



Colonel X. looks at geopolitics and global strategic issues

# The Decoder of Geopolitics

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*Each quarter a senior French military officer, former member of the Special Forces, shares his perspective on global geopolitical issues. As would be expected, his name remains confidential.*

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## Namibia: a high power of attraction for a small and almost peaceful nation

The Namib is the oldest desert in the world with blood-red and ochre colors. It attracts tourists. Yet Namibia is one of the newest independent countries on the African continent, after Eritrea. It was by resolution 435 (1978) that the United Nations prepared Namibia for its independence, which was only achieved on March 31, 1990. After a violent and concentrationist German colonization<sup>1</sup>, South Africa applied the logic of apartheid to it while capturing the riches of the subsoil, mainly against the will of the Herero, Nama and Ovambo ethnic groups. This "South West Africa", placed under the mandate of the League of Nations and then the United Nations, was only released by its shady neighbor very late, after a guerrilla war that led, among others, the Cubans, present in Angola, supported by the Soviets, to interfere in this revolutionary struggle alongside the pro-Marxist South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). However, Pretoria is still well established in its former fifth province, economically speaking. China, which was ousted in the 1960s while supporting the other party, the South West African National Union (SWANU), has returned to it. The stakes are high for the 35th largest country in the world<sup>2</sup>. Foreign investors are still attracted by its ores and diamonds<sup>3</sup>, its uranium, its famous rare earths but also its fish-bearing waters of the Benguela Current. Open to multilateralism, this young state, anxious to tackle confounding inequalities<sup>4</sup>, particularly in the land sector, is very concerned about the porosity of its borders, which are cut, sometimes with a knife, and exposed to dark trafficking. These same borders are subject to emotions with Botswana, Angola for the construction of a dam in the Okavango Delta, or even with Zambia, on the Caprivi strip adjacent to the Zambezi River or with South Africa for the Orange River limits. On the west coast, Zimbabwe has just obtained port facilities at Walvis Bay. While Namibia has a reduced defense, it deploys a detachment to Lesotho (SADC) and Darfur (UN/UNAMID). Still equipped with Soviet equipment, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made a stopover in the Namibian capital

<sup>1</sup> In 2004, Germany apologized for the massacres committed in 1904. Negotiations are underway for a joint declaration and while the two victim tribes have filed genocide complaints with a US court (2017).

<sup>2</sup> 2.5 mn inhabitants, with 824,292 km<sup>2</sup> and a density of 2.8 h/km<sup>2</sup>, 1,500 km of coastline, an Exclusive Economic Zone of 580,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> 9th largest producer in the world (2018), 90% comes from offshore mines.

<sup>4</sup> In November 2019, presidential elections will be held by electronic voting. Hage Geingob, current president, from SWAPO, a party in power since independence, is standing for re-election. This recent state has established electoral parity between men and women: 48% of women elected to the National Assembly, one of the five highest political representation rates of women in the world.

to re-establish ties that had never been deeply extended, as well as with Angola, Cuba or Iran. Now it is India that is initiating military cooperation. The United States, an importer of uranium, observes while helping Namibia in the fight against drug trafficking and AIDS. An unknown: the consequences of a drought that is worsening to become a national disaster declared this year.

### **Haiti: half of Hispaniola suffering**

The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere<sup>5</sup> is the continuous target of hurricanes swollen and pushed from the Atlantic to the warm Caribbean Sea. At the same time, 90% of its population is also facing drought, floods and other earthquakes from the North American tectonic fault line. This cycle of natural disasters has resulted in the deaths of nearly 230,000 Haitians in 20 years<sup>6</sup>. Poverty, insalubrity, epidemics<sup>7</sup> in slum dwellings rhyme with violations of the fundamental human rights of the most vulnerable. This fragile and rapidly growing urbanization is facing water challenges, and above all, access to sanitation with its multiple consequences in terms of hygiene. In addition, there is growing concern about the country's ability to ensure food security and the nutritional component for children. The country's structural deficiencies, the economic crisis, limited international aid, the halt to the forced return of Haitian migrants, and finally the inability of the political authorities (when they are not involved in influence or corruption) to provide basic services to its vulnerable population do not favor the emergence of a crucial and rapid change of course to prepare for the worst scenario of a climate crisis, which is now predictable. What a gap with Dominican, Cuban or Puerto Rican neighbors who are able to anticipate, alert and protect their population! The international organization of the French-speaking world is not enough to take up this State, despite economic, humanitarian and, of course, cultural initiatives. The scars of the 2010 earthquakes and Irma's are still fresh on the ground and in Haitian minds.

### **India-Pakistan-Afghanistan: haunting borders**

In mid-August 1947, Pakistan and India were born, in pain. The sovereign of Kashmir had not made his choice and the English were dodging. With a Muslim majority, Kashmir, the "water tower" of the Indus, is the victim of a latent conflict between three atomic states, China managing part of it. Terrorism<sup>8</sup>, air strikes<sup>9</sup>, verbal jousting with internal political connotations, with ongoing elections in India, are pushing the UN to explicitly call for de-escalation. At the same time, the Indian subcontinent is moving. Due to the Silk Road, China settles in Gwadar, Pakistan<sup>10</sup> to better maneuver in the Indian Ocean and lock the Indian navy which has just conducted a bilateral exercise with France (namely Varuna 19.1). The Americans are shifting their support to India, whose defense budget is swelling and rearming. Iran is signing an agreement to modernize the port of Chabahar with India, but also with Afghanistan, while Daesh is in Khorasan. The Trump administration is looking into how to withdraw its troops through an agreement with the Afghan Taliban<sup>11</sup>, with a Pashtun majority, located on the English border, known as the "Mortimer Durand line", dating from 1896, still not signed between these two undemocratic states. Today, the Pakistanis are building a "wall" that will separate a proud and ticklish ethnic group. The case is far from being settled in these mountainous foothills.

<sup>5</sup> GDP per capita of \$870. 6 million inhabitants (out of a total of 11 million) would live below the poverty line, and 2.5 million below the extreme poverty line (1.23\$/day).

<sup>6</sup> "Poverty & Death: Disaster and Mortality 1996-2015" Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters.

<sup>7</sup> Cholera, diphtheria and malaria, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA / UN).

<sup>8</sup> On February 14, a suicide attack by Jaish-e-Mohammed killed some 40 Indian paramilitaries.

<sup>9</sup> Airspace violations are increasing above the line between Pakistani Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Indian Jammu and Kashmir.

<sup>10</sup> The United States in the fight against al-Qaeda had modernized Pakistan's defense. The Pakistani intelligence service (ISI) and the influence of the military are suspected by the US of logistically and financially supporting training camps for Islamist terrorism.

<sup>11</sup> US-Taliban discussions in Doha, Qatar in January. A consensus is reached with China and Russia for an inclusive peace process.