

LA LIGNE FINE REVIEW

September 2026



Being able to act in a fragmented world: sovereignty, dependencies and contested spaces

The fragmentation of the international system does not mean a mechanical return to a world organized in watertight blocks. Rather, it manifests itself in the multiplication of spaces for competition, the politicization of interdependencies and the search by states for capacities that allow them to preserve their freedom of action. The work published by La Ligne Fine - Institut in September addresses this transformation from very different terrains: outer space, cyberspace, maritime routes, alliances and coalitions, supply chains, multilateral institutions and national public policies.

Several publications thus question the concrete conditions of sovereignty. This does not consist in eliminating all dependence or in controlling all the resources necessary for action alone. Rather, it presupposes identifying critical dependencies, maintaining alternatives and having the institutions, infrastructures and capacities to continue to decide and act when the environment deteriorates. This strategic question dialogues this month with two works devoted to public action: effectively governing child protection and evaluating what inclusive education really produces.

THE PAPERS OF THE FINE LINE



The Fine Line Papers n°9 — Militarization of space

Written by Alek UMONT

The militarization of space does not begin with the recent emergence of anti-satellite capabilities: intelligence satellites, military telecommunications, navigation and early warning have been part of power strategies for several decades. The contemporary transformation lies in the much deeper integration of space services into the daily functioning of armed forces and in the parallel diversification of the means of disrupting them.

The paper therefore proposes not to reduce space conflict to the presence of weapons in orbit. Jamming, *spoofing*, cyberattacks, neutralization of ground stations or disruption of links can affect a space architecture without physically destroying a satellite. The strategic challenge becomes that of the continuity of functions: identifying the truly critical services, protecting the corresponding architectures, providing alternative solutions and maintaining a capacity for action in a degraded space environment. This reading puts resilience back at the center of space power.

The Fine Line Papers n°10 — Strategic cyber-warfare

Written by Alek UMONT

Cyber now occupies a permanent place in defence doctrines and national security strategies, but it is not a battlefield that functions like the land, sea or air domains. A cyber operation can be prepared long before it is used, operate civilian infrastructure, remain clandestine for months and produce very variable effects depending on the exact architecture of the target.

The paper thus distinguishes between espionage, computer crime, influence, sabotage and digital capabilities directly integrated into a military confrontation. It also relativizes the image of an instrument capable, on its own, of causing the lasting collapse of a state: the effects depend on precise vulnerabilities, access that sometimes takes a long time to prepare, restoration capacities and articulation with other instruments of power. The strategic value of cyber lies less in its supposed technical omnipotence than in its ability to be part of broader strategies, while blurring the lines between competition, coercion and conflict.

The Fine Line Papers n°11 — Recomposition of geopolitical blocs

Author: La Ligne Fine – Institut

The return of the vocabulary of "blocs" reflects a real polarization: security concerns, technological dependencies, supply chains and political rivalries are leading states to select their partners more closely and to reduce certain exposures. The enlargement of NATO, the rapprochement between non-Western powers, the extension of the BRICS and the policies of reducing economic risks bear witness to this evolution.

Le Papier, however, rejects the overly simple analogy with the Cold War. Contemporary groups have neither the same degree of integration nor the same political discipline. States can cooperate in one area and preserve divergent interests elsewhere; intermediary powers multiply partnerships without necessarily accepting exclusive alignment. The current recomposition is thus less that of two closed blocs than that of a more polarized system, in which the control of dependencies and the ability to forge variable partnerships become instruments of power.

The Fine Line Papers n°12 — Strategic sovereignty

Written by Alek UMONT

Strategic sovereignty is often equated with complete autonomy. On the contrary, Le Papier starts from the observation that no contemporary state can produce alone all the technologies,



energy resources, armaments, medicines or infrastructures on which it depends. Interdependencies do not therefore constitute in themselves a negation of sovereignty. The relevant question is that of their binding nature. A dependence becomes strategically problematic when an external actor can exploit it to reduce a state's freedom of decision or when the absence of an alternative transforms a supply disruption into a major vulnerability. Strategic sovereignty must therefore be thought of as a capacity for arbitration: diversifying, substituting, building up reserves, protecting certain critical capacities and accepting controlled interdependencies elsewhere. This approach replaces the ideal of autarky with a reflection on resilience, the available options and real freedom of decision.

STRATEGIC NOTES

Inclusive education in an ordinary environment in France: an insufficiently proven principle?

Written by Soizic MORVAN

The Note shifts the debate on inclusive education from an opposition between principle and contestation to a question of evaluation: do we know enough about what the policies implemented actually produce? Drawing on the culture of empirical evaluation associated in particular with the work of Esther Duflo, it questions the ability of public authorities to measure the real effects of a policy to which significant human, material and financial resources are devoted.

The challenge is not to call into question the objective of inclusion but to distinguish the legitimacy of a principle from the proof of the effectiveness of the measures chosen to achieve it. Schooling in an ordinary environment must therefore be questioned on the basis of its results, the conditions in which it operates and the data allowing the mechanisms to be compared. In this sense, the Note defends a more general requirement of public action: a policy should not only be evaluated on the basis of its intentions or the means committed, but also on the basis of its observable effects.

Guarding Contested Sea Lanes: Comparing Western Maritime Security Responses in the Black and Red Seas

Written by Marija CEKMARIOVA

The Note compares Western responses to two maritime environments that have been subject since 2022 to threats that are similar in some respects but dealt with by very different legal and operational architectures: drifting mines and GPS disturbances in the Black Sea; missiles, drones and attacks targeting infrastructure in the Red Sea.

The comparison shows how much the responses depend on the institutional framework as much as on the threat itself. In the Black Sea, the Montreux Convention severely limits the naval options available; in the Red Sea, several mechanisms coexist — a coalition led by the United States, a European mission and American-British strikes — without a single command. The Note examines their mandates, their speed of implementation, their coordination and the difficulty of objectively measuring their results. It thus emphasizes that a maritime threat does not automatically produce a standardized response: geography, law, political visibility of the danger and coalition architectures profoundly structure the capacity for action.

THE FINE MEMO

Memo 10/15 — Governing child protection: who is really driving a decentralized public policy?

Written by Ismaïl BOUHIOUL



Child protection is based on a particular institutional architecture: rights and guidelines are defined within a national framework, while their implementation depends largely on the departments, which are responsible for the organization of child welfare. At the same time, the State has gradually strengthened its presence through new coordination, expertise and evaluation structures.

The Memo examines the discrepancy between this proliferation of national actors and the absence of an equivalent chain of responsibility. The National Council for Child Protection, France Enfance Protégée or the High Commission for Children can promote, coordinate and evaluate, but none of them has general power of direction over the departments. The question is therefore not only that of the competences attributed to each institution: it concerns the ability of a decentralized system to guarantee a coherent policy when legal responsibility, financing, steering and execution are divided between several levels.

COUNTRY FACTSHEETS

Country Profile9 — Anguilla

Author: La Ligne Fine - Institut

Anguilla is a case of constrained micro-sovereignty. A British Overseas Territory with a strong internal autonomy, the island remains dependent on the United Kingdom for certain sovereign functions, tourism for its economic activity, imports for many essential goods and transport infrastructure for its opening up to the world.

However, the fact sheet insists on its ability to adapt. Alongside high-end tourism and financial services, the ".ai" internet domain has become an unexpected resource in the context of the global rise of artificial intelligence. Anguilla's trajectory thus depends less on a traditional rise to power than on its ability to convert sectoral advantages and sometimes volatile rents into infrastructure, diversification and resilience.

Country Profile n°10 — Antarctica

Author: La Ligne Fine - Institut

This Country Profile is deliberately atypical: Antarctica is neither a state nor a territory with a national government. It is an internationalized space governed mainly by the Antarctic Treaty system, which organizes the peaceful use of the continent, scientific cooperation and several restrictions on military and nuclear activities.

The strategic interest of the fact sheet lies precisely in this singularity. The continent concentrates issues of international governance, scientific research, resources, the environment and the presence of the state without falling into the ordinary categories of territorial sovereignty. It thus constitutes a particular laboratory of institutionalized cooperation, but also a space whose geopolitical value increases as climatic, technological and strategic transformations modify the conditions of access and the interests that project themselves into it.

Country Profile n°11 — Antigua and Barbuda

Written by Alek UMONT

Antigua and Barbuda, a small independent Caribbean island State, combines institutional stability, a relatively high level of income and a high level of participation in regional and international organizations. However, its economy remains highly vulnerable to external shocks due to sectoral concentration, small market size, debt and vulnerability to natural disasters.

The fact sheet thus makes it possible to question the sovereignty of small states other than through their conventional capacities. Membership of the Commonwealth, CARICOM and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States provides monetary and political integration



frameworks that partially compensate for the narrowness of national resources. The strategic question becomes that of resilience: preserving the attractiveness and openness of an island economy while reducing its exposure to climatic and economic hazards.

Country Profile n°12 — Saudi Arabia

Author: La Ligne Fine – Institut

Saudi Arabia appears to be a power undergoing rapid transformation, at the crossroads of oil revenues, economic diversification and increasingly autonomous diplomacy. Vision 2030 structures this recomposition by seeking to develop non-oil activities, attract investment, strengthen the role of the Public Investment Fund, modernise infrastructure and position Riyadh as a major economic, financial and logistical centre.

However, the fact sheet highlights the weaknesses of this model: persistent dependence on hydrocarbons, the high cost of megaprojects, extreme centralization of power and exposure to an unstable regional environment. The strategic question becomes that of conversion: transforming oil revenues into productivity, public investment into sustainable assets, social modernization into human capital and diplomatic diversification into real autonomy. Saudi Arabia thus presents itself as a laboratory of authoritarian power seeking to prepare for the post-oil era without renouncing the instruments on which its power is based.

Country Factsheet n°13 — Argentine Republic

Written by Camille BLANCHARD

Argentina combines considerable material potential with profound economic and political transformations. In particular, the country has significant agricultural, energy and mining resources, including the hydrocarbons of Vaca Muerta, lithium and copper. At the same time, the presidency of Javier Milei placed the state in a sequence of rapid economic reform that reshaped the internal political and social balances.

The fact sheet places these developments in a broader strategic reading: a middle power with a vast territory, critical resources and its own diplomatic tradition, but confronted with the need to stabilize its economy and convert its natural advantages into sustainable capabilities. Argentina thus appears to be at the crossroads of several dynamics of the contemporary international system: energy security, critical minerals, agriculture, relations with the great powers and redefinition of national economic models.

REPUBLICATION OF ACADEMIC WORKS

The Transformation of Multilateralism in a Multipolar Order: The Role of China and Brazil

Academic work by Isabela Muller dos Santos

La Ligne Fine - Institut has republished, with the agreement of its author, this dissertation devoted to the transformation of multilateralism in an international system that has become more pluralistic and fragmented. This republication does not transform the work into the Institute's own production: the arguments, analytical choices and conclusions remain those of the author, the editorial intervention of La Ligne Fine - Institut being limited to its preparation and presentation.

The thesis refuses to interpret contemporary transformations as a simple decline of multilateralism. Through a comparison between China and Brazil, it highlights two modalities of transformation of international institutions. China combines pragmatic contestation, institutional diversification, and the search for alternative sources of legitimacy while remaining engaged in the main existing institutions; Brazil favors international law, coalitions, and a gradual reform of global governance from within. The work thus sheds light on a less uniform multilateral order, shaped by the differentiated strategies of emerging powers.



A LINE OF FORCE

The September publications describe less the disappearance of existing structures than a transformation of the conditions in which actors can still act within them.

The international system remains interdependent, but its interdependencies are becoming more explicitly political. Commercial satellites can support military operations; civilian digital infrastructure becomes surfaces of confrontation; a maritime route can be disrupted by conventional means, drones or electronic interference; a supply chain can become an instrument of pressure; a multilateral institution can be simultaneously used, contested and competed with.

In this context, sovereignty is no longer measured solely by the possession of resources. It depends on the ability to identify critical vulnerabilities, to maintain several options and to build mechanisms to continue action when an environment becomes contested. The militarization of space, cyber warfare, the recomposition of blocs and strategic sovereignty directly address this question. The Note on the Black and Red Seas shows how legal and institutional constraints concretely modify the possible responses. The work on China and Brazil reminds us that the transformation of the international order also involves the institutions and the strategies of influence that are deployed there.

Studies devoted to public action shift this question to the interior of the State. Governing a decentralized policy or defending inclusive education presupposes, here again, more than a principle: identifiable responsibilities, capacities for execution and methods for verifying the effects obtained.

The main thrust of September can thus be formulated simply: autonomy does not lie in the absence of constraints, but in the ability to maintain choices in spite of them.

Find all the publications and works mentioned in this edition on the website of [La Ligne Fine - Institut.](#)

The Review reports each month on what the Institute publishes, examines and puts into discussion.

