in their historical rivalry, placing their relationship and the prospects for responding to future crises at greater risk of escalation than ever before. The risks are clear and the international community should strengthen all diplomatic channels available to avoid further crises with unpredictable consequences in a highly militarised situation that includes the threat of nuclear weapons.

5.4. Militaristic escalation in the European Union

The EU and its member states have approved a massive rearmament plan, ReArm Europe, which intensifies the global arms race, creates risks of escalating tensions in Europe and of impacting human and environmental security and diverts away the efforts, resources and leadership required to promote negotiated resolutions to socio-political crises and ongoing conflicts and to restore and strengthen multilateral arms control and disarmament frameworks.

The EU's militaristic escalation has accelerated in the early months of 2025, although it was preceded by years of militarisation in the EU and its member states. According to data from the SIPRI, total military spending in Europe reached $693 billion in 2024, an 83% increase compared to 2015 and above the levels reported at the end of the Cold War. Between 2015-2019 and 2020-2025, European NATO countries boosted their arms imports by 105%.[4] Though far behind military spending at the country level, the EU's security and defence budget has also increased, with new instruments and programmes since 2017, including the Preparatory Action for Defence Research (PRDA) (2017-2019), with a budget of €90 million; the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP) (2019-2020), with €500 million; the European Defence Fund (EDF), with €8 billion, as part of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2017-2027; the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), established in 2023, with €500 million; the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Joint Procurement (EDIRPA), also created in 2023, with €310 million; and the European Defence Industrial Programme (EDIP), with at least €1.5 billion for 2025-2027, which is intended to implement the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) adopted in 2024.[5] Added to all this are other instruments in the EU budget related to "internal security" and border control, as well as outside the EU budget through the European Peace Facility (EPF).[6]

The EU's militaristic escalation has accelerated in the first few months of 2025, though it comes after years of militarisation in the EU and its member states

The rearmament drive intensified in the first few months of 2025. On 4 March 2025, the president of the European Commission presented the "ReArm Europe" plan,[7] with various proposals for measures to massively boost defence spending, the economic cost of which would be borne primarily by the member states. The plan was endorsed by the European Council on 6 March (EUCO conclusions 6/25). In turn, the European Commission presented the White Paper on Defence in March. According to ENAAT's analysis, the White Paper incorporates the measures of the ReArm Europe plan, expands on them and aligns them with other current military industry measures in Europe. According to ENAAT, what is new is the magnitude or large scale of the new steps compared to the path of militarisation already followed by the EU.[8] Following the ReArm Europe plan and the White Paper, the European Commission has taken new steps to promote the implementation of the ReArm Europe Plan.[9]

Both **consist of measures for massive rearmament in Europe that seeks to spend €800 billion over four years**, in addition to the high previous expenditure. The EU has identified seven areas of defence capabilities to strengthen: air and missile defence; artillery systems, including missile systems capable of deep precision and long-range attacks; ammunition and missiles; drones and counter-drone systems; military mobility (a network of land corridors, airports, seaports and support elements and services that facilitate the rapid transfer of troops and military equipment across European and partner countries); cyber and electronic warfare and military artificial intelligence and quantum computing for defence; and strategic enablers and protection of infrastructure considered critical (including airlift, air-to-air refuelling aircraft, intelligence and surveillance, maritime awareness and others).[10] The EU also stresses "border protection" (land, sea and air). In addition to enhancing member state capabilities, the White Paper lays out priorities and measures aimed at increasing

4 George, Mathew et al., *Trends in military arms transfers*, 2024. SIPRI Factsheet, March 2025.
5 Sédou, Laëtitia, "ReArm Europe, or the myth of a European defence for peace", *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Brussels Office,* 15 April 2025; Brunet, Pere et al. *Peace and Disarmament in Europe. For shared détente, peace and security*, Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau, Report No. 65, September 2024; Arteaga, Félix, *Europa en guerra y la defensa europea: ¿Cómo siempre?, Real Instituto Elcano*, ARI 117/2024, 9 September 2024, p.3.
6 Jones, Chris, Jane Kilpatrick and Yasha Maccanico, *At what cost? Funding the EU's security, defence, and border policies, 2021–2027. A guide for civil society on how EU budgets work*, Transnational Institute and Statewatch, April 2022.7
7 The "ReArm Europe" plan was later renamed "Readiness 2030" at the urging of the Spanish government, but without changing its purpose to promote large-scale rearmament.
8 Sédou, Laëtitia, "ReArm Europe, or the myth of a European defence for peace", *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Brussels Office,* 15 April de 2025.
9 European Commission, "EU budget set for defence-related boost under new regulation", 22 April 2025; ENAAT," News from the Brussels' Bubble", NBB #2025-2, 30 April 2025.
10 European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*. JOIN(2025) 120 final, 19 March 2025, pp. 6-10.

military support for Ukraine, which it defines as a "porcupine strategy" (military assistance in the war and as a deterrent against future attacks) and which it also considers a way to boost Europe's competitiveness in the defence sector.[11]

The EU Commission and EU governments have not articulated detailed arguments and justifications for this new rearmament race. They state that the objective is "to strengthen the security of the European Union and the protection of our citizens" and argue that "Europe must be more sovereign and more responsible for its own defence".[12] The White Paper on Defence highlights a proliferation of threats to European security that threaten "our way of life", including challenges arising from wars, migration and climate change in neighbouring regions; terrorism and violent extremism; organised crime; systemic competition between actors and geopolitical rivalry in different parts of the world; Russia, understood as a "fundamental threat" to European security; hybrid threats; a global technological race; and risks to the supply of critical raw materials. According to the White Paper, the EU must spend massively on defence to develop military capabilities that deter armed aggression. Meanwhile, various EU documents and speeches also stress that the massive support plan for military defence aims to boost European industrial and technological competitiveness.

With its rearmament plan, the EU and its governments are neglecting non-military avenues for addressing conflicts and building security

The ReArm Europe plan seems to consider militarism as the only or primary viable path forward and turns the theory of military deterrence into dogma, in contrast to the possible range of non-military strategies and courses of action that have been underutilised by the EU and its member states to deal with armed conflicts and socio-political crises (current ones and less intense ones previously). These include the strengthening of the EU's external action and the diplomatic services of member states with resource allocations on par with those proposed for military action; greater efforts in political dialogue and mediation; support for other mediating and facilitating actors; large-scale promotion of capabilities to support dialogue and integrate conflict sensitivity into external and internal policies; programmes dedicated to research and action on non-violent conflict prevention and transformation capacities; support for civil society engaged in non-violent action in Europe and third countries; programmes and instruments to address the links between militarism, violence and hegemonic masculinities; the strengthening of public systems, public goods and social cohesion (both inside and outside the EU); and the strengthening of regional and global arms control and disarmament frameworks and instruments.

In the past and before the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU and its member states neglected options to explore responses to the specific threat posed by Russia, such as by strengthening continental dialogue in the political and security spheres. Marked by Russia's imperialist dynamics and confrontation with Euro-Atlantic institutions, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had devastating and long-lasting consequences for the Ukrainian population and has given rise to real dilemmas among broad swathes of the population regarding the need to provide military support to Ukraine to resist the invasion. Given Russia's invasion, occupation and hypermilitarism, further efforts are needed to shift the confrontation towards military de-escalation, both in relation to the Russia-Ukraine war and tensions between Russia and the EU/NATO. The combination of the "porcupine strategy" (massive support for Ukraine's long-term military capabilities) and massive EU rearmament as a means of military deterrence against Russia could exacerbate tension and militarisation on the continent and worsen security risks and hotspots of conflict rather than help them to dissipate. **In cooperation with actors outside the Western geopolitical arena, the EU and its member states could leverage greater political and diplomatic action to foster a negotiated solution to the Russia-Ukraine war, even if it proves difficult and costly**. The EU could explore dialogue aimed at de-escalation and confidence- and security-building measures regarding tensions between Russia and the EU/NATO.

Furthermore, even if the ReArm Europe plan focuses on supporting Ukraine and Europe's military capabilities, it could lead to an increase of European military industry arms exports to third countries based on military industry companies' pursuit of profits and economies of scale, including exports to countries with human rights violations, socio-political crises and conflicts and gender-based violence. Militarisation and armament act as fuel for and enable crises and armed conflicts, with serious impacts on civilians in armed conflict zones, including the risks of exposure to sexual violence.

The EU and its member states' rearmament strategy will also exacerbate the climate crisis, which the EU paradoxically perceives as a threat to its security. Studies have indicated that the world's militaries are "the largest consumers of fossil fuels on the planet and also the largest emitters of greenhouse gases that cause the climate crisis, with 5.5% of total global emissions". The plan also takes a reductionist approach to the goal of industrial growth and competitiveness, proactively and massively promoting the military industry, whose arms exports aggravate socio-political crises and conflicts and their impacts on affected populations. This comes at the expense of supporting non-military industries that meet people's basic needs and a necessary eco-social transition to deal with the climate emergency.

11 Ibid., p .10.
12 European Council, *Special meeting of the European Council (6 March 2025) – Conclusions*, EUCO 6/25, 6 March 2025.

Critical analyses have highlighted the arms industry's influence on the EU's path to militarisation. Through extensive lobbying, the military industry has forged close ties with European institutions and decision-makers and has influenced EU decisions made over the years, including those related to earmarking specific funds for the sector, the increased flexibility of civilian programmes and their opening to the entry of the military industry and the creation of architecture and forums for ongoing dialogue with the military industry.[13] **The facilitation of the arms lobby contrasts with the lack of transparency regarding EU funds for the security and defence industry[14] and the lack of broad political and social debate on EU rearmament proposals and possible alternatives**.

The ReArm Europe plan aims to ensure that the bulk of massive military defence spending comes from state public budgets. To this end, the EU proposes that states request the activation of the general safeguard clause of the Stability and Growth Pact (known as the "general escape clause"). The EU will allow states that request activation of that clause to spend above the 3% deficit threshold and increase their military defence spending by 1.5% of GDP annually, without penalty, for a period of four years. In doing so, states are encouraged to spend on military defence at the expense of public debt that the states and their citizens will have to repay, to the detriment of other non-military (and more economical) ways to address the challenges identified by the EU to justify its ReArm Europe plan. Outside the EU, the United Kingdom has already announced plans to cut social spending and development cooperation to increase its defence spending. Even if member states such as Spain have stated that there will be no rollbacks in social spending, additional defence expenditure funded by new revenue streams (and not from cuts or fiscal deficits) still involves a political decision to prioritise military spending over other critical needs. These could include public housing, education, healthcare, transport, caregiving services, the eco-social transition amid the climate emergency, gender-based violence prevention and response, tax fraud enforcement, anti-corruption efforts or other areas that would strengthen populations and countries across Europe facing internal and external challenges.

The EU is also promoting a new instrument called Security Action for Europe (SAFE), whose legislative proposal was also presented in March 2025. Through this instrument, the EU will raise €150 billion in capital markets and provide loans with simplified processes, pre-financing and VAT-free payments to states upon request to provide "urgent and substantial public investment" in the European defence industry, with joint procurement**. A third main pillar of the ReArm Europe plan consists of possibilities and incentives for member states to use funds from EU Cohesion Policy programmes to boost national defence spending**. The Cohesion Policy encompasses various funds to promote economic growth and social and territorial cohesion and reduce disparities between countries and regions. It includes instruments such as the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Just Transition Fund and others. Diverting these funds, or part of them, to cover defence spending means militarising the EU's Cohesion Policy and depriving it of resources. This is especially serious given the climate emergency and the need for a just eco-social transition, as well as specific challenges facing both rural and urban areas.

The plan also includes deregulatory measures to facilitate the military industry's access to public and private funding and promote military production and military mobility, according to ENAAT, which also warns that this will affect environmental and social regulations.[15] Among other actions, the European Investment Bank has lifted restrictions on financing for military activities, with the exception of lethal weapons.

The shift towards greater militarisation and rearmament in the EU and its member states is also influenced by the position taken by the NATO military alliance and the uncertainty surrounding trans-Atlantic relations under the new administration of US President Donald Trump. Whilst the alliance agreed to a target of 2% of member states' GDP for defence spending at the 2014 NATO summit (the year of Russia's military annexation of Crimea), NATO, the US and EU actors are now pushing to agree on higher spending thresholds of between 3% and 5% at the 2025 summit. As with the ReArm Europe plan, prioritising rearmament and militarisation, whether at 3%, 3.5% or 5%, whilst neglecting non-military approaches to building security in Europe and worldwide, will only exacerbate trends towards conflict and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. In response, civil society actors have sprung into action to condemn the rearmament promoted by the EU and NATO and advocate other ways to build security.

Instead of mimicking global dynamics of militarisation and confrontation, the EU and its member states could promote other forms of international relations through multilateralism and military de-escalation. Given the militarist paths currently taken by EU states, efforts are required at multiple levels, including national parliaments, political parties, sub-state governments, universities, trade unions and peace, feminist, anti-racist and environmental movements, among others, to articulate alliances and alternative proposals to promote multidimensional security.

13 Akkerman, Mark and Chloé Maulewaeter, *From war lobby to war economy How the arms industry shapes European policies*, ENAAT, September 2023.
14 Brunet, Pere, *The European Defence Fund: the Opaque Use of Public Fund*, Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau and ENAAT, Report No. 70, December 2024.
15 Sédou, Laëtitia, "ReArm Europe, or the myth of a European defence for peace", *Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Brussels Office,* 15 April 2025.