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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Iran: Production Line Opens for New Sayyad-3 Missile

OE Watch Commentary: With the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the unfreezing of many Iranian assets and the lifting of some sanctions, Iran has been able to augment its military budget. One of its top priorities appears to be boosting its missile capabilities. According to the excerpted article from *Kayhan*, a newspaper whose editor is appointed by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and which remains close to the Office of the Supreme Leader, Iran is moving ahead with its Sayyad surface-to-air missile line.

The Sayyad-3 appears to be an enhanced version of the Sayyad-2, which was unveiled in November 2013 and is similar to the RIM-66 that pre-revolutionary Iran acquired from the United States in the 1970s. According to the excerpt, Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan inaugurated the production line of the new Sayyad-3 missile which has a 75-mile range and can reach altitudes of 16 miles. If true, this capability puts the Lockheed U-2 within range. Dehghan also reportedly said that the Sayyad-3 uses active radar, semi-active radar, and infrared guidance to maximize its potential against a host of targets and that it would be a component of the Talash-2 air defense system which the Iranian military has yet to unveil publicly. Iranian investment in the Sayyad-3 and the Talash-2 suggests that despite Iran's purchase of the S-300 (and potential purchase of the S-400) from Russia, Iranian military officials do not want to rely on Russia for air defense. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The Sayyad-3 system has been designed... to serve against medium and long-range airborne threats.”

Source: “Iftetah’-e Khat-e Tavalid Moshak Barad Boland Sayyad-3 (Opening of the Production Line for the Long-Range Sayyad-3 Missile),” *Kayhan*, 22 July 2017. <http://kayhan.ir/fa/news/109363>

In the presence of Gen. Hossein Dehghan, Minister of Defense and Armed Force Logistics, and Gen. Amir Farzad Esmaili, Commander of the Air Defense Force, on the 115th day of the year of the resistance economy, the production line for the Sayyad-3 missile opened and it was delivered to the Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base. The Sayyad-3 was designed and built by scientists and specialists of the Aerospace Industries Organization at the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics. In his opening speech, Gen. Dehghan stated that this production line was part of the strategy of the Ministry of Defense to strengthen and update the air defense of the country, in short, medium, and long ranges, and said, “The Sayyad-3 system has been designed with a range of 120 kilometers [75 miles] and a maximum attitude of 27 kilometers [16.7 miles] to serve against medium and long-range airborne threats.”



The Sayyad-3 missile on display

Source: Iranian Ministry of Defense, <http://mod.gov.ir/sites/default/files/sayyad4.jpg>, public domain.



Iran: Qods Force Commander Brags about American Casualties

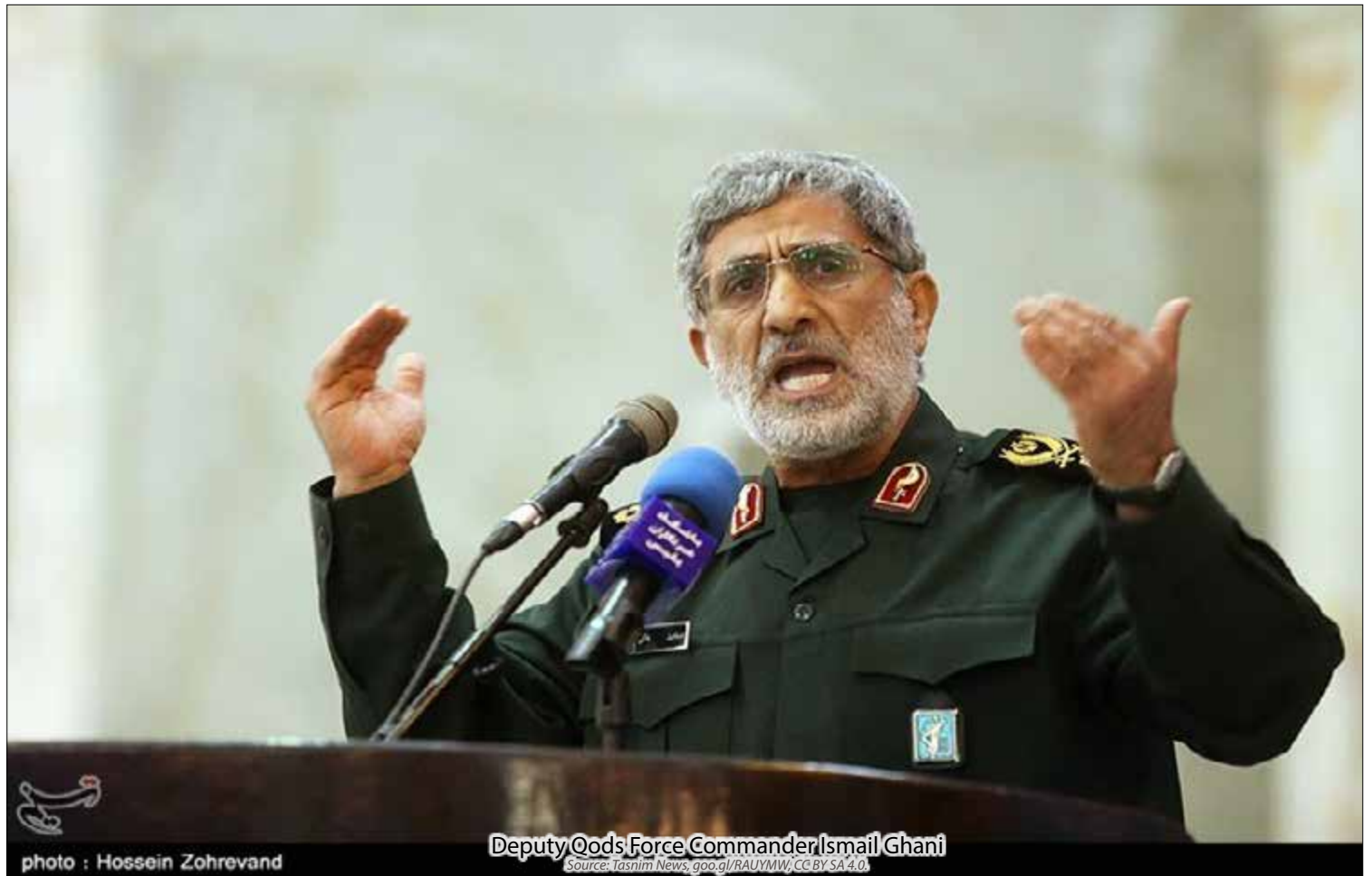
OE Watch

Commentary: Within the broad spectrum of Iranian power, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is more powerful than the executive branch. It arguably wields more influence over Iranian policy than any other body with the exception of the Supreme Leader. Therefore, what IRGC commanders and recruits think and believe matters. Within the IRGC, the Qods [Jerusalem] Force is the most elite unit. It is against this backdrop that the excerpted remarks of Deputy Commander of the Qods Force Brigadier General Esmail Qaani merit attention.

The remarks are from a ceremony in which Qaani is speaking to ‘defenders of the shrines’--a moniker which Iranian religious authorities and hardline press use in reference to those who supposedly volunteered to fight in Iraq against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and in Syria against any number of anti-Assad regime force. Qaani embraces and endorses the conspiracy theory that the 11 September 2001 attacks were an inside job, and suggests that Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan was actually a pretext to attack Iran. He claims that the rise of ISIS and US military involvement in Syria along with its re-engagement in Iraq were merely the second stage of the same plot. Qaani boasts, however, that despite the financial strength of the United States, it has not only failed in its supposed objectives, but the Qods Force has also managed to cause more casualties against Americans than the reverse.

Qaani’s speech reflects two important elements of IRGC ideology. The first is the paranoia at the heart of the IRGC and especially the Qods Force worldview that great powers always seek to victimize Iran, thus the Qods Force can never drop its guard (even when Iranian politicians are tempted to do so). The second element is Qods Force enmity toward the United States in particular. In its extreme form such as that voiced by Qaani, this manifests itself in the ideas that the Qods Force is figuratively and literally at war with the United States.

The question is whether rhetoric voiced by leaders such as Qaani is actually internalized in the mindset of the IRGC and Qods Force, or whether it is treated more as a stylistic flourish. Regardless, the fact that so many recruits into the Qods Force entered the IRGC bubble at a young age through youth programs, summer camps, and after school activities, suggests that many Qods Force officers share Qaani’s worldview. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



“America has suffered more losses from us than we have suffered losses from them.”

Source: “Amerika ba 6 hazar milyard dollar hazineh hich Eqdami ‘Alihe Natavanast Anjam Dahad (America could not do anything against Iran, even with \$6 trillion),” *Tasnim News.com*, 13 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/L52Qh7>

General Esmail Qaani, speaking today at a ceremony for the martyrs of the defenders of shrines from the village of Palak-e Sofla in the Amol district [of Mazandaran]... Qaani said, “From the beginning of the Islamic Revolution to the present day, the global arrogance [the United States] and enemies have designed and sought to implement various actions.” Adding that the enemies began a war with Iran from inside houses and towns, he said, “The enemies of the Islamic Revolution were not small people and small countries, but rather at their head is the arrogance of America and Israel. Qaani said, “We do not forget our direction,” and added, “During the eight years of the imposed war [the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War], thousands of kilometers away, people have been working [against us]. Today, the war with the enemy is also taking place thousands of kilometers away and, he said, “America ordered its elites to fight us, but the powerful, divine system defended against them... America, under the pretext of September 11 attacks which it carried out itself, invaded Afghanistan and mobilized youth Muslims and deployed them to Afghanistan so that they can later attack Iran... [but] America has suffered more losses from us than we have suffered losses from them.”



Iran: Launch Officially Opens Space Facility

OE Watch Commentary: On 27 July, Iran launched a ‘Simorgh’ (‘Phoenix’) rocket from its Imam Khomeini spaceport in Semnan, northern Iran. The Simorgh (also known as the Safir-2) was officially unveiled by then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2010. While Iran had launched a Simorgh from the Semnan facility in 2015, the excerpted article claims the most recent launch—which Iranian media said resulted in the two-stage rocket reaching orbit—was meant to officially inaugurate the updated spaceport.

Iranian investment in the spaceport suggests that Tehran plans to continue its rocket and ballistic missile work. The excerpted article from a moderate, pro-regime web portal once associated with the late senior statesman Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani discusses the potential for Iran to carry payloads eventually surpassing 1,000 pounds into low earth orbit for both Iran and other states. It also claims that Iran will compete with countries like France or Russia-- a far-fetched idea. After all, countries antagonistic to the West could more easily and with less risk utilize the Russian spaceport in Kazakhstan.

The potential for Iranian rockets to carry greater payloads will raise concerns among countries suspicious of Iran’s nuclear intent given the possibility that the Simorgh is intended as a dual-use platform for an intercontinental ballistic missile and also to carry a nuclear warhead. Even without the most advanced miniaturization technologies, a crude and effective nuclear warhead can be constructed that would fall well within the payload weight ambitions of 1100-1540 pounds, as the excerpt mentions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Bah Shalik Moafaqit Amiz ‘Simorgh’ Paygah Fizayi Keshvarzeman Rasman Efftitah’ Shod (Our country’s spaceport was officially opened with the successful launch of ‘Simorgh’),” *Tabnak.com*, 27 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/cFYyHp>

After carrying out a successful test launch of a rocket named Simorgh [“Phoenix”] at the Imam Khomeini spaceport in 2015, today another Simorgh rocket was tested and it was successful. The difference was that this time the launch of the Simorgh had two aims: The first was the complete testing of the structures and equipment of our country’s only spaceport in Semnan which was the official opening of this site, and then sensing the performance of the second-stage of the rocket: If it happened [successfully] then the Simorgh will be ready to carry satellites from Iran and other countries into Low Earth Orbit. It was a great result that with today’s test, the rocket capabilities of our country have increased dramatically and the ability to carry payloads of 25-50 kilograms has increased to 100 kilograms. Considering that the development plan of Simorgh is on the agenda of our country, and with future adjustments and optimization, this rocket is set in the future to be able to handle loads ranging from 500 to 700 kilograms.

“The rocket capabilities of our country have increased dramatically.”



photo : Mohammad Agah

Safir space launch vehicle carrying Fajr satellite

Source: Tasnim News via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Safir_space_launch_vehicle_carrying_Fajr_satellite_06.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

Iran: IRGC Training in China

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has, like last year, sent a team to participate in the International Army Games, an annual exercise and competition founded by the Russian Ministry of Defense which this year Russia and China jointly host. Numerous teams participate, most of which tend to be in the Chinese and Russian policy orbit, including Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Angola, South Africa, Laos, and Iran. The excerpted article from a news portal closely aligned with the IRGC discusses the Iranian special operations airborne team's departure for China and its first days drilling with the Chinese.

While the games are competitions rather than traditional military exercises, the teams also conduct joint drills in and around the games (though this is not reflected on the games' website). This increases interoperability between elite Iranian forces and their Chinese and Russian counterparts. The excerpted article, for example, highlights Iranian use of Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force Z8KA helicopters.

The continued expansion of the Army Games signals that the diplomatic axis developing against the West both informally and via the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has an emerging military angle as Beijing and Moscow gather the elites from their formal and informal alliance in annual exercises. Iran's presence is increasingly regular in such gatherings. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: "Tamrinat-e Niruha-ye Vizheh Havabard Sepah Pasdaran dar Chin (IRGC Airborne Special Forces Training in China)," *Tasnim News*, 25 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/e6vW7M>

The 33rd Mahdi Special Airborne Unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps based in Jahrom [Fars Province], which ranked first in domestic competitions with other airborne teams, went to China in recent days and they are preparing for a strong presence in the 2017 Army Games. There are six subjects in the games: Suvorov Attack [Infantry Fighting Vehicles racing and target shooting]; Aviadarts [fighter jet navigation and targeting]; nuclear, biological, and chemical protection unit competitions; anti-aircraft; airborne unit competitions; and maintenance competitions... Up until now, the Iranian team has received its equipment and is preparing and conducting periodic exercises which include firing artillery and RPGs, parachuting, and jumping from Chinese Z8KA helicopters.

"The Iranian team has [been]...jumping from Chinese Z8KA helicopters."



Iranian soldiers drill in China during joint war games and exercises

Source Tasnim News, goo.gl/fz674x, CC BY SA 4.0.

photo : Tasnim News



Iran Officially Opposes Kurdish Independence Referendum

OE Watch Commentary: On 25 September, Iraqi Kurds will go to the polls in a referendum in both the Iraqi Kurdistan Region and the “disputed territories” such as Kirkuk and Diyala which are claimed by both the central Iraqi government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil. On the ballot will be a single question: “Do you want the Kurdistan region and the Kurdistan areas outside the region’s administration to become an independent state?”

The Iranian government has long opposed any Kurdish independence in Iraq, largely because they fear how the precedent might impact the Kurdish population in Iran. While no Middle Eastern country besides Israel has allowed true censuses in decades because of the sensitivity of the data for their own internal security, most geographers and anthropologists estimate that perhaps eight percent of Iranians speak Kurdish as their first language. Iran has a Kordestan province, but it encompasses only about half of the areas inside Iran in which Kurds predominate. Therefore, the idea that the Iraqi Kurdish referendum will include not only the Iraqi Kurdistan Region itself but neighboring provinces worries Tehran even more.

Recently, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Major-General Mohammad Bagheri, Chief of Staff for the Armed Forces of Iran, commented that the referendum “is the beginning of [a] crisis and ... new challenges in the region” and called the vote “unacceptable.” In the excerpted remarks from an Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs press conference, an unidentified journalist asks Bahram Qassemi, the foreign ministry spokesman, to speak about Bagheri’s remarks. While Qassemi’s remarks are a bit more diplomatic in tone, he underscores that the Iranian government shares the concerns of the IRGC. So too does the Supreme National Security Council who, on the same day as Qassemi’s press conference, warned that “Although this issue might look attractive, it will actually isolate and pressure the Iraqi Kurds; weaken Kurdistan and finally the entire Iraq.”

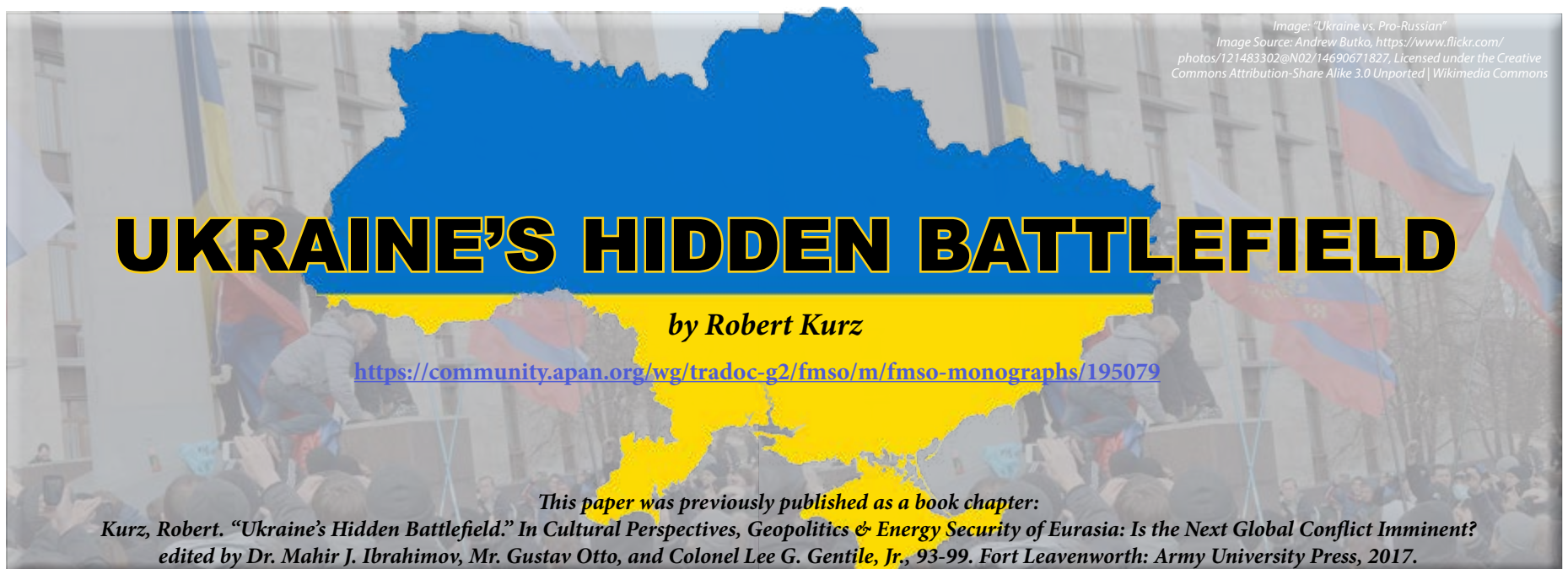
The KRG brands itself as the most stable, democratic, and pro-American entity in the region. The KRG’s decision to move forward with the referendum despite Iran throwing down the gauntlet will likely lead to growing tension between Iran and the KRG. How that tension plays out—whether in greater Iranian support for anti-referendum Kurdish parties and politicians or more overt violence directed at Masoud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party—can significantly alter stability calculations throughout the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Independence of Kurdistan...will trigger instability in the region.”

Source: “Neshast Khabari Sokhanguye Vezarat-e Amor-e Kharaji ba Khabarnagaran-e Dakhli va Kharaji (A News Conference with the Foreign Ministry Spokesman with Domestic and Foreign Reporters),” *Iran Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 24 July 2017. <http://www.mfa.gov.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=1&pageid=128&newsview=467192>

Question: What did Major General [Mohammad] Bagheri’s comments mean with reference to the referendum on independence of Kurdistan?

Answer: The independence of Kurdistan is a dream which will take a lot of time to interpret. Iran calls for territorial integrity and territorial unity in Iraq, and we see the referendum at the expense of peace and stability in the region. This will trigger third-party agents and instability in the region and will not benefit anyone. In the current situation, we want Iraq’s territorial integrity and the rule of the central government.”

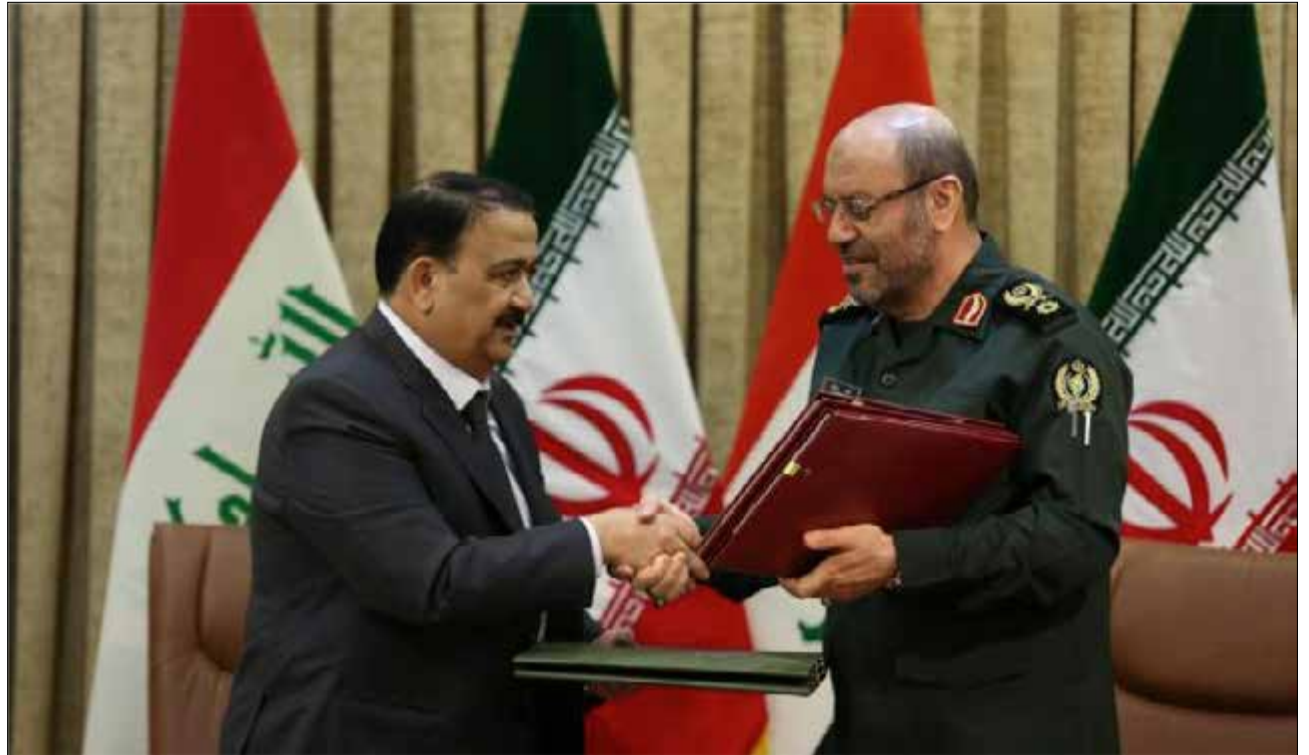




Iran and Iraq Sign Defense Memorandum of Understanding

OE Watch Commentary: Since June 2014, the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has consumed Iraqi security resources. Iraq faced a military and security crisis when many army units disintegrated in the face of ISIS. While Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani called for volunteers to defend Iraq, giving rise to the *Hashd ash-Shaabi* (Popular Mobilization Units), the Iraqi government welcomed external assistance in its drive to liberate Mosul. Iranian-backed militias and Iranian advisors up to and including Qods Force Chief Qassem Soleimani answered the call and made no secret of their efforts to counter ISIS inside Iraq.

The growing Iranian presence—and the presence of Iraqi militias answering more to Tehran than to Baghdad—raised many questions, however, about the future of the Iranian presence after ISIS’s defeat. While Iraqi leaders and diplomats acknowledged the legitimacy of these concerns, they deferred discussion by arguing that such matters were secondary until after Mosul’s liberation. On 10 July 2017, however, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Abadi traveled to Mosul to declare the city liberated.



Iran and Iraq's Defense Ministers Shake Hands after Signing Memorandum of Understanding

Source: Iran Ministry of Defense, goo.gl/vrvgv, public domain.

Both inside and outside Iraq, conversation began not only about the political future of Mosul and many predominantly Sunni areas of Iraq, but also about what should become of the *Hashd ash-Shaabi* and especially the Iranian-backed militias which comprise perhaps 30 percent of the total militiamen in the *Hashd ash-Shaabi*. It is against this backdrop that the recent memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Iraqi and Iranian defense ministers is important. The accompanying excerpt from the Iranian Ministry of Defense discusses the MoU, and notes that it is “the beginning of a wide range of military-defense cooperation in various areas.”

Relations between Iran and Iraq are nothing new. The border between the two is the longest for both. Religious pilgrimage goes both directions and Iraq is a major market for Iranian manufactured goods and agriculture. In addition, both countries are majority Shi’ite and ruled by Shi’ite parties, although serious theological differences exist between the philosophy espoused by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the leading ayatollahs in Iraq. Nor is this the first time the two countries have signed an MoU. In 2014, former Iraqi Defense Minister Khalid al-Obeidi visited Tehran and signed an MoU to boost cooperation between the two countries.

While lacking in details, the updated MoU appears to promote a wide range of cooperation that could regularize the presence of Iranian trainers and Qods Force liaisons within Iraq. It could also slow, if not halt the disarming and decommissioning of Iranian-backed and trained groups. A more robust Iranian-backed militia or advisor presence in Iraq could halt reforms and provide Iran with veto power over the decisions of future Iraqi governments, as it does with Hezbollah in Lebanon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Both sides emphasized the importance of deepening and expanding defense cooperation.”

Source: “Yadasht Tafahem Hamkarihayeh Mian Iran va Iraq Emza’i Shod (A Memorandum of Understanding on Military-Defense Cooperation was signed between Iran and Iraq),” *Iran Ministry of Defense*, 23 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/xQX5SR>

According to the information office of the Ministry of Defense, the memorandum of understanding marked the beginning of a wide range of military-defense cooperation in various areas agreed by the parties. Among the provisions of this memorandum of understanding are the extension of cooperation and the exchange of experiences in combating terrorism, extremism, border security, and other educational, logistical, technical and military support. Following the signing by the defense ministers of the two countries of the Memorandum of Understanding on military-defense cooperation, both sides emphasized the importance of deepening and expanding defense cooperation between the two countries and they expressed their hope that the memorandum would usher in more serious, deeper and more active cooperation.



Iran: Policing the Internet and Social Media

OE Watch Commentary: Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution was not only a political revolution but also an ideological one. Adherence to the Islamic Republic's values and morals is mandatory, and the Iranian government has inaugurated multiple security agencies to ensure that Iranians obey and submit to the ideology of the regime. The expansion of the internet, particularly social media, however, poses an increasing challenge to Iranian security forces. To deal with this challenge, the Iranian government set up a cyber-police force charged with policing the internet and social media. In the excerpted article from the cyber-police website, the chief of cyber-police details a huge increase in crimes committed on the internet. Whereas in past years, he spoke about crackdowns on 'moral crimes' (code for pornography), this year he singled out social media and especially Telegram (a cloud-based instant messaging service) and Instagram (a photo and video-sharing service) as being involved in almost two-thirds of the cybercrimes investigated and prosecuted.

The cyber-police emphasis on Telegram may reflect fear that politicians and civil society leaders upset with the shrinking public and social space under current President Hassan Rouhani may turn to social media to organize. Iranian police recently arrested six administrators for reform-minded chat channels on Telegram. However, according to an interview with their lawyer published in the excerpted *Iran Labor News Agency* article, the judiciary subsequently released them on bail. They may have been pawns in a larger behind-the-scenes fight over government control and access to social media. On 26 July, for example, Iran's public prosecutor deputy for cyberspace affairs threatened to bring charges against the minister of communications if he did not take more robust action to block social media "with criminal content." Four days later, the Iranian press reported Telegram had moved its servers into Iran in an apparent compromise whereby it could still operate but Iranian police would have greater access to monitor the platform. (Telegram's founder Pavel Durov, however, denied in a tweet that the company had transferred any servers into Iran). Ordinary Iranians might not see Durov's denial, however, as cyber-police chief Hadianfar reaffirmed Iran's ban on Twitter.

For several decades, Iranian police and security forces sought to weed out terror cells, police women's clothing, prevent drug trafficking and alcohol consumption, and break up mixed gender parties. Recent events suggest that concern over social media and the Iranian government's ability to monitor and control it are leapfrogging over other police priorities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



“More than 60 percent of the cybercrime involved Telegram and Instagram.”

Source: “Rashed 45 dar sadi Jaraim Siberi (Cyber Crimes Up 45 Percent),” *Cyberpolice.ir*, 27 July 2017. <http://www.cyberpolice.ir/news/88291>

General Sayed Kamal Hadianfar, on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of the Tehran Summit, told reporters that the conference was held for two days, with a focus on crime tracking, countering terrorists from cyberspace, and so on. In response to a question about the state of cybercrime in the country, he said: “In the year from March 2016 to March 2017, in comparison to the previous year, there has been more than a 70 percent increase in cybercrime cases, of which 43 percent of the total crimes involved Telegram and 20 percent involved Instagram. Thus, more than 60 percent of the cybercrime involved Telegram and Instagram... General Hadianfar said that this year, we witnessed an increase in cybercrime, and that in the past four months, cybercrime has increased by 45 percent. He added, “Our discovery rate is as high as 80 percent, and we are looking to increase our ability. The Ministry of Communications, along with the development of the Internet, will also pay attention to the security of the citizens. “With the development of infrastructure and equipment, it seems that crime in cyberspace is also increasing, and we hope that the Ministry of Communications will coexist with the development of growth,” he said, predicting that crimes will continue to increase in cyberspace.

Source: “Sedur Qarar 500 Milyon Tomani baraye Madiran Kanalha-ye Telegrami Islah Talab/She Nefar Azad Shodand (5 Billion Rial Bail Issued for Reformist Telegram Managers/3 People Freed),” *Iranian Labor News Agency*, 29 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/zV8tMK>

Ali Mojtahedzadeh, in an interview with the *Iranian Labor News Agency [ILNA]* correspondent regarding the latest status of the case against the reformist managers of Telegram, said, each of the six administrators of the Telegram channels received a 500 million toman bail by the decision of the court. Mistery Baqeri, Naqdi and Jamshidi were freed, and Nima Keshvari will be released tomorrow as well. The lawyer for the administrators of the reformist Telegram channels said, “Mr. Sobhan Jafari has not yet been able to secure bail and, God-willing, he will make bail or it will be waived by the court so that this person will also be released.... A number of reformist telegraph channel managers were arrested last month, according to ILNA...”



Iran's Concern About Kurdish Insurgency

OE Watch Commentary: Kurds living in Iran have long been restive. Kurdish resistance to Tehran's centralized control dates back almost a century. In the 1920s and 1930s, Reza Shah—the father of the Iranian monarch ousted in 1979—brutally crushed tribal resistance to the central government. In 1946, Kurds (including the father of Masoud Barzani, the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, or IKR) briefly claimed an independent state in and around Mahabad, in northwestern Iran, but the Iranian army pacified it within a year. The 1979 Islamic Revolution compounded the disenfranchisement many Iranian Kurds felt: Not only were they ethnically different from many Persians but because Kurds are predominantly Sunni, they found themselves discriminated against twice over—ethnically and religiously—by a government which based itself on Ayatollah Khomeini's exegesis of Shi'ite theology and political philosophy. Against this backdrop, violence in Iranian Kurdistan has never been far below the surface. The Iranian military and security forces deploy a disproportionate number of troops to keep order in the mountainous region, and the Iranian judiciary imprisons and often executes Iranian Kurds it suspects of joining Kurdish cultural or nationalist groups.

Still, Iranian repression of its Kurds—perhaps eight percent of its total population—has not placated the region. With Iraqi Kurds headed to a referendum, the decades-long understanding between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Kurdish dissident groups appears to be breaking down. Both the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I) and Komala, historically the Iranian Kurdish communist party, have long maintained camps in Iraqi Kurdish territory. Both understood that they would remain unmolested by Iranian forces so long as they did not attack Iran from this territory. However, reports—referenced here—of Iranian artillery fire directed at KDP-I and Komala camps in Iraqi territory suggest that the Iranian military is now operating under altered rules of engagement. The assassination of Komala's representative in the IKR reported in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated *Raja News* and excerpted here likewise suggests that Iranian aggression toward the Kurds will no longer know borders.

Such Iranian actions are not occurring in a vacuum, however. The Iranian government remains fiercely opposed to the forthcoming referendum on Iraqi Kurdish independence. Iranian officials fear that the IKR could create a precedent which could inspire Iranian Kurds to demand autonomy or even independence. The Iranian government—and many Iranian intellectuals outside of government—believe that Kurdish moves toward autonomy or independence could reverberate far beyond Iran's Kurdish population: Iran, after all, is a multi-ethnic country with a history of separatist movements among not only Kurds but also Azeris, Baluch, Arabs, and Gilakis. Nor is the Iranian government being blindly paranoid. The Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has engaged in an insurgency inside Iran. The interception of weaponry along Iran's mountainous border—reported in *Tasnim*, an outlet close to the security services and the IRGC and excerpted here, likely raises concern in Tehran about the possibility that the Kurds' long low-grade insurgency might increase in intensity. Certainly, Iranian authorities may worry that despite the successful interception of contraband, more might have evaded Iran's security net. If that is the case, Iran may be looking at additional terrorist attacks inside the country. Either way, it seems that the border region between Iran and the IKR may soon grow hotter. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“...Weapons, ammunition and explosive devices were discovered in the northwestern parts of the country....”

Source: “Keshef-e Salah, Mohemat va Tejezhat-e Enfejari Shemal-e Gharb-e Keshavarz (Discovery of Weapons, ammunition and explosive devices in the northwest of the country),” *Tasnim News*, 24 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/mzKh6M>

General Qassem Rezaei, during a ceremony to honor the commander of the Bushehr province, and noting how well-being and security in Islamic Iran are due to the passion of the martyrs, said that the defenders of the shrines and martyrs play a significant role in the security of Islamic Iran because the defenders of the shrines also defend the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, and stand against the threat of enemies across the border and do not allow enemies or those attacking to penetrate the borders of Iran.... The commander announced the discovery of a large cargo of contraband in the northwest of the country: 30 horses and mules, carrying a cargo of weapons, ammunition and explosive devices, were discovered in the northwestern parts of the country by the border guards....” General Rezaie, pointing to the increase in smuggling discoveries on the borders of Islamic Iran, stressed that counteracting smuggling is not satisfactory. More serious measures should be taken in this area.

Source: “Namayنده Komala dar Kurdistan-e ‘Iraq bar asar Shalik Goluleh beh Halekat Rasid (Komala's Representative in Iraqi Kurdistan Killed by a Bullet),” *Raja News*, 28 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/AfJxwv>

Based on news received from the Zargwez Camp [southwest of Sulaymani] of the communist Komala party, on the afternoon of 14 July, Rahman Nejat was shot dead in a completely suspicious incident...! He served as a member of the Central Committee of Komala, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Iran and as the official representative of Komala in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Source: “Iran Movazeh Goruhaye Kurd ra dar Khak-e ‘Iraq Golulehbaran Kard (Iran Shells Kurdish Opposition Groups on Iraqi Soil),” *Porcesh.ir*, 3 July 2017. <http://porcesh.ir/fa/2238>

The media and local authorities in Iraqi Kurdistan have released reports and videos showing that this morning Iran shelled the positions two Kurdish groups—the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran and Komala... The location of the attack is Halgurd mountain in the border area near Haji Omran [Iraq] and Piranshahr [Iran].



Iran: Army Unveils Video Game

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article discusses a new video game recently released by the Iranian army, called the “Battle in the Gulf of Aden 2.” The game’s scenario is described as the Iranian Navy’s “powerful presence fighting pirates in international waters in the Gulf of Aden.” The game was unveiled at the country’s top computer and electronic expo before a group of senior Iranian military officials. The first version of the game hit the market in 2012 and quickly became the most popular computer game in Iran supplanting the “Age of Heroes,” a three-dimensional game based upon the stories of the Shahnameh, Iran’s national epic.

As the article discusses, senior officials of the Iranian military, including the commander of the Navy, attended the unveiling of the new version. This likely underscores the importance that the Iranian military places on such gaming, both for recruitment purposes and to indoctrinate youth who are more likely to play a video game than pay much heed to the state-controlled media. It is significant that the game’s sponsors appear to be the regular Iranian navy rather than the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the elite military organization which prides itself on ideological commitment to Iran’s revolutionary ideals and which normally is the body more engaged in indoctrination.

Glorification of Iran’s participation in counter-piracy efforts in the Gulf of Aden may exaggerate Iran’s actual effectiveness in that operation, but the video game provides an effective way to revise the narrative to place Iran front and center in the fight against Somali pirates. The game’s focus on the Gulf of Aden may also signal the Iranian military’s commitment to operation in and around Yemen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Bazi ‘Mobarzeh dar Khalij-e Aden 2’ Ravanmayi Shod (The Game ‘Battle for the Gulf of Aden 2’ is Unveiled),” *Islamic Students News Agency*, 24 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/rfLe8b>

A mobile version of the ‘Battle for the Gulf of Aden 2’ was unveiled before a group of commanders on the sidelines of Elecomp 96 [an annual Iranian computer and electronics trade exposition]. The ‘Gulf of Aden 2’ mobile game was unveiled on Monday afternoon, at a ceremony attended by Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, commander of the Iranian Navy; Amir Golfam, president of the Organization for the Protection of Works and the Publishing of the Values of the Holy Defense of the Army; Abbas Mohammad Hassani, chief of the Political Ideology Center of the Armed Forces; and Amir Shahin Taqikhani, army spokesman for Elecomp 96.

This game was made with a Unity 3D graphic engine and professional audio and the scenario is about the Iranian Navy’s powerful presence fighting pirates in international waters in the Gulf of Aden. “Battle for the Gulf of Aden” is one of the first Iranian games that is dedicated to modern warfare and takes place at the present time, and in it, the player takes the role of an Iranian navy marine deployed on an important mission to international waters.

“The player takes the role of an Iranian navy marine.”



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Western Sahara: The Cherry Blossom Affair

OE Watch Commentary: In 1975, Morocco repossessed the Western Sahara, a former Spanish colony carved out of territory originally seized from Morocco during the 19th century. The Polisario Front (PF- The Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro), a Marxist group and a relic of the Cold War long supported by Algeria and Cuba, contested the move and laid claim to the territory as leader of the self-styled Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. This led to a 16-year war that ended in a cease-fire and the establishment of a UN peacekeeping mission in 1991. Since then, UN-facilitated discussions on the territory's status have been inconclusive. While the UN considers the area to be non-self-governing territory, the United States, France, and a number of African and Arab countries have embraced neutrality while endorsing a 1999 plan for autonomy of the Western Sahara under Moroccan sovereignty. The US Congress' 2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act signed into law on 5 May 2017 agreed to allow Morocco to use US funds to develop the Western Sahara.

While United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 690 created the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to organize a referendum to determine the status of ethnic Sahrawi from the Western Sahara, that effort floundered over disputes of qualifications to vote. Both Algeria and the PF have long opposed a full census of refugees and likely inflate their numbers in order to collect additional foreign aid. Moroccan officials, meanwhile, object to Algerian efforts to pad the PF camps in Tindouf with those who trace their roots to Algeria and Mauritania rather than the Western Sahara.

In 2016, after a disputed road clearing operation near Guerguerat, a village in the UN buffer zone in the southern Western Sahara about six miles from the Mauritanian border, the PF entered the territory leading to a military standoff with Morocco. In February 2017, Morocco withdrew its forces at the urging of the UN, but the PF fighters remained for several more months to extract 'tax' on trade until finally acceding to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres's demand. Their months-long unilateral presence, however, took a diplomatic toll as the UN and regional powers viewed the PF singly as the threat to regional stability and the status quo. Both the PF withdrawal and the African Union's invitation for Morocco to rejoin the body after 33 years represented blows to PF's prestige and momentum.

It is against this backdrop that the PF has embarked on a new strategy: One day after the UNSC asked both Morocco and the PF to resolve their dispute "without preconditions and in good faith," PF activists requested that South Africa impound the cargo vessel 'Cherry Blossom' after it made an unscheduled stop in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, carrying phosphate mined in the Western Sahara. The PF claims that exports from the disputed territory are illegal. As the excerpted article from a Casablanca paper documents, South Africa agreed to the request and impounded the ship and cargo. A similar request to Panamanian authorities with regard to another ship carrying phosphate mined in the Western Sahara was denied when the Panamanian court ruled it had no "jurisdictional competence" in the matter.

South Africa's African National Congress has long acted as a patron for the PF. But the South African court's decision to agree to the seizure of the ship heralds increasing chilliness in relations between Morocco and South Africa, two of Africa's economic powerhouses. It also establishes a very dangerous precedent as it creates an incentive for self-styled liberation movements to avoid diplomacy and instead use third state courts to seize property.

Finding a compliant court is akin to winning the lottery: If the South African court decides against the ship's owners, the sale of the phosphate will represent a windfall for the PF and enable the group to double down on insurgency instead of the diplomatic process. If this becomes a pattern with other separatist movements, the chance of conflict could increase as owners of seized property might consider judgments against them to be akin to piracy and separatist movements might seek backdoor legitimacy by becoming claimants in courts. Either way, the final disposition of the Cherry Blossom and its cargo bear watching. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: "Affaire « Cherry Blossom »: OCP dénie la légitimité de la cour sud-africaine (The 'Cherry Blossom' Affair : OCP Denies the Legitimacy of the South African Court)," *La Nouvelle Tribune*, 13 July 2017. <https://lnt.ma/affaire-cherry-blossom-ocp-denie-legitimite-de-cour-sud-africaine/>

In deciding to refer the case of "Cherry Blossom" on its merits, the South African court makes a highly political decision and commits a serious abuse of power. Not only does it claim for itself jurisdiction which contravenes the basic principles of international law but, moreover, its decision constitutes political interference in the process conducted under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council. OCP [Morocco's state-owned Office Chérifien des Phosphates] and its subsidiary Phosboucraa deny the South African court any legitimacy to pronounce on the merits of a case followed at the highest international level. On 1 May 2017, following a request by the Polisario Front, a South African judge ordered the seizure of a shipment of phosphate from Phosboucraa, resulting in the vessel being detained in Port Elizabeth. This request was based on purely political allegations.... While accepting the complexity and international character of the matter, the South African court assumed jurisdictional competence in contradiction [with] principles of international law.

“The South African court assumed jurisdictional competence in contradiction [with] principles of international law.”



Turkistan Islamic Party Benefiting from Syrian War Dynamics

OE Watch Commentary: Uyghur jihadist fighters have been involved in the Syrian war since at least 2012. The most prominent Uyghur group in Syria, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), played a key role in several battles against Syrian loyalist forces in 2015 and 2016 (see: “Turkistan Islamic Party Makes its Mark on the Syrian Rebellion,” *OE Watch*, June 2016). As highlighted in the two accompanying passages, the group is now benefiting from the shrinking territory of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and rebel-jihadist infighting in Syria’s Idlib Province.

According to the first accompanying passage, from the pro-Syrian government Lebanese daily *al-Akhbar*, “the past year witnessed a constant exodus of Uyghur fighters from ISIS to the TIP, as fighting against ISIS intensified.” The article cites figures for the city of al-Bab in East Aleppo Province, from which Turkish-backed forces expelled ISIS last February. According to the article, ISIS’s Uyghur fighters were given the choice between retreating to Deir Ezzor with other ISIS fighters or joining the TIP as part of a negotiated surrender. The majority opted to join the TIP.

The TIP has also “begun to reap the rewards of the tensions in several parts of rural Idlib,” according to the article. The second accompanying passage, from the Lebanese news site *al-Modon*, details how the TIP has staked out a neutral position in the ongoing conflict for control over a lucrative border crossing linking Syria’s Idlib Province and Turkey. The conflict pits Idlib’s two main rebel-jihadist groups, Ahrar al-Sham and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham or HTS (formerly the Nusra Front). The TIP has, in the past, worked closely with former incarnations of HTS, but in the current spat it has sought to remain neutral. As the article notes: “Even though a considerable number of TIP fighters favor HTS... a large chunk of the TIP knows who Ahrar al-Sham is and that the majority of the moderate opposition would side with them were HTS to attack Ahrar.” The TIP has remained on the sidelines and sought to mediate in previous rounds of intra-jihadist fighting, including the 2013 Nusra Front/ISIS split and the dissolution of Jund al-Aqsa in early 2017.

Over the past five years an estimated 3,000 TIP fighters and their families have taken over villages in mountainous parts of Syria, near the Turkish border. Their ultimate stated goal, however, is to “liberate” Xinjiang Province in western China. Having gained valuable experience and notoriety from the Syrian war, the remaining TIP fighters may eventually reconsider their commitment to staying in the Levant. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...The TIP has begun to reap the rewards of the tensions in several parts of rural Idlib...”

Source:

أنقرة وواشنطن تُسرجان الحصان الصيني الأسود؟
“Are Ankara and Washington Saddling Up ‘The Chinese Dark Horse’?” *al-Akhbar*, 17 July 2017. <http://al-akhbar.com/node/280285>

... The past year witnessed a constant exodus of Uyghur fighters from ISIS to the TIP, as fighting against ISIS intensified... The number of Uyghurs who defected from ISIS and joined the TIP since the middle of last year until this February totals around 400. ISIS’s withdrawal from the city of al-Bab in February 2017 was a notable and important event for the TIP, which worked to help strike a deal between the Euphrates Shield (and its sponsors in Ankara) and ISIS, which stipulated that foreign ISIS fighters would leave al-Bab while local fighters would be granted amnesty and their personal safety, as well as that of their families and their belongings. It also gave Uyghur ISIS fighters in al-Bab the choice between withdrawing with their families or going to temporary centers before joining the TIP. According to a Syrian source inside Euphrates Shield, 72 Uyghurs fighting with ISIS in al-Bab chose to go to the temporary centers, while 11 decided to remain with ISIS and withdraw toward southeast Aleppo Province and from there to al-Tabqa and Raqqah... The TIP has begun to reap the rewards of the tensions in several parts of rural Idlib in recent days. The TIP is not a party to the outbreak of hostilities, which consist primarily of skirmishes between Ahrar al-Sham and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham/al-Nusra. Developments seem to point to an expansion of areas under the control of the TIP.

Source:

لماذا استتفر “الحزب التركستاني” قواته في سوريا؟
“Why Are ‘Turkistani Party’ Forces on Alert in Syria?” *al-Modon*, 8 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/GEwGX3>

Tens of motorcycles transporting TIP fighters left on Friday from Syrian villages along the Turkish border toward Bab al-Hawa and Sarmada in Idlib, after HTS took over the historical town of Sarmada and set up checkpoints near Bab al-Hawa. In response, Ahrar al-Sham sent reinforcement with heavy weaponry including anti-tank missiles. TIP leadership took a neutral position between the two groups regarding these events, even though a considerable number of TIP fighters favor HTS. Still, a large chunk of the TIP knows who Ahrar al-Sham is and that the majority of the moderate opposition would side with them were HTS to attack Ahrar. Consequently, the TIP is currently working to mediate, meeting with Saudi preacher Abdullah Moheisini, former Nusra Front jurist Abu Maria al-Qahtani, and Ahrar al-Sham leaders, in order to calm the situation in northern Syria, particularly Bab al-Hawa... Residents of the villages where the TIP is present do not feel in danger from fighting between Ahrar and HTS, and thus the presence of the TIP represents a form of insurance in the case of fighting between the two largest factions in northern Syria... Residents of Jabal az Zawiya believe there are attempts to draw the TIP to side with HTS in the expected attacks against Ahrar al-Sham. Residents fear statements issued on Friday, which they view as the start of impending clashes and which, according to some, marks the end of the jihad in the Levant; for others they signal the end of a complicated phase of the Syrian Revolution.



The Future of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: The Syrian refugee crisis is one of the largest humanitarian crises of our time, with over five million refugees having fled Syria. More than three million of these are in Turkey, with the rest divided between Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and other countries. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss some of the challenges Turkey is facing in hosting such a high number of refugees, and the possible long-term threat arising from refugee children, who make up two thirds of the Syrian refugees in Turkey.

In the first passage, Turkish President Erdoğan discusses the efforts that Turkey has made to host the Syrian refugees. He points out that Turkey has stretched its own resources and spent close to 30 billion dollars on addressing their needs, to include shelters, health, education, training and employment. He also laments that Turkey has only received 800 million euros of the six billion that was promised. In March 2016, Turkey and the European Union (EU) had signed a complicated agreement aimed to curb the flood of refugees into Europe, which included financial support to Turkey to improve the lives of the three million Syrian refugees there.

Many outside observers agree that Turkey has done a reasonably good job in hosting the refugees without much outside support. Nevertheless, the refugees are traumatized from a brutal war and trying to settle into a country where they don't speak the language. The second and third passages feature findings by a psychology and human development professor from Turkey who has been conducting studies on the issue of Syrian refugee children in Turkey. As the second passage discusses, the data suggests that, of the two million Syrian refugee children in Turkey, three quarters suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, and 70% have lost a family member. The data also shows that "over half of these children should be in elementary school but are not going; 70% of those who should be in middle school are not going.. [and] at the high school level, the rate is 90%."

In the third passage, the same professor points out that this dangerous combination of traumatized children with no education and no hope for the future, and living in refugee camps has produced terror groups in other parts of the world. He notes that the refugee camps in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border are where the Taliban was born. Similarly, he claims that refugee camps in Africa are where Boko Haram was born. He concludes that Turkey does not have the option to allow this to happen, limited resources or not. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

Source: "Erdoğan'dan Afrin mesajı! 'Gerekli cevabı vereceğiz' (A message about Afrin by Erdoğan! 'We will respond as necessary')," *Milliyet.com*, 8 July 2017. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/son-dakika-erdogan-kapsamli-siyaset-2481448/>

"Unfortunately our European friends have continued to stand idly by in the face of this issue which is a life or death situation for millions of innocent people. We have tried very hard to fulfill our humanitarian duties, by stretching our own resources. The camps that we built for the refugees are unmatched in the world. We did not and are not letting the refugees live in ghettos, or islands that are effectively open air prisons, nor did we leave them in desperation and hunger. On the contrary, we are hosting them in temporary shelters and our cities, in a dignified way. From education to health services, from language training to employment, we are working on answering their every need. We have spent close to 30 billion dollars through our government agencies, municipalities and NGOs, but we have not received any serious support from the international community. I want this to be known..."

....While doing all these, the European Union had promised 6 billion Euros. But until now, we have only received 800 million Euros. Numbers and statements are being distorted here..."

Source: Ayşe Arman, "Eğitilmeyen Suriyeli mülteci çocuklar karşımıza Taliban olarak çıkabilir! (Syrian refugee children who are not educated can emerge as the Taliban!)," *Hurriyet.com.tr*, 9 July 2017. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/ayse-arman/egitilmeyen-suriyeli-multeci-cocuklar-karsimiza-taliban-olarak- cikabilir-40514186>

[Question:] One of the issues that you highlight is Syrian refugee children. There are 3 million refugees, 2 million of them are children.... What kind of data do you have on these children?

[Answer:] The data is awful. Very sad. These children are experiencing huge levels of trauma. Three quarters of them suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. The rate of depression is near 50%.... They can't sleep at night, they wet themselves... The rate of losing a family member is near 70%. They have either lost their mother or father. The result is depression. They don't want to eat, they don't want to sleep, maybe they are suicidal. This is the situation....

This is a very sad picture....Over half of these children should be in elementary school but they are not going. 70% of those that should be in middle school are not going. For the high school level, the rate is 90%... So, on the one hand, they have experienced trauma. They can't sleep. They have no hope for the future. On the other hand, they are not going to school. So what is going to happen to these kids?... We have seen the answer to this question in other parts of the world, when there are similar conflicts. For example in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border... [if they are not educated] they will become the Taliban... This is how Boko Haram in Africa, and the Taliban emerged. So we do not have the option to do nothing....

Source: Selçuk R. Şirin, "İtiraz Et, Hayal Kur, İlerle! (Object, Dream, Get Ahead!)," Speech at TEDxIstanbul, 6 July 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA5C0zifeTU>

"We have a very dangerous situation. A group that has suffered trauma, [who is] not going to school, and ... settling in a country where they don't speak the language. In order to predict where this can lead, we only need to look at three geographies. Look at the Far East-- the Pakistan-Afghanistan border is just one of them-- the refugee camps there is where the Taliban was born. Look at Africa, from the refugee camps in Africa, Boko Haram was born. Look at the Middle East-- you know the Middle East. We have this danger ahead of us. We need to provide these kids with a better hope for the future."



Israel's New Project to Tackle Tunnel Threat

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages from Israeli sources discuss the construction of a new wall aimed to tackle the threat posed by Hamas tunnels. The wall will reportedly reach dozens of meters deep into the ground, stand six meters high from ground level and have sensors installed in it.

As the first passage from the *Times of Israel* notes, “the construction of Israel’s underground security barrier aimed at countering the Hamas terror group’s attack tunnels is picking up speed...with hundreds of workers operating around the clock on the massive engineering project.” Work on the 37-mile barrier began this summer and is planned to be completed within two years. It will reportedly feature an “advanced underground protection system that extends dozens of meters below the ground... in order to detect and destroy tunnels that attempt to penetrate into Israeli territory, as well as an above-ground metal fence adorned with sensors.” As the second passage from the *Haaretz* notes, “sensors installed inside the barrier will sound an alarm if anyone approaches it and warn Israel of any future tunnel digging.”

The passages note that the Israeli military is concerned that the construction of the barrier could spark a conflict with Hamas. However, they also point out that the barrier is being built inside Israeli territory. The third passage from *Al Monitor* discusses Israeli assessments regarding how Hamas might react to the construction. It points out that the tunnel project is the “apple of [Hamas’s] eye,” and that Hamas may try to sabotage the construction of the project. It also notes that as the situation in Gaza worsens, the project may be a catalyst for a wave of Hamas violence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“The defense establishment hopes the underground concrete barrier will eliminate the threat posed by Hamas tunnels entering Israel.”

Source: Judah Ari Gross, “Revealing details of Gaza tunnel-thwarting barrier, IDF says it could spark war,” *Times of Israel*, 10 August 2017. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/revealing-details-of-gaza-tunnel-thwarting-barrier-idf-says-it-could-spark-war>

The construction of Israel’s underground security barrier aimed at countering the Hamas terror group’s attack tunnels is picking up speed, the head of the IDF’s Southern Command said Wednesday, with hundreds of workers operating around the clock on the massive engineering project.

Maj. Gen. Eyal Zamir said the military was concerned that the construction on the barrier could spark a conflict with Hamas. The terror group sees its tunnels as a central weapon in the fight against Israel and the Defense Ministry’s barrier presents a threat to them...

The work on the 37-mile (60-kilometer) barrier began in earnest earlier this summer, and Zamir said it would be completed within two years. It will feature an advanced underground protection system that extends dozens of meters below the ground — the army would not specify the depth — in order to detect and destroy tunnels that attempt to penetrate into Israeli territory, as well as an above-ground metal fence adorned with sensors.

The Defense Ministry will also bulk up the defense along the Gaza coast, putting up breakwaters and other protective measures in order to prevent infiltration into Israel from the sea, as occurred during the 2014 Gaza war...

The barrier is being built inside Israeli territory, Zamir said. The current metal fence surrounding the Strip, which lies exactly on the border, will remain in place, while the new fence is built a few dozen meters inside Israel.

Source: “Israeli Army Reveals Massive Barrier Being Built to Stop Hamas’ Gaza Terror Tunnels,” *Haaretz.com*, 10 August 2017. <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.806052>

The Israel Defense Forces is tackling the threat posed by tunnels that Hamas builds from Gaza into Israel by constructing a massive barrier. The project, estimated to cost 3 billion shekels (\$833 million), will include a concrete wall fitted with sensors and reaching dozens of meters deep into the ground and standing six meters high from ground level...

The defense establishment hopes the underground concrete barrier will eliminate the threat posed by Hamas tunnels entering Israel. Sensors installed inside the barrier will sound an alarm if anyone approaches it and warn Israel of any future tunnel digging.

The barrier’s construction is also aimed at destroying the existing tunnels near the border. The army is using a huge drilling machine that crushes anything in its path to a considerable depth. This is expected to destroy the tunnels currently crossing the border from Gaza to Israel...

Afterward large iron cages containing water-resistant pipes with sensors will be inserted into the ground as foundations. Once the underground barrier is built, a six-meter-high metal wall will be built on top of it to prevent anyone from crossing the border above the ground.

Source: Shlomi Eldar, “Israel to launch major project to block Hamas tunnels,” *Al Monitor*, 27 April 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/04/israel-hamas-gaza-strip-attack-tunnels-construction-idf.html>

Israel feels that there is a chance that Hamas’ military wing may try to sabotage the construction in order to rescue the apple of its eye: the tunnel project...

...the more the economic situation in Gaza worsens, and the more Hamas feels powerless regarding the distress of the Gaza residents, the more likely it is to retaliate. There is a high likelihood that Israel’s obstacle-building efforts may be the catalyst for an eruption of Hamas violence to break the closure on Gaza.



Germany Withdraws from Incirlik

OE Watch Commentary: In late July, Germany completed the withdrawal of its troops from the Incirlik Air Base in southern Turkey. Approximately 260 troops and 6 Tornado patrol planes along with an air refueling tanker, equipment and aircraft parts will be moving to the Azraq Airbase in Jordan by October. The German Tornado war planes conduct reconnaissance missions as part of the coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The accompanying passages from the Turkish and international press discuss this development.

As the first passages discusses, the decision was made after a series of issues causing tension in Turkish-German relations. The second passage discusses some of the operational details of the transfer. It will take two months to move the planes and technical equipment, especially for the containers with digital military equipment to be removed from Incirlik and re-established in the base in Jordan. The base in Jordan is not yet ready to accommodate the German planes, so the planes will first be sent back to Germany. It also points out that the base is smaller than Incirlik and that it “must first be modified to meet the needs of the German air grouping.”



A U.S. Air Force KC-135 Stratotanker prepares to land at Mwaffaq Salti Air Base in Al Azraq, Jordan, October 17, 2009

Source: By Caycee Cook, U.S. Air Force [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AKC-135_prepares_to_land_at_Mwaffaq_Salti_Air_Base.jpg, Public Domain.

Then-Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Işık (current Deputy Prime Minister) said that Turkey was ready to provide support to ensure that the withdrawal did not disrupt the fight against ISIS. The final passage by a Turkish foreign policy expert points out that Germany’s withdrawal of its troops from Turkey would make it difficult for Germany to implement Article 5 of the NATO charter on Turkey’s behalf, warning that Turkish-German frictions may be “the harbinger of an overhaul of the transatlantic security system.” It may be premature to make such a claim, and it is worth noting that German troops remain at the Konya Airbase in Turkey. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“... the last Tornado plane at the Incirlik Base left today [31 July].”

Source: “Alman Tornadolarının İncirlikten çekilmesi tamamlandı (German Tornados’ withdrawal from Incirlik is complete),” *Cumhuriyet.com*, 31 July 2017. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/793407/Alman_Tornadolari_nin_incirlik_ten_cekilmesi_tamamlandi.html

In June, following Turkey’s refusal to grant permission to German parliamentarians to visit the base, the German government and Federal Parliament had decided to move its approximately 260 troops and 6 Tornado patrol planes and fuel transfer planes located in Incirlik to Jordan.

According to the reports in the German press, based on reporting on [German] Defense Ministry sources, the last Tornado plane at the Incirlik Base left today [31 July]. It was reported that the Tornados have returned to the Buchel Air Base in the Rheinland Pfalz area of Germany.

Germany had been conducting patrol missions in Syria and Iraq since early last year, as part of its support to the anti-ISIS international coalition. It is expected that the German Tornados will re-start their patrol missions as of mid-October, following the completion of preparations at the Jordanian Azraq Base.

Source: “Germany begins troop withdrawal from Turkey’s Incirlik Air Base,” *RT.com*, 10 July 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/395820-germany-troops-withdrawal-incirlik/>

The process of transferring military aircraft and personnel from the Turkish airbase to a new location in Jordan will result in the suspension of German participation within the US-led coalition for at least two or three months, the German Defense Ministry said earlier...

Tornado reconnaissance jets stationed at Incirlik will be sent back to Germany as the Jordanian base is not yet fully ready to accommodate the aircraft. The Tornados are due in Jordan by October. Jordan’s Al-Asrak base is also much smaller than Turkey’s Incirlik and must first be modified to meet the needs of the German air grouping. Berlin must also still sign several technical agreements with Amman regulating the stationing of German aircraft at the base, German’s Der Spiegel weekly reports.

Source: “Cengiz Çandar, “German troops poised to leave Turkey for Jordan,” *Al Monitor*, 7 June 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/06/turkey-germany-nato-rift-may-bring-overhaul-nato-ranks.html#ixzz4pUaGoiwh>

“If Germany indeed removes its troops from Turkey, Berlin would no longer be able to implement Article 5 of NATO’s charter on Turkey’s behalf. Article 5 is the backbone of the alliance under which every member country agrees to defend the others. ... Turkish-German frictions may be the harbinger of an overhaul of the transatlantic security system.”



Yemen's Ballistic Missiles Continue Taunting Saudi Arabia

OE Watch Commentary: On 22 July, Yemeni forces from the “Huthi-Saleh” alliance battling the Saudi/UAE-led “Arab Coalition” launched a “Burkan-2-H” missile toward an oil refinery in the Saudi port city of Yanbu, approximately 800 kilometers from the Yemeni border. Days later they claimed the simultaneous launch of several “Burkan-1” missiles toward the King Fahad Airbase in the Saudi city of al-Taif. Although neither strike seems to have caused significant damage, the launches signal that Yemeni forces are still able to lob missiles across the border, in greater numbers and across greater distances than before. That is a problem for Saudi Arabia, according to the two accompanying passages.

The launch targeting Yanbu is the deepest missile penetration into Saudi territory in the current conflict, while the simultaneous launch a few days later was the first of its kind. The Huthi-Saleh forces’ use of ballistic missiles recalls tactics used by Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Army in 1990, where range, mobility and concealment of TELs (Transporter-Erector-Launcher) were prioritized at the expense of firepower and accuracy. Yemen’s cave-rich mountainous terrain is a favorable environment for such an employment of missiles. The mere fact of successfully flying a Burkan (modified SCUD) across the border is considered a strategic victory for the Huthi-Saleh forces.

As noted in the first accompanying passage from the Qatari daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, it is significant that Huthi-Saleh forces can escalate their missile launches after two years of conflict. Neutralizing Yemen’s ballistic missile threat was, after all, a key driver of the initial Saudi military intervention in March 2015. As the article notes, “the most important message of the Huthis and their allies to Saudi Arabia is that after tens of thousands of airstrikes they are still able to threaten Saudi airspace.” The launches may have little operational value, but they can be held up as evidence of shortcomings in the Arab Coalition’s “SCUD-hunting” efforts and the Saudi-led effort as a whole.

With each additional missile launch, Yemeni forces aligned with the Huthis and former president Saleh seek to drive home the point that the Arab Coalition lacks meaningful ground-level intelligence in Yemen. The second accompanying passage, from the Arabic-language webpage of the Russian news website *Sputnik*, quotes a spokesperson for the anti-Saudi Yemeni armed forces who argues, somewhat tauntingly: “The intelligence shortcomings lead to the hysteria and haphazardness of the coalition airstrikes against civilian targets, in light of their inability to strike Yemen’s missiles.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...after tens of thousands of airstrikes [the Huthis and their allies] are still able to threaten Saudi airspace...”

Source: صواريخ الحوثيين باتجاه السعودية رسائل سياسية أولاً
“Huthi Missiles Toward Saudi Arabia: Political Message Primarily,”
al-Araby al-Jadid, 28 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/qKyzEK>

On Thursday evening the Huthis announced that they had launched “several [ballistic] missiles” toward the King Abdel Aziz Airbase in al-Taif, Saudi Arabia...This is the first time the Huthis claimed to have launched “several missiles.” There are questions whether they were three or four and whether they were launched simultaneously or sequentially. This is nonetheless a notable escalation... it is clear that they carry a political message more so than an attempt to strike and destroy the enemy. The most important message of the Huthis and their allies to Saudi Arabia is that after tens of thousands of airstrikes they are still able to threaten Saudi airspace. This is the most they can do given the asymmetry in favor of the coalition airstrikes. Each missile launched may be answered with hundreds of airstrikes. The Huthis and their allies don’t have air defense to prevent these strikes...

Source: الجيش اليمني المتحالف مع أنصار الله قدراتنا الصاروخية تحمل الكثير من المفاجآت
“The Yemeni Army Allied with Ansar Allah: Many Surprises Remaining For Our Missile Capabilities,” *Sputnik (Arabic)*, 12 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/xei3Sq>

“The United States wants to tell the world that it has military intelligence on Yemen while in fact that is not the case. Most of what is published by U.S. intelligence is available in leaks and different media outlets including social media. This points to an American inability to obtain intelligence, especially given the tactics, formations and military measures secretly taken by the army and the popular committees and which cannot be infiltrated... The intelligence shortcomings lead to the hysteria and haphazardness of the coalition airstrikes against civilian targets, in light of their inability to strike Yemen’s missiles... [Yemen’s] missile capabilities are improving daily and there are further technical models that will improve our capabilities of establishing a strike and counter-strike balance. Meanwhile, the U.S. and the west will continue to attrite the Gulf countries.”



An African Perspective on China's Role in Africa

OE Watch Commentary: China establishing a military base in Djibouti – so far its one and only in Africa – is not a sudden change in foreign policy. As the accompanying article relates, this expanding military footprint is part of a natural progression that started with the end of the Cold War. Since then, China has gradually increased its willingness to be involved in Africa, especially in the realm of peacekeeping. The article, from a South African source, analyzes China's role in Africa through three broad perspectives, which it claims are related to China's goals: Asserting its position as a global power, crafting a positive image of itself, and promoting its national interests.

On the first point, it is notable that China is the only country that contributes both significant amounts of money and numbers of troops to UN peacekeeping operations. In fact China has emerged as an important player in international peacekeeping operations not just in Africa but in other locations as well. On the second point, using peacekeeping in a deliberate and systematic way enables China to project itself not just as a global power but also a responsible one, thus helping to fulfill its goal of placing itself in a positive light. Gifting the entire African Union building has certainly further helped it to burnish its image.

China's third goal, according to the article, is promoting its national interests. With China now Africa's largest trading partner, and the country making huge investments in African infrastructure and businesses, it is no surprise that it would also want to protect these financial outlays. Therefore China's strategic and material concerns are inextricably tied to African politics and security. Although the article does not mention it, there has been considerable blowback in Africa against China because Chinese goods frequently undercut locally produced ones. Thus from the Chinese perspective, good public relations from peacekeeping can possibly help offset some of the bad publicity it receives for its often controversial marketplace actions.

Although China has a tradition of non-interventionism, it recognized a need to participate in peacekeeping in South Sudan, a country where it has strong interests in oil production. As the article relates, this perhaps signals a more assertive role for China with regards to peace and security in Africa. However, there is a risk that if it becomes too assertive it will be viewed as yet just another colonial power mainly interested in exploiting African resources.

With China contributing troops to peacekeeping operations in South Sudan, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the author claims that China is sending a message to other major powers that while its profile is rising, it is not a strategic threat to them. The author notes that China "wants developing countries to regard it as a friend in global politics," but warns that China may apply military power if "it believes its economic interests are under threat." **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“African leaders must be realistic about developments such as the Djibouti military base. They can't welcome China's presence – and investments – as an acceptable alternative to America, while opposing Beijing's use of diplomatic – and even military – means to protect its interests.”



Chinese engineers serving with the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), part of an expanding role of China in Africa

Source: UN Photo/Stuart Price, https://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/5812675060/in/photolist-9RDtMw-RM2eWy-72RDVM-5Jf4R-ucdCLz-Jz526B-zB29i-9U25Ev-7b63aD-E2VJey-DVYffe-xcG3CF-rioCv9-rzWPuT, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Source: Theo Neethling, "Africa: What the Djibouti Military Base Tells Us About China's Growing Role in Africa," *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 1 August 2017. <https://theconversation.com/what-the-djibouti-military-base-tells-us-about-chinas-growing-role-in-africa-81783>

At the same time, as much as China is being forced to adopt high risk strategies in cases of overseas investment, as in South Sudan, its approach can still be defined as being carefully impartial. It remains true that China's increased involvement in political dynamics in South Sudan doesn't sit easily with its long held policy of non-intervention.

China remains acutely aware of the pitfalls associated with the politics of interventionism, especially in developing nations. It wants developing countries to regard it as a friend in global politics.

But it wouldn't be surprising if China started to apply at least a measure of military (hard) power alongside diplomatic (soft) power if it believes its economic interests are under threat.

African leaders must be realistic about developments such as the Djibouti military base. They can't welcome China's presence – and investments – as an acceptable alternative to America, while opposing Beijing's use of diplomatic – and even military – means to protect its interests.



Israel Tries to Re-Engage Africa

OE Watch Commentary: “Israel is coming back to Africa,” or at least that’s what Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel’s Prime Minister, told attendees at the recent Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit. The accompanying article discusses Israel’s efforts to strengthen its relations with the continent and some local reactions to this.

About 50 years ago Israel had thriving relations in many parts of the continent as African nations were eager to receive technical assistance in security, agriculture, health, and education from a country viewed as a model for successful post-colonization development. In return, as the accompanying article relates, Israel was hoping to garner diplomatic support in its troubling relations with its neighboring Arab countries. Thus, the article claims that nothing has changed as Israel’s present push to return to Africa is once again to garner support for its diplomatic policies and many in Africa are once again looking forward to the technological solutions to some of their problems Israel has to offer.

What happened that caused Israel to leave Africa? The article claims that it was Israeli success in the Six Day War in which it captured great swaths of Arab land. By 1972, Arab pressure and fears of African disunity persuaded many African nations to sever ties with Israel. Israel’s “Africa adventure,” as described by then Foreign Minister Golda Meir, was over by late 1973.

Israel’s attempted return to Africa is not being met by jubilant calls in all parts of the continent. Nigeria, Benin, Niger, and Morocco all chose not to attend the ECOWAS summit. Morocco’s King Mohammed VI explicitly noted that the reason was Netanyahu’s attendance; the others provided no explanation. Israel has even had difficulties with Senegal, a country whose president, Macky Sall, met with Netanyahu in New York, which led to the latter declaring afterwards that the two nations had “great relations.” Three months later Senegal was a co-sponsor of a UN Security Resolution declaring certain Israeli settlements illegal. Israel cut its aid programs to Senegal and also Angola, which had voted in favor of the resolution, and recalled its ambassador from Senegal. Relations between Israel and Senegal were repaired when Netanyahu and Sall met again at the ECOWAS summit, but it is still uncertain whether or not Senegal will adopt a more pro-Israel stance.

There have been other disputes with African countries, including at international forums. Thus, while Israel has made some progress, there is still a great deal of resistance to its present charm offensive. Indeed, as the author states, even some of the countries perceived as being more amenable to better relations with Israel might not readily embrace diplomatic support for it as they balance regional commitments to other countries that have a more critical stance towards the Middle East nation. In other words, the support Israel gets in Africa might take different forms in different nations and could frequently be ambivalent or unstable. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is working to establish better relations between Israel and Africa

Source: US State Dept, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_Netanyahu_portrait.jpg, Public Domain

“During his speech in Monrovia, [Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu] declared once again that ‘Israel is coming back to Africa’.”

Source: Yotam Gidron, “Call it a comeback: Israel’s grand ‘return’ to Africa,” *African Arguments*, 2 August 2017. <http://africanarguments.org/2017/08/03/call-it-a-comeback-israels-grand-return-to-africa/>

This June, Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu broke new ground as he became the first non-African leader to speak at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit. During his speech in Monrovia, he declared once again that “Israel is coming back to Africa.”

Israel is making considerable efforts to strengthen its relations with the continent. A year ago, Netanyahu became the first Israeli PM to visit Africa in decades as he travelled to Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and Ethiopia. Since 2016, at least nine African heads of state have visited Israel.

Netanyahu’s vow that Israel is “coming back” to Africa is a reference to the thriving relations of the 1960s...

Israel’s engagement was largely driven by the need to gain support at the UN and curb Arab influence.

Israel is also clearly focusing on East and West Africa in its efforts. In southern Africa, where memories of apartheid and Israel’s support for it are fresher, the country is still less welcome. The same is true in North Africa.



Al-Shabaab's Defiant Reply to Amnesty Offer

OE Watch Commentary: No one expected Somalia's offer of amnesty to al-Shabaab fighters to bring an end to the ongoing conflict in that country, but the hope was that more of the fighters would accept it than ultimately did. To be sure, there were some who decided to leave the terrorist group – approximately 50 at last count – including a few senior leaders. However, as the accompanying article relates, such efforts, while weakening al-Shabaab, are not enough to defeat the organization since the core leadership's vision of Somalia does not include the federal government.

That government is presently led by Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, known as Farmajo. As President of Somalia he was the one who announced the amnesty in April of this year, with a promise to eradicate those who did not accept the offer within two years. Some speculated that with Farmajo, reportedly incorruptible and less clan-inclined, there was a genuine chance for engagement with al-Shabaab. However, al-Shabaab leaders quickly squashed that idea, declaring that the amnesty offer was really made for western consumption.

Since Farmajo's inauguration, al-Shabaab has stepped up its attacks in Mogadishu, letting the country know how it feels about the new president. These bloody incidents are especially unnerving as the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) has already handed over security of the capital to Somali forces and has plans for a large countrywide drawdown to begin in October 2018 and be completed by 2020. Al-Shabaab's continued strength has some worried that such a move by AMISOM may be premature, and that Somali military forces may not be fully prepared to deal with the terrorist organization by then.

Besides launching large-scale attacks, al-Shabaab has also been targeting the 14,000 individuals delegated by their clans to vote in the 2016-2017 elections. These assassinations could serve to intimidate the population at large for the 2020-2021 elections when universal adult suffrage will be in effect. And al-Shabaab is not limiting its attempts to impact political processes to just Somalia. Its violent activity in the northern part of Kenya, where it has an operational sanctuary in the Boni Forest, is meant to persuade Kenya to reduce its military presence in Somalia.

As the accompanying article states, with AMISOM withdrawing its forces over the next few years, al-Shabaab does not need to be stronger than its enemies, it just needs to be strong enough to survive. If it does, its presence will continue to be a problem not only for Somalia but the entire region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“With the presumed expiration of that amnesty, it is clear which path most of al-Shabaab has chosen, but what is less clear is the Somali government's ability to respond.”



Somali National Army soldiers, such as the ones shown here on a technical, will assume greater responsibility for protecting the country from attacks by al-Shabaab as AMISOM withdraws

Source: AMISOM, (Flickr) <https://goo.gl/g7IHFP>, Public Domain

Source: Omar S. Mahmood, “Al-Shabaab holds its ground against Somalia's amnesty deal,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 4 August 2017. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/al-shabaab-holds-its-ground-against-somalias-amnesty-deal>

In early April, Farmajo announced a 60-day amnesty for al-Shabaab militants, while also offering to open discussions with the movement's leadership.

At the same time, he noted that Somalia was in a state of war, and promised to eradicate within two years those who didn't take advantage of his offer to surrender. With the presumed expiration of that amnesty, it is clear which path most of al-Shabaab has chosen, but what is less clear is the Somali government's ability to respond.

The biggest question is whether Farmajo will be able to implement the stick of his approach, and militarily defeat the group within two years. It is too early to judge – but al-Shabaab has demonstrated it is up to the task.

The violence, combined with messaging directed towards Kenya, is an attempt to influence the nation's political process (in favour of a government that would reduce its military presence in Somalia). This indicates how al-Shabaab can strategically employ its violence to shape larger events.



Mali's Dilemma over Dialogue with Insurgents

OE Watch Commentary: Amadou Kufa is the leader of a group in Mali called the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) or the Macina Brigade (Katiba Macina), which is part of a coalition of militant groups that make up al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The group claims a desire to revive a Fulani Islamic emirate in Mali. Although al-Qaeda groups rarely negotiate, the excerpted French-language article from *Le Monde* discusses a recent development in which Kufa offered his terms for a ceasefire with the government of Mali.

According to the article, Kufa sent two emissaries to Bamako, Mali's capital, to pass a message to a professor in the city who used to be in government. The terms Kufa demanded for a ceasefire were an end to French operations in Mali and the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). He also demanded that the professor who received his message act as mediator. Kufa's support comes from his perceived support of ethnic Fulanis in Mali and the protection he offers to Fulani pastoralists.

The article states that the Malian position on negotiations is unclear. Officially the government indicated at a national conference that it was open to talks and that negotiations were necessary given that it was unable to militarily defeat the insurgents. There is hope that negotiations could achieve success because the group that oversees FLM under the AQIM umbrella is Ansar Dine, whose leader, Iyad Ag Ghaly, was a Malian diplomat before becoming a Salafi-jihadi and joining al-Qaeda. The government, however, has also reiterated that it does not negotiate with terrorists, which it labels both the FLM and Ansar Dine. The condition the government has stipulated, according to the article, is that Kufa or Ag Ghaly must identify as Malians.

There are, however, other prominent institutions in Mali that have influence over whether negotiations can take place. The head of the Malian Islamic High Council, for example, supports negotiations with Ansar Dine and the FLM. On the other hand, as the article notes, France and the international community's opposition to negotiations would likely make Mali hesitate before engaging with Ansar Dine or the FLM. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“On the principle of direct discussions with jihadist groups, the position of the Malian authorities remains unclear.”



Ansar Dine Rebels

Source: Anne Look, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ansar_Dine_Rebels_-_VOA.jpg, (Public domain)

Source: “Au Mali, le djihadiste Amadou Koufa pose trois conditions pour négocier avec le pouvoir (In Mali, the jihadist Amadou Koufa Poses Three Conditions to Negotiate with the Government),” *Lemonde.fr*, 25 July 2017. http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/07/25/au-mali-le-djihadiste-amadou-koufa-pose-trois-conditions-pour-negocier-avec-le-pouvoir_5164770_3212.html

At the end of May, two emissaries of Amadou Kufa, the founder of the Malian jihadist movement Macina Liberation Front (FLM), traveled to Bamako to bring a message to Professor Alioune Nouhoum Diallo. Amadou Kufa, a Fulani preacher active in the Mopti region and a leading figure in a movement that has claimed since 2015 a number of deadly attacks, poses as the first condition for any negotiation with the government the cessation of Operation Barkhane. Launched in August 2014, the French force's mission is to combat terrorism in the Sahelo-Saharan region, which extends from Mauritania to Chad via Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The second condition laid down by the founder of the MLF is the departure of the United Nations Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Finally, the third condition to any negotiation is in the first phase of the talks in Bamako to have as the mediator Professor Alioune Nouhoum Diallo.

According to a reliable source, Amadou Koufa organized this year in the Macina region the crossing of the Niger River of Fulani herders. There were no Malian authorities or security forces. Amadou Kufa supervised the passage of animals in three parts of the Niger River and everything went very well.

On the principle of direct discussions with jihadist groups, the position of the Malian authorities remains unclear. For the moment, [Malian] President Keita and his government are reluctant to take the plunge. They may be afraid of placing themselves in an uncomfortable position vis-à-vis the international community, particularly France.



FARC-EP Changes Its Name... to FARC-EP

OE Watch Commentary: The FARC-EP, which abbreviates *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia -- Ejército del Pueblo* (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces -- Army of the People), usually shortened to just FARC, has indicated it will change its name as it transitions (ostensibly) into peaceable political pursuits and electoral politics. Now we have the first credible information as to what its new name will be. Reportedly, it will be called the FARC-EP, *Frente Amplio de Reconciliación de Colombia - Esperanza del Pueblo* (Broad Front of Colombian Reconciliation -- Hope of the People). This researcher and many analysts and journalists here and abroad hope that this report pans out as valid. It will save thousands of us from having to repeatedly write “New Name Such-and-Such, formerly known as the FARC.” In any case, the name-change does not seem to indicate anything substantive about the organization’s goals, leadership structure, or organizational ethics. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Source: By MrPenguin20 via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_FARC-EP.svg, CC BY SA 3.0

Source: “El nuevo nombre de las FARC (The new name of the FARC),” *Caracol Radio*, 27 July 2017. http://caracol.com.co/programa/2017/07/27/6am_hoy_por_hoy/1501160016_991561.html

“Caracol Radio scooped the news of the name that the group will take upon leaving its weapons behind and taking the path [to peace]. The Armed Forces of Colombia -- Army of the People, that turned in its weapons and are in transit towards civilian life, leave behind that name of more than fifty years and from now on will call themselves the Broad Front of Colombian Reconciliation -- Hope of the People.”

The Colombian Military’s Changing Priorities

OE Watch Commentary: The Colombian military is looking to the future and preparing for its role in post-conflict Colombia, now that some of the country’s internal threats have been addressed. Given the decreased violence associated with drug trafficking activity and the peace deal with the FARC, the military is now looking outside Colombia. The accompanying passages from Colombian sources discuss some of the changing priorities of the Colombian military.

The Colombian Air Force (FAC per its Spanish acronym), in particular, has many new plans. As the first accompanying passage discusses, the FAC is looking to launch a new military satellite before the end of 2017 in addition to developing new aeronautical science and technology projects. It is also planning to participate in international military coalitions and in capacity building of partner nation militaries.

The FAC has already begun their efforts related to capacity building of partner nations. In June 2017, the FAC offered training for the Guatemalan Air Force which focused on combating illicit trafficking; something that the FAC is well-versed in, given their extensive experience in counternarcotics operations. Also in the realm of building partner nation capacities, Colombia has intensified its efforts to share its experiences with countries in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean that are impacted by the effects of transnational organized crime. Over the last two decades, the FAC has received extensive training on how to use air assets to counter illegal activity. Now, they have an opportunity to share their experiences with partner nations.

As the second passage discusses, the most important challenge that the FAC faces in the post-conflict era is “redefining the roles, functions and mission of the armed forces and the police in a complex multi-criminality context.” For example, the war on drugs will gradually be transferred back to the National Police. The military has played a critical role in controlling internal conflicts for an extended time and their removal from this status must be gradual so that the National Police can assimilate to their new and expanded duties. Although there is no set time frame for when military components will separate their duties from the National Police, it is a priority in the post-conflict era. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “Fuerza Aérea lanzará su satélite en 2017 (Colombian Air Force Will Launch Its Satellite in 2017),” *El Colombiano*, 03 May 2017. <http://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/fuerza-aerea-lanzara-su-satelite-en-2017-DX4909162>

During a one-on-one interview with reporter Ricardo Gaviria, Colombian Air Force General Carlos Eduardo Bueno talks about new plans for the institution, led by him. Among other things, Gen. Bueno says that the FAC has plans to launch a military satellite before year’s end. He also discussed how science and technology will play a bigger role in the future of the country’s Air Force. Finally, he indicated that with a stronger dollar in comparison to their peso, the Colombians will replace their Kfir aircraft.

Source: “La necesaria transformación de las FFAA (Necessary Changes for Transformation of the Colombian Armed Forces),” *Confidencial Colombia*, 23 May 2017. [http://confidencialcolombia.com/es/1/lo_mas_confidencial/31148/La-necesaria-transformaci%C3%B3n-de-las-FFAA-\(Parte-1\)-Jaime-Polanco-Fuerzas-Militares-Farc.htm](http://confidencialcolombia.com/es/1/lo_mas_confidencial/31148/La-necesaria-transformaci%C3%B3n-de-las-FFAA-(Parte-1)-Jaime-Polanco-Fuerzas-Militares-Farc.htm)

The article enumerates challenges the Colombian Armed Forces face in the post-conflict era but one of the most pertinent has been highlighted as redefining the roles, the functions and the mission of the armed forces and the police in a complex multi-criminality context.



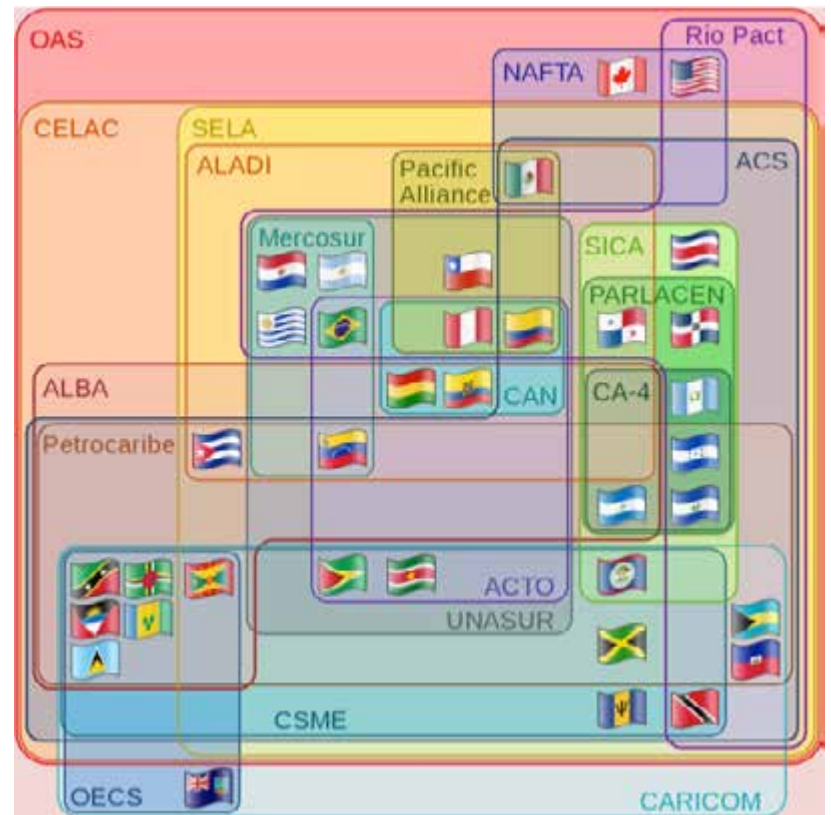
A Meeting in Lima, an Americas Ledger

OE Watch Commentary: A sideline event related to the news coming out of Venezuela gives us useful insight into the real ledger of competitors, that is, who stands for and against what in the hemisphere. The Peruvian government invited a group of foreign ministers to a meeting in Lima to consider the situation in Venezuela. At the meeting, the attendees unanimously reprimanded the Maduro regime, defined it as a dictatorship and took some first steps to show solidarity to the Venezuelan National Assembly that Maduro recently ousted. We will have to wait to see if there is anything to the attendees' claims that what they did was anything more than gesture.

The second accompanying source discusses a parallel meeting to the one in Peru, organized by Maduro in Caracas, in which the attendees "closed ranks in favor of the Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro." This highlights for us the underlying problem: many governments in the region support the Maduro regime -- governments of countries controlled by Marxist-inspired political parties. The core group is formed of Cuba (Communist Party of Cuba), Bolivia (Movement Toward Socialism), Ecuador (PAIS Alliance) and Nicaragua (Sandinista National Liberation Front). Venezuela's ruling party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV, hardly stands isolated. The Marxist parties continue to enjoy the backing of numerous extra-regional governments and political parties as well.

As the third accompanying source indicates, the region's non-Marxist governments were indeed unable to assert the necessary support in the Organization of American States (OAS) to effectively condemn Venezuela. Whether the meeting in Peru was or was not in accordance with international law is beside the point. The ledger of competitors is best sorted by political parties and right now, pro-Bolivarian parties have enough strength to paralyze the OAS and its supposedly potent application of the *Carta Democrática* (a finding by the OAS that democratic order within a country had been ruptured such that it constituted an insurmountable obstacle to OAS participation by the government that perpetrated the rupture). Imposition of said Carta would in any case do nothing to reduce support that the PSUV enjoys from affiliated parties like the Communist Party of Cuba. Statements that the regime in Venezuela is a dictatorship or that Venezuela is a failed state may have some future utility for justifying physical action. In the meantime, the sides of the contest are at least clarifying themselves.

The accompanying diagram is from Wikipedia. Note the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) countries in the middle. Therein resides the core of support for totalitarian control of Venezuela. A general list of parties forming the greater constellation of regional support for the ALBA regimes can be discovered as the membership of the Forum of Sao Paulo. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Euler diagram showing the relationships between various multinational organisations in the Americas

Source: Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Template:Supranational_American_Bodies, CC BY SA 3.0

Source: "17 países cierran filas contra la dictadura de Nicolás Maduro (17 countries close ranks against the dictatorship of Nicolás Maduro)," *La Republica*, 9 August 2017. <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:jfr8srXWDNsJ:larepublica.pe/politica/1071646-17-paises-cierran-filas-contr-la-dictadura-de-nicolas-maduro+&cd=6&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

Videgaray [Mexican foreign minister] asserted that, 'beyond simple reflective posturing', the countries will recognize legal actions such as the signing of contracts or financial agreements with Venezuela only if approved by the National Assembly.... This [the meeting and its results] is no small thing considering that previously the countries of CARICOM [Caribbean Community] voted against the application of the Carta Democrática in Venezuela."

Source: Editors, "Países del Alba cierran filas para defender a Maduro y su Asamblea Constituyente (ALBA countries close ranks to defend Maduro and his Constituent Assembly)," *El Comercio*, 9 August 2017. <https://elcomercio.pe/amp/mundo/latinoamerica/paises-alba-cierran-filas-defender-maduro-asamblea-constituyente-noticia-448591>

"Parallel to the meeting of foreign ministers that was carried out in Peru, the President of Venezuela called a meeting of representatives of the Bolivarian Alliance in Caracas...they closed ranks in favor of the Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro to reject international sanctions against the National Constituent Assembly (ANC)..."

Source: Fabiola Velásquez, "Saúl Ortega: Reunión de cancilleres en Lima es violatorio del derecho internacional (Saúl Ortega: Meeting of foreign ministers in Lima is violative of international law)," *Ciudad MCY*, 10 August 2017. <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:xGCUi9hvFg8J:ciudadmcy.info.ve/%3Fp%3D7020+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

"The document signed in Lima is a failure. It follows an illegality that they promoted from the OAS. They met there [in Lima] because they could not apply the Carta Democrática against Venezuela."



Venezuela's Internal Crisis

OE Watch Commentary: The United Socialist party of Venezuela (PSUV), has been consolidating and deepening its control over the Venezuelan population. The previous article in this issue considers the external support that the PSUV enjoys from other Marxist and Marxist-inclined parties in the region and beyond. The overall analytical proposition of that article (that the region is more usefully sorted according to political party than according to country or nation) applies in turn to Venezuela's internal crisis.

From the first accompanying source, we note that the Vente Venezuela party, led by María Corina Machado, is separating itself from the other parties of the heterogeneous opposition coalition known as the Table of Democratic Unity (MUD). That party is refusing to participate in upcoming regional elections that have been announced by the newly-imposed National Constituent Assembly (ANC) and which will be controlled by the PSUV.

The second accompanying source is sufficient explanation as to why. Diosdado Cabello, a PSUV leader and leader of the ANC, is demanding a show of capitulation and subordination from any parties wishing to participate. In the same article he asserts that the ANC is absolutely sovereign and may continue in power for six years. While Vente Venezuela asserts itself as committed to opposing the PSUV dictatorship, other parts of the MUD coalition, notably the socialist Democratic Action party headed by the aging Henry Ramos Allup, has apparently decided for the compromise participation under the leadership of the PSUV. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: "Maria Corina se deslinda de los traidores de la MUD que quieren ir a elecciones regionales (Maria Corina sets herself apart from the traitors of the MUD who want to go to [participate in] the regional elections)," *DolarToday and Noticiero Digital*, 11 August 2017. <https://dolarToday.com/maria-corina-se-deslinda-de-los-traidores-de-la-mud-que-quieren-ir-elecciones-regionales/>

[Opposition leader María Corina Machado:] "To go to regional [elections] the way they are set up now is to legitimate a CNE [National Elections Council] that the entire world recognizes as complicit in the greatest fraud in this hemisphere, to go to elections is to accept that we lost the struggle in the street, and that is not true," she warned.

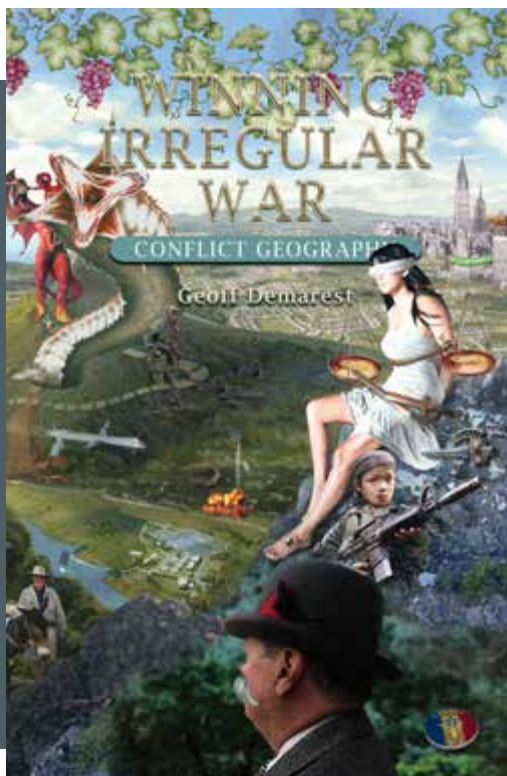


"...to go to elections is to accept that we lost..."



Source: "Cabello: Candidatos a las regionales deberán tener carta de buena conducta (Candidates for the Regionals Must Have a Letter of Good Conduct)," *El Nacional Web*, 9 August 2017. http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/gobierno/cabello-candidatos-las-regionales-deberan-tener-carta-buena-conducta_198012

"Diosdado Cabello, member of the fraudulent National Constituent Assembly (ANC), expressed that ... the regional elections candidates would have to present a good conduct letter extended to them by the constituent assemblymen. Cabello warned that they had better read all the regulations that the ANC approved and know the rules of the democratic game."



Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest raises new and overlooked concepts related to modern conflict in a provocative manner designed to stir up debate and critical thinking. As Geoff Demarest puts it: "I hope that some of the ideas in it will be contagious."

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195392/download>



Haiti Peacekeeping Mission to End in October

OE Watch Commentary:

The United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) will cease operations in October 2017. However, given Haiti's fragile state, the withdrawal of MINUSTAH troops is hardly welcome in the region, with several countries already having expressed their concerns with the plan. The accompanying passages from Latin American sources discuss regional concerns regarding this withdrawal.

The mission had been established in June 2004 by a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution, after then-President Bertrand Aristide left Haiti for exile following an armed conflict which spread to several cities across the country. In January 2010, after Haiti was devastated by a powerful earthquake, the UNSC decided to increase the overall force levels of MINUSTAH to support the immediate recovery, reconstruction and stability efforts in the country. Since the completion of presidential elections in 2011, MINUSTAH has been working to fulfill its original mandate to restore a secure and stable environment, to promote the political process, to strengthen Haiti's government institutions and rule-of-law-structures, as well as to promote and protect human rights.

Haiti is still viewed as very fragile when it comes to its democratic institutions. As the first excerpt notes, it is ranked the most corrupt country in Latin America (tied with Venezuela) by Transparency International, an international anti-corruption organization. For these reasons alone, the withdrawal of MINUSTAH troops is creating concern. The Dominican Republic in particular is worried about a possible mass migration of Haitian nationals into the country, as border control was one of the many roles performed by MINUSTAH troops. In an attempt to mitigate concerns, the Dominican Republic is already planning to increase troop presence along the countries' shared border. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



One of the bases of the Minustah in Cap-Haitien, with Nepali forces

Source: By Rémi Kaupp (Self-photographed), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:File%3AMinustah_in_Cap-Haitien.jpg, [GFDL (<http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>), CC-BY-SA-3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>) or CC BY-SA 2.5-2.0-1.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5-2.0-1.0/>)] via Wikimedia Commons

“... the end of MINUSTAH might cause a surge in Haitians trying to migrate to the Dominican Republic.”

Source: “Venezuela y Haití son los países más corruptos de América Latina (Venezuela and Haiti Are the Most Corrupt Countries in Latin America),” *Univision y Agencias*, 07 January 2017. <http://www.univision.com/noticias/corrupcion/venezuela-y-haiti-son-los-paises-mas-corruptos-de-america-latina>

In Latin America, the countries ranked at the bottom of the list put together by Transparency International – a global civil society organization leading the fight against corruption – are Haiti and Venezuela, both tied at 158 points. The index is formulated on opinions of corruption experts in the public sector based on a number of factors. An example is if public authorities are held responsible for their acts or punished if caught in corruption scandals.

Source: “El Ejército reforzará la frontera con Haití por salida MINUSTAH (Dominican Army Will Send More Troops to the Border with Haiti After MINUSTAH Leaves),” *Metro República Dominicana*, 02 May 2017. <https://www.metrord.do/do/noticias/2017/05/02/ejercito-reforzara-frontera-haiti-salida-minustah.html>

The Dominican Republic Ministry of Defense announced the deployment of 1,000 troops to border areas between the country and Haiti anticipating that the end of MINUSTAH might cause a surge in Haitians trying to migrate to the Dominican Republic. Dominican Defense Minister Rubén Darío said that this mobilization will be a combined operation with a Border Security Special Unit (CESFRONT, per its Spanish acronym).



Honduras: Gang Leaders “Clone” Themselves to Avoid Maximum Security Prison

OE Watch Commentary: In early 2017, Honduran authorities began transferring high-level MS-13 and Barrio 18 gang members from the Tamara prison in Tegucigalpa, Honduras to a maximum security prison recently built outside the capital as part of operation Arpía III. These transfers aimed to establish better control over gang members who were known to freely run their operations from inside prisons. They were also designed to take away luxuries known to few prisoners in Honduras except those with power or money. To date, 773 prisoners classified as “highly dangerous” have been transferred to the new prison. However, during the process, it was discovered that some of the prisoners were able to “clone” themselves, meaning that they used a fellow gang member to take their place in prison.

Within the Tamara prison, gang members operated with impunity and could freely use cell phones. Thus the initial abrupt transfer of important gang leaders led to a lack of communication and a rupture of their structures outside prisons. This in turn led to the emergence of new leaders and new roles on the outside, which in some cases angered incarcerated leaders. As the first accompanying excerpt discusses, incarcerated gang members thus began formulating plans to change their identities and appoint members of their own organizations to take their place in prison before their scheduled transfer.

The escape of dozens of Barrio 18 gang members in early May, just days before their intended transfer, may be linked to this effort. As the second excerpt suggests, authorities claim that this was not a simple escape, but instead, part of the gang members’ plan to clone themselves, with the help of complicit prison guards. Follow-on investigations into cloning within the prison system revealed that at least 17 other inmates were serving sentences for others. Now that this knowledge is public, steps are being taken to better identify prisoners. These include improved intake procedures when initial photos and fingerprints are taken. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “Jefes de pandillas tienen a sus clones en los penales (Gang Leaders Use Clones in Prison),” *La Prensa*, 17 June 2017. http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1077137-410/jefes-pandillas-clones-penales-pandilleros-ms-pandilla_18

The Honduran National Police revealed information which confirms that many MS-13 and Barrio 18 gang leaders changed their identities and appointed members of their organizations to take their place in prison two months before their scheduled transfer. This information is in line with the identification process carried out by the National Penitentiary Institute (INP), in coordination with Forensic Medicine and the National Registry of Persons (RNP), which indicated that they too obtained information that Mara leaders did indeed “clone” themselves to avoid the drastic changes they would have to endure in the new maximum security prison.

Source: “Hasta 4 ‘clones’ tienen reos (Prisoners Have up to 4 Clones),” *La Tribuna*, 5 June 2017. <http://www.latribuna.hn/2017/06/05/4-clones-tienen-reos/>

The escape of dozens of Barrio 18 gang members in early May was only part of the plan the criminals came up with following the announcement they would be transferred to maximum security prisons. As one detective pointed out, “It was not an escape, it was a well-orchestrated plan implemented by Barrio 18 gang members in which they decided to pay high amounts of money to key individuals within the prison system so that they leave.” The detective further stated that what happened is not at all uncommon and that some prisoners have up to 4 clones serving their sentence at varying times.

“... some prisoners have up to 4 clones serving their sentence at varying times.”

Source: “La cárcel hondureña donde están presos los pandilleros más peligrosos (The Honduran Prison Where the Most Dangerous Gang Members will be Incarcerated),” *Prensa Libre*. 6 October 2016. <http://www.prensalibre.com/internacional/la-carcel-hondurea-donde-estan-presos-los-pandilleros-mas-peligrosos>

Honduran prisons are known for their abysmal conditions, but for high-ranking gang members who possess the economic means to bribe guards, many are able to live in the same or even better conditions than outside of prison. For example, La Prensa news source reported that following the transfer of some high ranking gang members, it became public knowledge that some were allowed to play video games on 52-inch TVs, bring in their own furniture, and even install air-conditioning units, amongst other luxuries.



Engineer-Enhanced Cocaine Production in Honduras

OE Watch Commentary: Are certain climates or locations better than others for growing crops? Yes, but certain key factors needed to grow specific crops can be mimicked to make an area previously deemed as unfavorable more favorable. The accompanying passages from Latin American sources discuss engineer-enhanced cocaine production in Honduras, which has significant implications for drug-cartel routes and schemes.

As the first excerpt discusses, in late April 2017, authorities discovered the first ever coca plantation in the Olancho Department of Honduras. From this location, drug traffickers were growing more than 10,000 cocaine plants and 1,200 seedlings. More surprising still were indications that the plantation had likely been operational since 2014. The second excerpt points out that initial findings by authorities revealed that the land used to create the plantation was scouted out by Colombian crop engineers around that time. Once successful with coca plants, the Colombians then proceeded to start growing additional plants. As the third passage notes, Colombian drug cartels will likely try to continue to produce in Honduras because they can lower costs and further enhance their operational structures. The piece also points out that this change “should put countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador on alert because route changes may occur due to new production schemes.”

Indigenous cocaine is prevalent in the jungle region of the Andean ridge in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. This is because cocaine plants require hot, damp, and humid climates as well as iron-rich clay soil to thrive; all of which is readily offered by the rainforest environment unique to the Andean jungle. The Andean jungle is also perfect to dry out leaves as the geography in and around where cocaine grows provides an ideal setting to lay mature leaves along the hillside until they are ready to be carefully packed into sacks and taken to a lab where they are further cultivated into coca paste. These factors make the Andean Ridge the premier location in the world to grow and cultivate cocaine. However, even though this region is ideal for production, it is not logistically ideal for producers whose primary consumers live in the United States or Europe. This is why Colombian cartels are looking to produce in areas such as Honduras. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“... the first cocaine plantation in Honduras shows that drug cartels are looking for new areas to develop.”

Source: “Honduras: Incautan plantación clandestina de coca en Esquipulas del Norte (Clandestine Coca Plantation Seized in Esquipulas del Norte, Honduras),” *El Heraldo*, 27 April 2017. <https://goo.gl/KTpPzD>

Three months of surveillance and intelligence collection aided Honduran authorities in discovering the country's first ever coca plantation on April 27, 2017. The plantation itself was located on top of a mountain in the Palos Blancos village of Olancho. From this location, drug traffickers were growing more than 10,000 cocaine plants and 1,200 seedlings.

Source: “Hallazgo de plantas de coca pone a Honduras en nueva fase del narco (Discovery of Cocaine Plants Marks New Phase of Drug Trafficking in Honduras),” *La Prensa*, 10 June 17. <http://www.laprensa.hn/honduras/1079056-410/plantas-coca-narcotrafico-marihuana-coca%C3%ADna>

Information released by authorities revealed that two Colombian crop engineers entered Honduras and selected different land areas to conduct trial runs to see if coca plants could thrive in any of the selected regions. As part of their assessment, the engineers tested soil and evaluated the effects that elevation and climate would have on the plants. Given the experiment was successful in Olancho, they stayed in the country and started a full-grown coca plantation there.

Source: “Honduras descubre plantación de coca (Cocaine Plantation Discovered in Honduras),” *Estrategia y Negocios*, 07 June 2017. <http://www.estrategiaynegocios.net/centroamericaymundo/1078918-330/honduras-descubre-plantaci%C3%B3n-de-coca>

Army intelligence agents believe that the discovery of the first cocaine plantation in Honduras shows that drug cartels are looking for new areas to develop. It also shows how they are re-thinking their operational schemes and innovating to reduce transportation costs. Analysts also indicated that this change should put countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador on alert because route changes may occur due to new production schemes.



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Is Thailand on the Verge of a Disruptive Power Struggle?

OE Watch Commentary: King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who acceded to the throne in Thailand in December 2016, two months after his father's death, is making some noteworthy changes to the law. He is granting himself greater powers and taking control of certain agencies, which has the military junta concerned. His father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej had taken a back seat and allowed the junta to have total control over the country, while still being able to wield influence and power. According to the accompanying article, there is a growing divide between the new king and the ruling junta, which is causing tension. The article raises the question of whether growing friction between King Maha Vajiralongkorn and the ruling junta may create a “disruptive and debilitating power struggle” within the country. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: John Pennington, “King Maha Vajiralongkorn Expands His Territory – But at What Cost?” *ASEAN Today*, August 2017. <http://www.aseantoday.com/2017/08/king-maha-expands-his-territory-but-at-what-cost>

Since acceding to the throne in December, King Maha Vajiralongkorn has taken a number of steps to increase his decision-making influence and consolidate his power. Unlike his father, he is not simply going to take a back seat and allow the junta to have total control. The junta risks losing influence and decision-making ability. But it is obliged to obey the king's orders thanks to protocol obligations and King Maha Vajiralongkorn's military background.

Soon after he began ruling, he demanded changes to the constitution. King Maha Vajiralongkorn now has power over naming a regent and the option to intervene in case of political deadlock. The amendment affords him independence and political influence. It also creates more instability.

For decades, the monarchy and military have worked closely together. But differences between the junta and the king are growing. King Maha Vajiralongkorn is keen for reconciliation between opposing political camps whereas Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has little appetite for it. Prayuth is also averse to King Maha Vajiralongkorn's allegedly close links with Thaksin Shinawatra.

“For decades, the monarchy and military have worked closely together. But differences between the junta and the king are growing.”

The Thai Junta's Struggle for Legitimacy: At What Cost?

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article argues that the Thai military junta is trying to gain legitimacy by boosting the country's slow economic growth. It is doing this by strengthening its bond to China, which the article warns could harm the smaller Asian country. Along with invoking Section 44, a controversial constitutional provision that will allow the military to pass any measure “for the sake of the reforms in any field...” the government has been speeding up the approval process of various projects in a controversial manner. For example, they are awarding projects to Chinese firms even “before the Environmental Impact Assessment report is finished.” The article notes that this “unlawful action lacks of good governance for environmental management of the country.” While this likely strengthens Thailand's ties with China, it could hurt the junta's reputation among Thai citizens, making it another source of tension. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Laura Villadiego, “Thailand Chases Chinese Money, But At What Cost?” *South Morning China Post*, 23 July 2017. <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/society/article/2102934/thailand-chases-chinese-money-what-cost>

... “We are the slowest growing economy in Southeast Asia.” The Thai economy grew by only 0.8 per cent in 2014, 2.8 per cent in 2015 and 3.2 per cent in 2016.

“Since the junta came in power, there has not been any protection for the environment. Almost every step they are taking is for GDP [growth],” said Somnuck Jongmeewasin, an academic and a member of Community Rights and Natural Resources Sub-Commission, under the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand.

It's taking longer than expected and the government is trying to reinforce its position by pushing economic growth. “The Thai junta is very worried about legitimacy,” said Paul Chambers, an expert on the Thai military at Naresuan University. “It's important for the junta to show good economic results. If there are results, the Thai people will probably accept the ‘achievement’ [as] legitimacy.”

Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha also invoked Section 44 in May, shortly after the Belt and Road Forum, to speed up the controversial Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), one of the government's main development projects that aims to expand the industrial areas in the eastern provinces of Chonburi, Rayong, and Chachoengsao, which are currently focused in the petrochemical, electronics and automotive sectors. These new industrial zones will include value-added industries such as aviation, robotics, or medical tourism.

The government started to pave the way last year, when they issued several orders to override the existing Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and urban planning laws. “The junta is not complying with what the normal environmental laws require ...This unlawful action lacks of good governance for environmental management of the country,” said the academic Somnuck Jongmeewasin. He said the new laws allow the government to award projects to companies before the Environmental Impact Assessment report is finished, even though the contract cannot be signed before. Nevertheless, this “locks up the project” for a specific contractor, which might sue the government if the project is dropped.

For China, Thailand is a key player in the regional development of their interests in Southeast Asia due to its strategic position in the middle of the region and the good relationships between both countries, explained Sakkarin Niyomsilpa, a demographic expert at Mahidol University's Institute for Population and Social Research who has researched on the recent migration wave of Chinese in Southeast Asia.

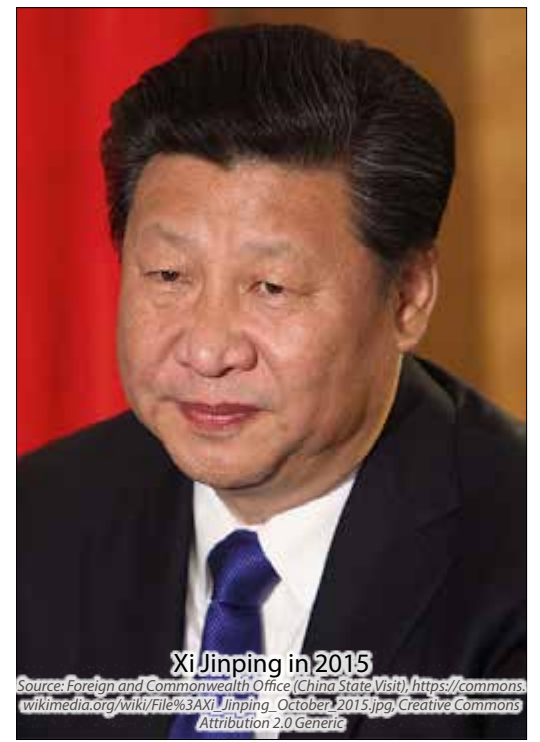


Xi Jinping's Push for a Strong Military

OE Watch Commentary: According to Chinese President Xi Jinping, China needs a strong military more than ever to “defeat all invading enemies” and “safeguard world peace.” The People’s Liberation Army, which celebrated its 90th anniversary on 1 August, is expected to build a “world-class armed force with confidence and capability.”

The accompanying excerpts from a recent speech by Xi offer a glimpse into his calls on army personnel to “build the army with better political awareness, strengthen the army through reform, develop the army with science and technology, and govern the army according to law.” The ultimate push for reform is driven by Xi’s firm desire to achieve the “Chinese dream of national rejuvenation” and to realize China’s “two centenary goals,” which are to build a “moderately well-off” society by 2021, which is the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China; and to become a strong, democratic, harmonious, and modern socialist country by 2049, which is the centenary of the founding the People’s Republic of China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Today, we are closer to the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than any other time in history, and we need to build a strong people’s military more than any other time in history.”



Source: “Xi Calls for Strong Military to Defeat Invading Enemies, Safeguard World Peace,” *Xinhuanet*, 30 July 2017. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/30/c_136485380.htm

President Xi Jinping said Sunday China needs a strong military more than ever, urging building the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into world-class armed forces with confidence and capability to “defeat all invading enemies” and “safeguard world peace.”

“The world is not all at peace, and peace must be safeguarded,” said Xi. “Today, we are closer to the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than any other time in history, and we need to build a strong people’s military more than any other time in history.”

He also called on the officers and soldiers to build the army with better political awareness, strengthen the army through reform, develop the army with science and technology, and govern the army according to law, in order to push for the modernization of national defense and the military in all respects.

Decision-Making Recommendations for China’s PLA

OE Watch Commentary: This article from the daily newspaper of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) stressed three points for PLA commanders. First, it is important to convert information superiority into action superiority, especially by making decisions ahead of time. Action superiority is described the “prerequisite [to] winning a battle.” Second, it is necessary to change the goal of decision-making from optimization to the satisfaction principle, due to the fast changing nature of warfare. Third, “cluster intelligence” is better than one-person decision-making because it raises the “scientific character of decision-making.” As the excerpt below notes, decision-making superiority is the core of operational actions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: “Strive to Establish Decision-Making Superiority in Informatized Joint Operations,” Zhang Wei, *Jiefangjun Bao Online*, 10 August 2017, p. 7.

Beyond all doubt, decision-making is the core of operational actions, and is the central part of a commander’s work. Decision-making superiority is the commanding of a favorable status for one’s decision-making activity versus the enemy’s decision-making activity. This is the key to converting a force’s information superiority into action superiority, and action superiority is the prerequisite of winning a battle. Commanders should accurately grasp the characteristics and regularities of informatized joint operations, and strive to establish their decision-making superiority over their adversaries.

“Cluster Intelligence” Decision-Making

On the opposite side of decision-making based on “cluster intelligence” is the commander’s one-man decision-making, of which, the biggest drawback is that such a one-person decision-making form can hardly prevent mistakes of being subjective, one-sided, arbitrary. In the course of making decisions based on “cluster intelligence”, commanders at multiple levels fully express their opinions in a form of military democracy, and then the opinions are comprehensively analyzed with the optimal being selected to shape the final decision. The greatest advantage is that such a decision-making pattern may prevent major errors caused by individual decision-making.

Moreover, with the smart decision-making support system being embedded in the information system, decision-making will no longer be exclusively done by a commander alone, but will be turned into “man-machine” joint decision-making. This will reduce the time of planning and decision-making, and will also raise the scientific character of decision-making. Therefore, decision-making based on “cluster intelligence” will be better suited to joint operations in the future big data epoch with a multitude of information...commanders will also quicken the change of the decision-making mindset from individual decision-making to collective decision-making.



“New-Type” Training in China’s PLA

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from a recent article in the daily newspaper of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) discusses “new-type” combat forces and their training. “New-type” combat forces, which represent where priorities for the development of military power lie, require “new-type” training assets. In addition to new equipment and technologies, these include new training models, textbooks, and organizations. “New-type” training must capture the capabilities of information power, which is a key factor in winning contemporary warfare. Information power determines the accuracy of operational actions and helps attain battlefield control. “New-type” training will shape combat capabilities and uncover ways to win the strategic initiative. Later this training will enable the PLA to break networks, strike key points, and paralyze whole systems. As the excerpt notes, building operational labs and using “new-type” training methods will establish a realistic simulated battlefield for exercising these developments. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

“By taking this experience of the US military as reference, while enhancing the role of the training grounds as the ‘quasi-battlefield,’ we should also move training forward to the labs as a ‘simulated battlefield.’ We should strengthen the building of operation labs in the new domains for the new forces, implement such technologies as military simulation, information processing, systems integration to develop new operational concepts, create new tactics and countermeasures, and test and validate combat plans and conceptions.”

Source: Shi Ming, “How to Forge the New-Type Combat Forces Into ‘Iron Fist’ Power,” *Jiefangjun Bao Online*, 25 July 2017. p. 7.

New-Type Training on the Simulated Battlefield

The new-type combat forces represent the developmental orientation of combat power. Effectively conducting realistic combat training may play a strong demonstrating and guiding role. The new-type combat forces possess new equipment and new technologies, serve in new battle domains, and implement new operational forms. They take the lead and serve as an engine for accelerating the change of the combat power generation model. The endeavor of exploring the methods and means of generating and enhancing the new-quality combat power through effectively conducting combat-realistic training may facilitate the organic combination of personnel and new-model weaponry, and may also promote the optimization of the combat power structure, enrich the theory on combat training, propel the development of weaponry and equipment, thus playing a guiding and sampling role for the transformation of military training and for the faster building of the new military power system.

By taking this experience of the US military as reference, while enhancing the role of the training grounds as the “quasi-battlefield”, we should also move training forward to the labs as a “simulated battlefield”. We should strengthen the building of operation labs in the new domains for the new forces, implement such technologies as military simulation, information processing, systems integration to develop new operational concepts, create new tactics and countermeasures, test and validate combat plans and conceptions. We should rely on large-scale multipurpose training bases to set up complex battlefield environments, bring the new-type combat forces into the training grounds for being forged and tempered, and close combine experiments, training, and operations.



China’s cyber policy has become partly visible to foreign nations through observation, tracking, and inference. The policy appears to have three vectors. These three aspects—peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner—dominate China’s cyber policy. Some are always hidden from view while others are demonstrated daily. Three Faces of the Cyber Dragon is divided into sections that coincide with these vectors.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195610/download>



Making Sense of China's Caribbean Policy

by Jared Ward

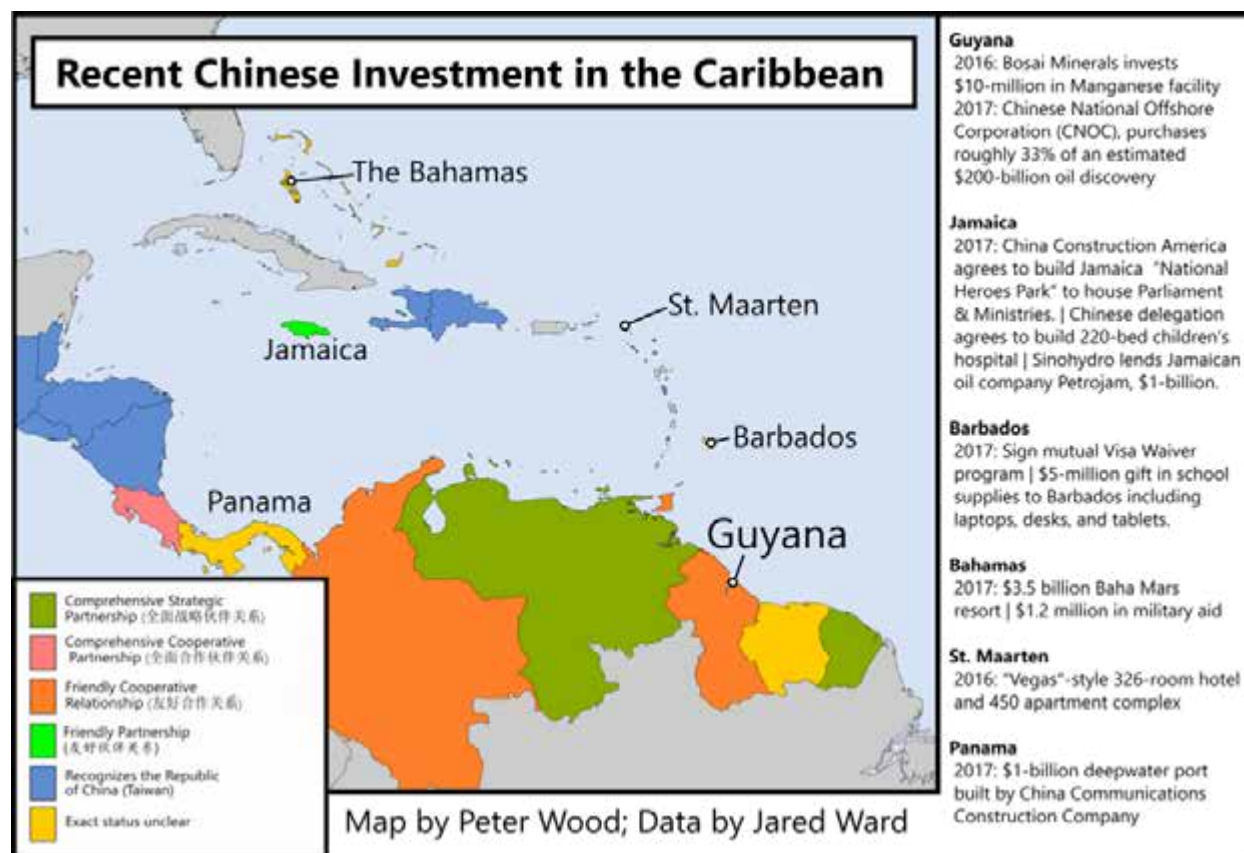
Republished in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, Vol. 17, Issue 10, dated 21 July 2017, Edited for OE Watch. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/making-sense-of-chinas-caribbean-policy/>

OE Watch Commentary: While the world's attention focuses on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) connecting China with Eurasia and Africa, China is also making major investments in the Caribbean. China's short and long-term interests in the region appear to be not only motivated by economics but also aimed at connecting nations in America's backyard to a Maritime Silk Road under Chinese influence. This presents a way for Xi Jinping to position China to challenge America in its own hemisphere. Thus, beyond market access, China's increased presence in Caribbean affairs can be understood as a subtle jab at American Western Hemisphere dominance at a time when Washington is pushing Beijing in the South China Sea.

In September 2016, the China Harbor Engineering Company agreed to build a mega-port in Jamaica that would make the small island-nation a hub for mammoth Chinese ships soon to begin crossing through an expanded Panama Canal. Valued at \$1.5 billion, the port will become China's largest in a region that has become a growing target for Chinese aid and diplomatic overtures. Barbados, a small island in the Lesser Antilles, has received millions from Chinese companies to restore historical landmarks and provide free medical care. In March of this year, a visa waiver program was created, aimed at opening the Caribbean paradise to an untapped market of 20-million Chinese tourists. Chinese funds have restored the Baha Mar luxury resort in the Bahamas. In Guyana, Chinese companies have developed the timber, oil, and gold industries.

The Caribbean has always been unable to offer Beijing the same natural resources or strategic military alliances with countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. However, geopolitically the region provides economic and symbolic incentives for China's investments. Many of China's largest infrastructure projects, like ports in the Bahamas and Jamaica, will be used to accommodate larger volumes of cargo coming from China for transshipment throughout the Western Hemisphere. In the excerpted interview with Cuban newspaper *Granma*, Zhu Qingqao from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs makes it clear that the Caribbean is part of a Maritime Silk Road. Recent developments in Sino-American relations have magnified the importance of border seas and the Caribbean, like the South China Sea, is likely to become a stage for clashing Chinese and American visions of global politics.

Chinese promises of aid to the Caribbean are consistent with a pattern elsewhere in the developing world. Beijing touts its own success as a developing nation; a rags to riches story of a non-Western power rising to global prominence. Caribbean officials generally view China's checkbook diplomacy in a positive light. Generous loan terms and willingness to undertake badly needed infrastructure projects have helped offset drying up funds from Western institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. The influx of capital and projects bring promises of badly needed jobs for locals and training programs to teach transferable skills. However, on the ground, these promises are much more complicated. Chinese aid to the Caribbean is a double-edged sword, with accusations against Chinese companies ranging from flouting local labor laws to providing job and contracts exclusively to Chinese nationals, to an exploitation of natural resources. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ward)**



Source: "Cuba-China relations at all-time high," *Granma*, 2 June 2017. <http://en.granma.cu/mundo/2017-06-02/cuba-china-relations-at-all-time-high>

Zhu [Director General of the department of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs at China's Foreign Ministry] highlighted opportunities for Latin America and the Caribbean to participate in the Silk Road initiative; an inclusive project launched by China but open to the entire world.

We are working on elaborating our development strategies and policies even further, with the aim of generating greater interconnectivity, he stated...

He noted that Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most important destination for Chinese investments abroad, only surpassed by Asia. In 2016, total investment by China in the region exceeded 150 billion dollars, 100 times more than five years ago, and has expanded to new sectors such as automobile and machine production industries, cell phone factories, as well as air conditioner, bus, electronics, as well as battery and solar panel manufacturing.



Indonesia and Neighbors to Coordinate Response to ISIS

OE Watch Commentary: As the violence between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and fighters affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Marawi (Philippines) continues, countries in the region are increasing their counter-terrorism preparedness. As the accompanying article from the Indonesian news source *Merdeka.com* discusses, six regional countries met in Indonesia to plan and coordinate their measures against ISIS in the region.

According to the article, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei agreed to share intelligence on foreign fighters, cooperate with social media and file-sharing companies, understand each others' terrorism laws, cooperate on counter-terrorism financing and on immigration and border surveillance. Also discussed were possible food support to Marawi or providing unmanned aircraft to the Philippines.

An Indonesian official noted the importance of social media. ISIS has been widely advertising photos, videos and threats from the militants in Marawi. As a result, Indonesia views social media as a double-edged sword. While indicating it has its benefits for information-sharing, the official said more monitoring is needed to prevent its exploitation by ISIS. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: "Begini tindak lanjut hasil pertemuan di Manado usir ISIS dari Marawi (Here's the Follow-up of the Meeting in Manado to Banish ISIS from Marawi)," *Merdeka.com*, 31 July 2017. <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/begini-tindak-lanjut-hasil-pertemuan-di-manado-usir-isis-dari-marawi.html>

Indonesia along with five other countries over the weekend held a meeting on the Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Cross Border Terrorism in Manado, North Sulawesi. Together with Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei, [the six countries] agreed on five commitments to expel ISIS from its new headquarters in Marawi, Southern Philippines. There was a working group that may help with food provision, tightening up navy patrols or, later, unmanned aircraft.

Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Wiranto said the monitoring of social media is necessary given the technological developments that are currently taking place. In this regard, cyber teams will be involved because "technology is like a double-edged sword that can provide a positive and negative impact."

The five points of agreement that have been established by the sub-regional countries are: 1. The formation of forums on foreign terrorist fighters in order to strengthen information-sharing and cooperation between law enforcement and intelligence services; 2. Encouragement of cooperation among the six countries and with companies that provide social media, video file sharing and messaging services; 3. Comparative studies of laws related to terrorism that are applicable in each country; 4. Strengthening cooperation between institutions for the prevention of financing of terrorism activities; and 5. Increased cooperation among immigration agencies in the framework of integrated border surveillance

"Technology is like a double-edged sword that can provide a positive and negative impact."



Marawi crisis troops

Source: Philippines Information Agency (Philippines Information Agency), "Marawi crisis troops", https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AMarawi_crisis_troops.jpg, (Public Domain)



Indonesia Steps Up Presence around the South China Sea

OE Watch Commentary: Two recent developments concerning Indonesia's activities in and around the South China Sea point to the country's growing diplomatic and naval presence there. The accompanying passages from Indonesian-language sources discuss these developments and regional reactions to them.

The first article discusses Indonesia's decision to name a body of water bordering the South China Sea, specifically the waters north of the Natuna Islands, as the North Natuna Sea. The articles note that the area contains vast fishing and oil drilling opportunities. Chinese protests of Indonesia's name change were met with a negative reaction from Indonesia's Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries. The Minister asserted that Indonesia had every

right to name its own waters. The Minister is known for blowing up foreign-owned ships that fish in Indonesian waters, which in recent years have included Chinese vessels, and in 2017 for arresting more than 100 fishermen from Vietnam who were fishing in Indonesian waters.

The second article discusses a recent incident in which the Indonesian navy shot and injured several Vietnamese fisherman in the South China Sea waters. According to the Vietnamese government's rescue team, the boat was 132 nautical miles off the coast of Vietnam's Con Dao island, which is near the newly renamed North Natuna Sea. Vietnam asserted that this incident contravened the strategic partnership between Vietnam and Indonesia and called for an investigation. There is no claimed tie between this incident and Indonesia's new naming of the North Natuna Sea, but it shows a trend of Indonesian assertiveness in the North Natuna Sea area both in rhetoric and action. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Scenery at Serasan Harbor, Natuna Islands, Riau Islands Province, Indonesia
Source: a_rabin (Flickr: 10011575), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Scenery_at_Serasan_Harbor%2C_Natuna_Islands%2C_Riau_Islands_Province%2C_Indonesia.jpg, (CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>))

“The Vietnamese government asked the Indonesian government to investigate and clarify reports that the Indonesian Navy has shot and injured several Vietnamese fishermen in the waters of the South China Sea.”

Source: “Menteri Susi Heran China Protes Penamaan Laut Natuna Utara (Minister Susi Surprised that China Protests Name of Natuna Sea),” *Kompas.com*, 18 July 2017. <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/07/18/1Menteri%20Susi%20Heran%20China%20Protes%20Penamaan%20Laut%20Natuna%20Utara>

Disputes over fishing rights and oil drilling have triggered tension in the waters of the South China Sea. The Chinese government claims almost all of these waters. But Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan also have claims over these waters. Although Indonesia is not a party to the dispute, recently the Indonesian government through the Coordinating Ministry of Marine Affairs officially announced the new name of the waters north of the Natuna Islands bordering the South China Sea as the North Natuna Sea.

Source: “Vietnam Minta Indonesia Selidiki Penembakan Nelayannya (Vietnam asks Indonesia to investigate the shooting of its fishermen),” *Detiknews*, 29 July 2017. <https://news.detik.com/internasional/3578653/vietnam-minta-indonesia-selidiki-penembakan-nelayannya>

The Vietnamese government has asked the Indonesian government to investigate and clarify reports that the Indonesian Navy has shot and injured several Vietnamese fishermen in the waters of the South China Sea. A Vietnamese fishing boat was about 132 nautical miles southeast of Con Dao Island, Vietnam when the fishermen on board were shot by the Indonesian Navy. Based on the coordinates given by Vietnamese authorities, the shootings took place near the area that Indonesia now calls the North Natuna Sea.



Georgian Diplomatic Initiatives to Security Issues

OE Watch Commentary: A number of Georgian government officials and security analysts have claimed that the best way to deal with another possible conflict with Russia is to build up and reform the country's armed forces. However, as the accompanying excerpted articles discuss, the government is engaged in diplomatic efforts on a non-use-of-force agreement with Russia. In addition, Georgia has been trying to engage the international community amid reports that the occupied South Ossetia region is gradually expanding.

The first article from the independent Georgian language newspaper *Versia* features an interview with the Georgian Minister of State for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, about issues with South Ossetia. The article mentions how officials are "hearing almost daily that the occupation forces have moved the "border" forward by a certain distance" and that according to Tsikhelashvili, it is "a continuation of the occupation which we have been confronting since 2008." There is nothing mentioned about how much the "border" has moved since 2008, but Tsikhelashvili states that the issue is being brought up in negotiations in Geneva.

The second article, from the English language news website *Civil Georgia*, analyzes the negotiations in Geneva over the non-use-of-force agreement with Russia. The article mentions how the "European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), originally seen as the key component of the international security arrangement to oversee the implementation of the ceasefire and potential subsequent agreements was never allowed access to either Abkhazia or South Ossetia." The article also states that "It might thus be useful for GID (the Geneva International Discussions) to start re-thinking the International Security Arrangements in terms of a revised confidence and security building measure regime, "rightsized" for these conflicts." The articles show that Georgia is looking for another mechanism to resolve not only the non-use-of-force agreement, but the more immediate and impactful occupation problems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: Gochadze, Tatia. "დეოკუპაციის საკითხთან დაკავშირებით პრინციპული და შეურიგებელი პოლიტიკა გვაქვს." რას უპირისპირებს საქართველოს ხერხეულდება რუსეთის მცოცავ ანექსიას (We Have a Principled and Uncompromising Policy on the De-occupation Issue.' How the Georgian Government Is Countering Russia's Creeping Annexation)," *Versia*, 14 July 2017. <https://goo.gl/GX1fCV>

The 79th Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meeting took place in Ergneti a few days ago. Government representatives discussed the incidents that had occurred along the occupation line and in the adjacent areas between 7 June and 10 July. We are hearing almost daily that the occupation forces have moved the "border" forward by a certain distance... They are installing banners, setting up barbed wire fences, and digging trenches...we will try to find out what is actually happening in Samachablo (South Ossetia) and what the government is doing to stop the occupation forces. Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, Minister of State for Reconciliation and Civil Equality, answered Versia's questions.

(Gochadze) Ketevan, what is the government doing to stop the creeping annexation?

(Tsikhelashvili) ...Unfortunately, this is not a new situation but a continuation of the occupation which we have been confronting since 2008. They have been installing artificial barriers along the occupation line as part of the occupation for years now. This process began intensively in 2009 and they also set up barbed wire fences in 2011 and 2013...

(Gochadze) On the other hand, some people believe that the government has achieved nothing through the so-called moderate policy toward Russia and that it needs to be more active, "disturb" the international community, and prompt it to engage in occupation issues.

(Tsikhelashvili) The government is already very active with regard to the international community.

(Gochadze) How is this activeness manifested?

(Tsikhelashvili) It is the number one issue on the agenda in any format and at any meeting...

(Gochadze) It would be interesting to know whether you are discussing these issues with the international community or raising them with the occupation force.

(Tsikhelashvili) For example, (we are discussing them) in the Geneva negotiating format...

Source: Batashvili, David. "Georgia-Russia: Getting Security Right," *Civil.ge*, 19 June 2017. <http://wp1.civil.ge/archives/187539>

This past spring, the observers of largely anemic diplomatic talks in Geneva were excited to hear the reluctant confirmation by the Georgian foreign ministry of the "minor progress" regarding the non-use-of-force (NUF) agreement. This followed on Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's "expectation" that such agreement was becoming "realistic...in the foreseeable future."

The NUF agreement has been the holy grail of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) – a diplomatic gathering to sort out the aftermath of the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia. But even if the abyss between the incompatible diplomatic positions can be breached, NUF would be of no consequence in real security terms...In 2016-2017, additional agreements saw the Abkhaz and South Ossetian military units either absorbed into, or put under Russian command...

The (EUMM), originally seen as the key component of the international security arrangement to oversee the implementation of the ceasefire and potential subsequent agreements was never allowed access to either Abkhazia or South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region...Although the key elements of NUF document have long been identified at GID, Russia insists that it is signed by Georgia on one side and Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the other. Tbilisi refuses, arguing that such a signature would amount to a de facto recognition of the two breakaway regions' independence, and also that Russia, not these entities represent a military threat to its security...

It might thus be useful for GID to start re-thinking the International Security Arrangements in terms of a revised confidence and security building measure regime, "rightsized" for these conflicts. Such an arrangement would aim to increase transparency and predictability of the military deployments and moves, reduce threat perceptions of the regional actors and minimize harm of any potential escalation...



Strengthening Russia's Military in South Ossetia

OE Watch Commentary: According to the Kremlin official line, South Ossetia is an independent state; but in reality Kremlin officials consider it to be a protectorate of Russia, or more precisely, a purloined province of Georgia. Over the past year, there have been rumors that the Kremlin intends to annex South Ossetia via the same referendum model used for Crimea in March 2014. The region declared independence after the brief war against Georgian forces in August 2008, and its sovereignty has only been recognized by Russia and three other states (Venezuela, Nicaragua and Nauru). Regardless of its political status, since 2008, Russia has continued to strengthen its military presence in South Ossetia, and the accompanying excerpt from the popular Russian source, *Izvestiya Online*, portrays the Kremlin's rationale for this significant deployment.

The excerpt points out that Russian military peacekeepers have been in the region for the past 25 years, having helped to quell conflicts in both 1992 and 2008. Indeed, the author asserts that “the events of 2008 and 1992 are associated with a single chain for Ossetians.” The argument goes that during both conflicts, Russian military personnel helped to defend the locals from Georgian aggression and to restore order. The size of the Russian contingent (4th RF Armed Forces Military Base) in the capital city of Tskhinvali has grown significantly since 2008 (approximately 4,000 personnel), and includes “at least several full-fledged motorized rifle battalions,” equipped with heavy armor, artillery, and air defense systems. The Russian military facilities are both modern and extensive, including everything from a new mess hall, satellite communications center, soldiers' dormitories to a kindergarten. Not surprisingly, the Ossetian locals now assert “that the guarantor of peace is 4th RF Armed Forces Military Base.”

The composition of this Russian military base, where “local residents constitute nearly 70 percent of the contract servicemen,” suggests that the Russian military presence has been a boon for the local economy. With the population of South Ossetia estimated at only 50,000, the Russian military base provides significant employment opportunities for both soldiers and civilians. If the modern military facilities in Tskhinvali are any indication, it appears that the Russian military will be stationed in South Ossetia for a long time. **End**

OE Watch Commentary (Finch)



Map showing South Ossetia

Source: Wikimedia.org, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Maps_of_South_Ossetia#/media/File:Caucasus_breakaway_regions_2008.svg CC BY-SA 3.0

Source: Nikolay Surkov, “Дважды миротворцы: В Цхинвале вспоминали, как россияне спасли Южную Осетию (Twice Peacekeepers. Tskhinval Residents Recalled How the Russians Saved South Ossetia),” *Izvestiya Online*, 14 July 2017. <https://iz.ru/619367/nikolai-surkov/dvazhdy-mirotvortcy>

The 25th anniversary of the introduction of the peacekeeping forces, who actually stopped the 1989-1992 war and insured the survival of the young republic, was celebrated On Friday, 14 July, in South Ossetia. But then again, they did this twice – first in 1992 and later in August 2008....

...Russians remember well the August 2008 war. However, the events of 2008 and 1992 are associated with a single chain for Ossetians.

“It is unlikely that the residents of South Ossetia would have remained here without the peacekeepers,” Republic President Anatoliy Bibilov said. In his words, 1992 was no different than 2008. At that time, Georgia also actually conducted the “Open Fields” Operation and only the peacekeepers’ arrival could have prevented this....

...There is no alarm or tension right now in the eyes of the residents of South Ossetia. Tskhinval is being actively built, it lives a normal life and is little distinguished from the cities of Russia’s south, except that there are an unexpectedly large number of traffic lights in the center. The Ossetians themselves say that the guarantor of peace is 4th RF Armed Forces Military Base

The 4th Military Base is three military garrisons and also another dozen outposts. The base itself looks precisely like any other Russian military unit. A parade ground, mess hall, satellite communications center, even rows of light green one- and two-story soldiers’ dormitories (barracks)... Only an orange kindergarten stands out.

...But vehicle parks with tanks, SAUs [self-propelled artillery mounts], BMPs [armored infantry vehicles], BTRs [armored transport vehicles], and multiple rocket launchers are parked behind the barracks. At least several full-fledged motorized rifle battalions.... Only the brand new communications systems catch your eye. ...

...Approximately half of the servicemen on the base are conscripts. But then again, right now they are striving to recruit more contract servicemen. One officer brings 5-6 men from an agitation trip to the military commissariats. The warm climate and relatively low prices attract people. Local residents constitute nearly 70 percent of the contract servicemen....

“...the events of 2008 and 1992 are associated with a single chain for Ossetians.”



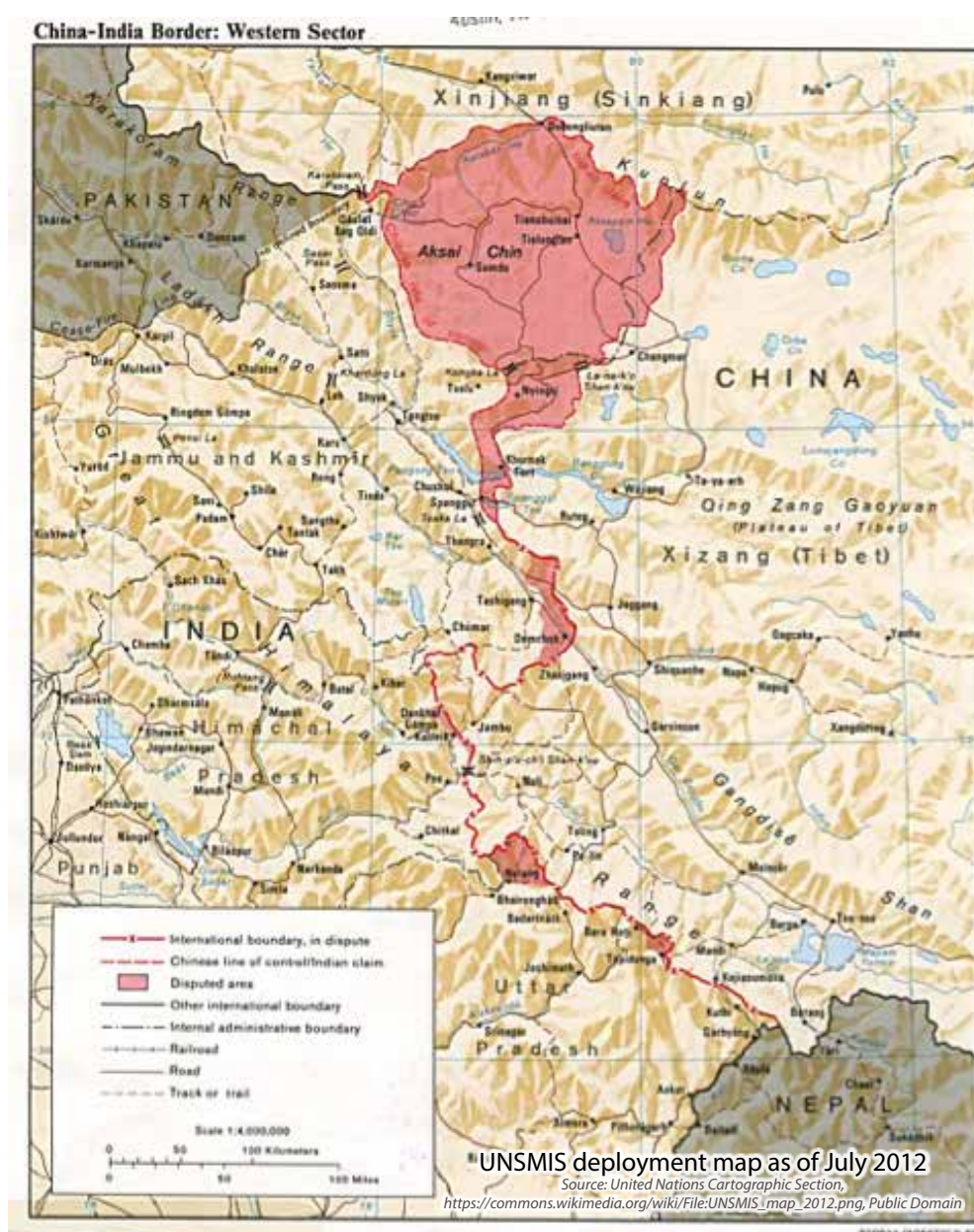
An Indian-Chinese Border Dispute and the SCO

OE Watch Commentary: When India and Pakistan joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on 9 June, questions came up on how the new members would impact the organization's activities of coordinating security efforts when they continue to clash over Kashmir. While many focused on how India and Pakistan could work together in the SCO, the accompanying excerpted articles report on a border dispute between India and China that flared up on 16 June and what impact this could have on the SCO. The dispute, which is taking place on India's border with the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, represents a significant incident between two members of the SCO and will likely serve as an example of how incidents between members are resolved.

The articles come from English language sources in India (the privately owned online news website *Firstpost*) and China (the online version of the government run *Global Times*) and provide some background on the dispute. The first article from *Firstpost* references the 1962 India-China War, which started because of border issues and resulted in China gaining territory. The article includes a quote from a retired Indian general, that "Chinese efforts to push a road-building party near the China-India-Bhutan trijunction is an attempt to get in behind Indian and Bhutanese defenses," and this is worth noting alongside references to the 1962 war. Road construction by China near its border with India contributed to the 1962 conflict and it appears to be one of the factors in the recent standoff.

The second *Firstpost* article reports on a meeting between the Indian and Chinese National Security Advisors noting that they are "the Special Representatives for India-China boundary talks." While it claims that relations haven't deteriorated as much as the media claims, it also warns that "there is always the possibility that things could turn ugly given China... is more powerful and assertive than it was ten or twenty years ago."

The article from China's *Global Times* provides insight into China's perspective. First, it describes the standoff as "Indian troops [having] illegally crossed the border with China in the Doklam area..." It also claims that "India's participation in the SCO will do more harm than good in the short and medium term." It discusses that the most important issue regarding the security of western China is the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and that security cooperation among SCO states "has created a favorable environment for the stability and development of Xinjiang." However, it warns that now India may oppose "China's position on terrorism" in Xinjiang, given that China blocked an Indian bid on a related matter at the UN Security Council in June. This would impact SCO's role in maintaining security in western China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Source: Sujan Dutta. "Sikkim standoff: Doka La incursions betray Chinese intentions of getting behind Indian, Bhutanese defences," *Firstpost*, 5 July 2017. <http://www.firstpost.com/india/sikkim-standoff-doka-la-incursions-betray-chinese-intentions-of-getting-behind-indian-bhutanese-defences-3778973.html>

'Chinese efforts to push a road-building party near the China-India-Bhutan trijunction is an attempt to get in behind Indian and Bhutanese defences'... Lt General Subrata Saha, who retired as the Deputy Chief of Army Staff (DCOAS) earlier this year told Firstpost...The current stand-off began around 16 June when a Chinese road building party entered Doka La. They were first spotted by the Royal Bhutan Army...Both India and China sent in reinforcements. Reports emerging from the area so far indicate to minor scuffles but no major flare-ups in violence have been seen...

... In the year 2006, too, there was a stand-off between Chinese and Indian troops in East Sikkim facing Doka La. Through 2006 and 2007, the Indian Army relocated its 27 Mountain Division to the region from Jammu... Despite the revival of memories of the 1962 war during which the Chinese overran Indian forces, there have been instances of strong Indian fightbacks. At Nathu La in Sikkim in 1967, for instance, and at the Sumdorong Chu in Arunachal Pradesh in 1987 when the then army chief had surprised the Chinese by airlifting an entire brigade of troops to the region...

(continued)



Continued: An Indian-Chinese Border Dispute and the SCO

“While the border stand-off continues, bilateral relations between India and China have not deteriorated as much as it is being described in the national media of both nations.”

Source: “NSA Ajit Doval in Beijing this week: Amid Sikkim stand off, all eyes on BRICS NSA summit which begins on 27 July,” *Firstpost*, 24 July 2017. <http://www.firstpost.com/india/nsa-ajit-doval-in-beijing-this-week-amid-sikkim-stand-off-all-eyes-on-brics-nsa-summit-which-begins-on-27-july-3848787.html>

As the ongoing India-China standoff in the Doka La region in Northeastern part of the country continues for the second month, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is all set to travel to Beijing to attend a BRICS NSA summit on 27 and 28 July...Chinese analysts have welcomed the Doval's meeting with his counterpart Yang Jiechi, claiming that the meeting may help ease prevailing tensions on the border...Both Doval and Yang are also the Special Representatives for India-China boundary talks (and) Chinese officials say Doval and Yang may have informal talks to resolve the standoff in Doklam in the Sikkim sector...

...While the border stand-off continues, bilateral relations between India and China have not deteriorated as much as it is being described in the national media of both nations...However, there is always the possibility that things could turn ugly given China, as a neighbour, is more powerful and assertive than it was ten or twenty years ago...

Source: Xiao Bin. “India's SCO membership threatens West China security,” *Global Times*, 23 July 2017. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1057631.shtml>

Since Indian troops illegally crossed the border with China in the Doklam area, China and India, both of which are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), have been locked in a standoff...India's participation in the SCO will do more harm than good in the short and medium term. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region matters the most to the security of western China. Security cooperation among the SCO states has created a favorable environment for the stability and development of Xinjiang... Due to a lack of evidence provided by India, China blocked India's bid to add Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar to the banned terrorists' list at the 1267 Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council in June. Therefore, the possibility of India opposing China's position on terrorism using the same excuse cannot be ruled out. This will definitely affect the SCO's role of maintaining security in western China...

Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

Since Central Asian states gained independence in 1991, new regional military and security alliances have been created (some of which are Russian-led), new military partnerships with non-NATO countries have been established, a number of joint military exercises have been conducted, over a dozen high-profile incidents of violence and civil unrest have taken place, and military installations have been used by foreign militaries. While this activity gained attention, it has not been collectively compiled. A compilation of this activity can serve as a guide for current and future military and security involvement in Central Asia.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/194880>



Uzbekistan's Post-Karimov Security Cooperation

OE Watch Commentary: Over the last several years Kazakhstan has actively been buying weapons and equipment from a number of international defense companies with a condition that the technology be transferred to Kazakh firms. Now Uzbekistan appears to be following a similar path. The accompanying excerpted article reports on a recent deal between Uzbekistan and Turkey for light armored vehicles that includes a condition to eventually produce them in Uzbekistan.

The article from *Fergana News*, an independent Russian news website with a focus on Central Asia, reports on the agreement for the purchase of the Turkish Ejder 4x4 armored vehicles. It notes that “testing of the armored vehicles in the conditions of Uzbekistan took place in June 2017.” This is worth noting alongside reports of increased security cooperation between Uzbekistan and Russia earlier this year, including upcoming joint military exercises. The article also mentions how the Turkish Minister of Defense “Nurettin Canikli discussed the prospects for military and military-technical cooperation between the two countries with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.” Following the death of President Karimov in 2016, there had been questions about what, if any changes President Mirziyoyev would carry out, particularly in regards to foreign policy and security cooperation. If the recent agreement is any indication, Mirziyoyev is pursuing deeper security partnerships than his predecessor and could be prepared to spend more money in the defense sector. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Now the parties are discussing the creation of a joint venture to produce such cars in Uzbekistan with the involvement of Turkish investments.”

Source: “Ўзбекистан хочет закупить в Турции десять бронемашин и наладить у себя их производство (Uzbekistan wants to purchase ten armored vehicles in Turkey and establish its own production of them),” *Fergana News*, 27 July 2017. <http://www.fergananews.com/news/26679>

Uzbekistan intends to purchase ten lightly armored cars of the Turkish company Nurol type Ejder 4x4, Uzdaily.Uz reports with reference to the press service of the Uzbek Defense Ministry. This became known during the meeting of Uzbek Defense Minister Kabul Berdiyev with his Turkish counterpart Nurettin Canikli, who arrived in Tashkent on an official visit. Testing of the armored vehicles in the conditions of Uzbekistan took place in June 2017. Now the parties are discussing the creation of a joint venture to produce such cars in Uzbekistan with the involvement of Turkish investments...

...On the same day, Nurettin Canikli discussed the prospects for military and military-technical cooperation between the two countries with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Remember that in 2015 the Ministry of Defense of Uzbekistan received 328 Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles and 20 armored repair and evacuation vehicles within the framework of the US Excess Defense Articles...



Vladimir Putin with Shavkat Mirziyoyev

Source: The Russian Presidential Press and Information Office, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AVladimir_Putin_with_Shavkat_Mirziyoyev_\(2017-04-05\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AVladimir_Putin_with_Shavkat_Mirziyoyev_(2017-04-05).jpg), CCA-SA 3.0



Russian Force Structure Developments in the Southern Military District

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying articles from *Izvestiya* discuss the growing force structure in Russia's Southern Military District. The reforms appear to be intended for modern high-tech warfare against an adversary with significant precision-guided munitions.

According to the first excerpted article, the Russian Federation is currently executing a phased activation of a new Combined Arms Army in Novocherkassk (8th Combined Arms Army). This new formation is unlikely to involve the creation of any new maneuver units, but it will add new command and control assets.

The second article discusses an organizational change to the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (MRD). Typically, Soviet/Russian motorized rifle divisions have three motorized rifle regiments and one tank regiment, while tank divisions have three tank regiments and one motorized rifle regiment. Since a motorized rifle regiment has many more personnel than a tank regiment, motorized rifle divisions are significantly larger (in terms of personnel) than tank divisions. The 150th MRD will not follow this convention, having two motorized rifle regiments and two tank regiments, and is being called the 'Division of the 21st Century.' This division is a 'general purpose tool of the 21st century' and is designed to confront enemies using 'precision-guided munitions and electronic jamming.' Although atypical, it is not the first time the Soviets/Russians have experimented with this type of force structure. This structure was first implemented in a few units in the late 1980s, but was abandoned after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was tried again by Chief of General Staff General Yuriy Baluyevskiy, but was again abandoned during the 2008 'New Look' reforms which abolished most Ground Forces' divisions. Interestingly, one of these divisions was also called the 'Division of the 21st Century.'

Although the Southern Military District presents a number of challenges for the Russian Armed Forces, the intent of these reforms likely has little to do with a (sometimes) restless Muslim population, Georgia, or even Ukraine. These potential threats have few capabilities for precision-guided munitions and electronic jamming. The addition of a new level of command and control (8th Combined Arms Army) would also not be particularly useful for dealing with these challenges. These reforms would be effective if Russia was facing a modern adversary such as the US and/or NATO, which have significant precision-guided munitions and electronic jamming capabilities, and can create conditions where the additional command and control capabilities provided by combined arms army may be seen as beneficial. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Yevgeniy Andreyev, "В Южном военном округе появится новая армия (Combined-Arms Army Planned for Southern Military District)," *Izvestiya Online*, 17 March 2017. <http://izvestia.ru/news/670561>

Combined Arms Army Planned for Southern Military District

The 8th Combined Arms Army will appear in the Southern Military District. It is planned to station the 8th Army headquarters in Novocherkassk, while units and subunits of the new formation will be stationed in Rostov and Volgograd Oblasts...In the opinion of experts, the new army will be a very important element in safeguarding Russia's security on the Southeastern strategic salient. Izvestiya was told at the Southern Military District that the army's formation has already begun. The plan is for the first stage to be completed in June 2017. During this stage, the 8th Army headquarters itself will be created, as will the control brigade. The brigade will provide the army command with communications with the units, subunits, and formations...

The new formation's precise T/O structure is not yet known. But it is assumed the army will include the newly formed 150th motorized rifle division, which is also based in Novocherkassk. The 8th Combined Arms Army will most likely be supplemented by the 20th Guards Motorized Brigade from Volgograd. "The task of creating self-sufficient combined-arms multi-service formations on all strategic salients was set not long ago by Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu personally," Izvestiya was told by Viktor Murakhovskiy, chief editor of the Arsenal of the Fatherland magazine..." In simple terms, combined-arms armies are now being created on all strategic salients. In addition to motorized rifle and armored divisions and brigades, they will include artillery and engineering regiments and brigades, and air defense, communications, and radiation, chemical, and biological protection units. The armies will be supported by Aerospace Forces' fighters, bombers, and attack aircraft and on specific salients by Navy ships and submarines." The expert says that the newly formed 8th Army will be a very important element in safeguarding Russia's security on the Southeastern strategic salient...

"The classic motorized rifle division is well-suited for defense and breakthrough of the enemy defense, and a tank division is effective in mobile operations: encirclements, envelopments, marches, But the new 150th Division is a general-purpose tool. It can perform missions effectively as an ordinary motorized rifle division and as a tank division. This new unit is designed for modern high-tech warfare. Its units and subunits will operate effectively under conditions of employment of precision-guided munitions and electronic jamming. It is not as big as an ordinary motorized rifle division and surpasses a tank division in firepower."

-Military Expert Vladislav Shurygin

(continued)



Continued: Russian Force Structure Developments in the Southern Military District

“The 8th Combined Arms Army will appear in the Southern Military District. It is planned to station the 8th Army headquarters in Novocherkassk, while units and subunits of the new formation will be stationed in Rostov and Volgograd Oblasts.”

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Yevgeniy Andreyev, “Минобороны сформировало «дивизию 21-го века» (Defense Ministry Activated ‘Division of the 21st Century’),” *Izvestiya Online*, 4 August 2017. <http://iz.ru/624964/aleksei-ramm-evgenii-andreev/na-iuge-rossii-sformirovali-stalnogo-monstra>

Defense Ministry Activated ‘Division of the 21st Century’

The Russian Federation Defense Ministry is completing activation of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (MRD). This military unit was given a unique table of organization structure. An ordinary motorized rifle division has three motorized rifle regiments and one tank regiment, but 150th MSD has two tank regiments and two motorized rifle regiments. Each MRP also has reinforced tank battalions. Thanks to this structure the new division was given unique maneuverability and firepower and the number of personnel and auxiliary equipment was reduced considerably. The military already has nicknamed the new military unit the “steel monster.”

Experts believe the new division is an effective tool of modern high-tech mobile warfare. Its regiments can halt the enemy, soften up his defense, make breakthroughs, and battle in his rear with identical effectiveness... In addition to the two-motorized rifle and two tank regiments, it has an artillery and an air defense regiment, reconnaissance battalion, signal battalion, and other units and subunits. Tank regiments of the new division will be armed with modernized T-72B3 tanks with added protection.

“The classic motorized rifle division is well-suited for defense and breakthrough of the enemy defense, and a tank division is effective in mobile operations: encirclements, envelopments, marches,” military expert Vladislav Shurygin told *Izvestiya*. “But the new 150th Division is a general-purpose tool. It can perform missions effectively as an ordinary motorized rifle division and as a tank division. This new unit is designed for modern high-tech warfare. Its units and subunits will operate effectively under conditions of employment of precision-guided munitions and electronic jamming. It is not as big as an ordinary motorized rifle division and surpasses a tank division in firepower.” According to the expert, division maneuverability and mobility are determined by the number of personnel as well as by the amount of equipment of combat and rear services subunits. The greater the number, the less mobile the formation, but at the same time it has great firepower. The new 150th MRD is a reasonable compromise...



The 150th Motorized Rifle Division

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12126899
egNews CC 4.0



The 'Strelets' C4ISR System

OE Watch Commentary: The Strelets reconnaissance, command and control, and communications system (KRUS) [комплекса разведки, управления и связи (КРУС)] has now become Russia's "go-to" system of record for C4ISR fires. The accompanying articles from the *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation* press service and *Krasnaya Zvezda* discuss the fielding of the Strelets for Naval Infantry and Coastal Defense Artillery.

The Strelets was developed in 2007, but was only fielded in large numbers beginning in 2011. It has undergone several modifications and hardware upgrades, and its use by Russian forces in Syria is well publicized. The 'targeting' component of the Strelets is primarily used by the Ground Forces, Airborne, and Naval Infantry, and consists of a small tablet computer that can be worn on a tactical vest. The Strelets (likely based on the Linux operating system), reportedly can interface with legacy Soviet and Russian intelligence collection equipment, and can interface with a variety of sensors (azimuth determination, radar, electro-optical, thermal-imaging, acoustic, target designation and sighting, etc.), to include UAV based sensors. Russia's next generation of man-portable short-range reconnaissance radars, the 1L277 *Sobolyatnik* and the 1L111M *Fara-VR*, appear to have been designed from the outset to integrate with it. The Strelets can also interface with other Russian Automated Command and Control Systems (ACUs) to include the Aerospace Defense Forces (VKS) *Metronom* strike-aviation ACU, and the Airborne Troops (VDV) *Andromeda-D* ACU.

The Strelets reportedly allows a serviceman to easily annotate the position of a target on digitized maps contained in the Strelets. The targets' coordinates are then transferred in real time to command posts, artillerymen and pilots, halving the amount of time needed to lay fires. The Strelets has several levels of accessories, the base variant is for individual serviceman, up to squad leader. The next accessory level is intended for platoon leaders and company commanders, having a computer and keyboard. The highest-level accessory package is for battalion and brigade commanders. The Strelets has an organic communications capability to communicate with other Strelets systems up to 1.5 kilometers away, and can retransmit communications from other Strelets transmitters. Presumably, it can also be integrated into existing communications networks for longer distance communications. The Strelets also has an organic GLONASS satellite receiver for navigation, and can likely use US GPS signals as well, and has an inertial navigation capability that is automatically activated in satellite navigation denied or degraded environments. Perhaps one of the more interesting features is the 'friend-or-foe' recognition system, with range depending on the specifications of the sensors to which the Strelets is interconnected. (The Strelets sends a query to the unrecognized object, if the object is a 'friend' then the serviceman hears an audible notification in the earpiece. If quiet, The Strelets defines the object as 'foe'.)

Initially, the Strelets was only designed to direct artillery and aircraft fires, but the system has reportedly been upgraded to allow the direction of naval fires, namely the Kh-35 "Zvezda" (AS-20 Kayak/ SS-N-25 Switchblade/ SSC-6 Sennight), 3M-54 "Kalibr" (SS-N-27 Sizzler), P-800 "Oniks" (SS-N-26 Strobile), and presumably the forthcoming 3M22 "Tsirkon" (SS-N-33) hypersonic cruise missile. The true value of the Strelets is signified by much more than the fielding of a computer tablet that allows the rapid direction of fires. The real value of Strelets is the behind-the-scenes infrastructure that creates the conditions for a network-centric C4ISR system that successfully integrates operators, reconnaissance assets, command elements, and very different fires systems to include ground-based tube artillery and rocket artillery; ballistic and cruise missile; strike aviation; and ship and coastal naval fires. If Strelets truly functions as described, the Russian Armed Forces will need only one system to task fires rapidly at all levels of battle, from front line artillery to deep strike aviation, through rear area missile strikes, truly fielding a unified Reconnaissance-Fire System that facilitates fires at both the tactical and operational depths. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The use of the KRUS Strelets system to support fire missions allows the commander to half the time between target detection and target destruction thanks to the transfer of target coordinates from the scout to the commander in an automatic mode without having to enter them manually or communicate them verbally.”

(continued)

Source: “Артиллеристы морской пехоты Каспийской флотилии впервые провели учение с использованием комплекса «Стрелец» (The Caspian Flotilla Naval Infantry's Artillerymen Have Conducted an Exercise Using Strelets System for the First Time),” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 7 July 2017. http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12132414@egNews

The Caspian Flotilla Naval Infantry's artillery subunit has conducted an exercise using the Reconnaissance, Command and Control, and Communications System (KRUS) [комплекса разведки, управления и связи (КРУС)] Strelets...

According to the exercise scenario, a reconnaissance patrol had discovered the opposing force. A scout equipped with a new KRUS Strelets system determined the target's coordinates using a laser range finder from the system's kit and communicated them in an automatic mode using his personal tablet to the battalion commander, who takes the decision on the use of artillery...Having received an order, the self-propelled artillery battery advanced to its position and, using the received coordinates, fired at the designated targets, confidently destroying target positions simulating the opposing force, thereby proving in practice the effectiveness of the use and the application of the KRUS Strelets system.

The use of the KRUS Strelets system to support fire missions allows the commander to half the time between target detection and target destruction thanks to the transfer of target coordinates from the scout to the commander in an automatic mode without having to enter them manually or communicate them verbally. In addition, the KRUS Strelets system interfaces with various reconnaissance devices, including UAVs, and makes it possible to communicate to the commander information about the scout's health, text messages (SMS), voice information, and information about the serviceman's location.

Continued: The 'Strelets' C4ISR System

“The reconnaissance-fire system is organizationally, informationally, and functionally an integrated aggregation of forces and resources of effective engagement and operational, combat, and technical support. They are unified by a single automated control system which, in aggregate, ensures the discovery and destruction of an adversary’s groups and facilities to the very core of his structure.”



AFV crew individual protection kit 6B48 Ratnik-ZK in two variants and a variant of Ratnik infantry combat system with KRUS Strelets intelligence, control and communications system

Source: By Vitaly V. Kuzmin, http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/4th-Kantemirovskaya-Tank-Division-Open-Day-Part2/i-9QLgvKP/A_, CC BY SA 4.0

Source: Pavel Zavolokin, “POK: как много в этом слове! (ROK: What a Meaningful Word!),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 14 July 2017. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/33791-rok-kak-mnogo-v-etom-slove>

The Reconnaissance-Fire System (ROK) makes it possible to reduce several fold the time between the moment of detecting targets and destroying them...Black Sea Fleet Army Corps artillery regiment has practiced joint operations with subunits of a coastal defense brigade during reconnaissance-fire system training sessions on the Angarskiy range. The motorized riflemen’s and gunners’ interaction ensured the discovery and destruction of enemy facilities in real-time mode...

Essentially, a training session lasts two days: On day one, individual and group performance evaluations are rehearsed in subunits, reconnaissance is conducted, coordinates of targets are determined at night by simulating enemy activities on the training fields, and data for fire control are prepared. On day two, fire control is conducted on levels from battery to brigade...

The reconnaissance-fire system is organizationally, informationally, and functionally an integrated aggregation of forces and resources of effective engagement and operational, combat, and technical support. They are unified by a single automated control system which, in aggregate, ensures the discovery and destruction of an adversary’s groups and facilities to the very core of his structure...As for additional reconnaissance and communications equipment, the motorized riflemen are receiving “Sobolyatnik” and “Fara” radar stations, and UAVs of various classes, from the “Orlan-10” to the “Takhion.” For the assigned task to be successfully performed, the motorized rifle company is also receiving a rocket-propelled, artillery, or mortar battery with its own equipment, which includes mobile reconnaissance posts capable of conducting radar, optical, and thermal-imaging reconnaissance.

The “Strelets” reconnaissance, command and control, and communications system (KRUS) makes it possible to conduct target reconnaissance and to transmit an image and the coordinates of targets with great precision. The KRUS system enables one to emit a target designation and to adjust aviation and artillery fire via a radio channel and space communications. In this way, a commander is able to assess a target visually and to define the target destruction sequence in real time.



The Changing Face of the Russian Conscription System

OE Watch Commentary: In recent years, the Russian Federation has put a great deal of effort to determine if conscription is needed, and if so, how it should be implemented. This issue has become particularly problematic as Russia reduced the conscription period from 24 months to 12 months. Commanders have complained that a 12-month conscription period is insufficient for training and utilization, while the generals point out that Russia cannot afford to implement a completely contract-based system, and lament the loss of a conscription system which imparts at least some military training for almost all Russian males. Despite a few public comments to the contrary, Russia appears to be adopting a hybrid system of contract service and conscription to fill the enlisted ranks. The accompanying passages from Russian sources discuss important aspects of this system.

Russia's current conscription system involves a mandatory period of state service for most young men. The majority of these young men opt for a 12-month conscription period of uniformed service, but a few opt for "alternative civil service." This program allows a young man to serve an 18-month conscription period of civil service for the military or they may serve a 21-month conscription period of civil service with a federal body or federal subject (state, oblast, republic, etc.). In practice, "alternative civil service" is rarely chosen, only 395 men opted for the program during the spring 2017 draft, and a total of only 970 are currently serving. (Continued)



Source: By Vitaly V. Kuzmin, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/27OMSBr/i-phmc8LT/A..>, CC BY SA 4.0

Source: Pavel Panov and Aleksey Ramm, "В сержанты со студенческой скамьи (Straight from Student to Sergeant)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 13 July 2017. <https://iz.ru/618371/pavel-panov-aleksei-ramm/v-serzhanty-so-studencheskoi-skami>

The Defense Ministry, jointly with the Education and Science Ministry, is planning to introduce special military courses for civilian higher educational institution (VUZ) students without drafting them for military service. In contrast to traditional military departments, graduates will not become officers upon completing their courses, but will receive military specialties at primary enlisted or sergeant rank level (commander of a squad, tank, fighting vehicle, or surface-to-air missile system). After graduating from the VUZ, they will be able to enter military service or conclude a contract to join the active reserve...

The Defense Ministry has told Izvestiya that the plan is for graduates to independently decide what to do after their courses end: Whether to enter military service under contract for a post defined by a military-related specialty or to join the active reserve. In this case the graduate will not permanently perform military service. But, in cases of necessity (commencement of hostilities, natural disasters, manmade disasters, and so forth), he will be called up from the reserve. To prevent reservists from losing their skills, it is planned that they will be summoned to special training musters several times a year. For being in the reserve, graduates from the courses will receive special monetary payments.

"The Armed Forces' combat capability is determined not only by the availability of modern arms and equipment, but also by trained personnel," Viktor Murakhovskiy, editor-in-chief of the Arsenal of the Fatherland magazine, told Izvestiya. "The military department leadership is working systematically to increase the Russian Armed Forces' combat capabilities. One of the key elements is the creation of a reserve. At present, special territorial commands have been deployed in the military districts, and civilian agencies are being involved in mobilization deployment. The reserve makes it possible, in cases of necessity, to rapidly increase the armed forces' numerical strength and to compensate for the shortfall of personnel in military units. But modern types of arms and military equipment require trained personnel with the appropriate education."

Source: Yuriy Gavrilov, "Сотни тысяч новых штыков (Hundreds of Thousands of New Bayonets)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 16 July 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/07/16/zavershilsia-vesennij-prizyv-v-armiiu.html>

The Ministry of Defense has summed up the preliminary results of the spring draft for military service. During the last three and a half months, the military commissariats based upon the edict of the country's president placed 142,000 young Russians into formation...As much as you would like, you can't call the current draft sequester "cosmetic". As compared to last spring, it totaled 13,000 men and, in comparison to the fall – 10,000 men...Although the Ministry of Defense insists on the reduction of the troop mixed manning principle, the Russian Army's progress toward universal professionalization is becoming increasingly perceptible...

Should we be surprised that the Ministry of Defense is quite calmly relating to the introduction of new deferments from the barracks. In the spring draft, hundreds of students of professional technical schools, colleges, and technical schools took advantage of that privilege for the first time. Beginning this year, they are legally guaranteed the opportunity to obtain a diploma with a vocational education, so to speak, without a separation from their studies...

In fact, this practice only works in favor of the commanders. A shortage of compulsory service soldiers is not being observed in the troops. And the officers are happy when they send new recruits with degrees to them in the subunits. Until recently, that is how it was with yesterday's higher educational institution (VUZ) students. It will soon be that way with vocational graduates. The commanders are saying: the equipment in the Army right now is complex and the soldiers with an education master it far more easily and rapidly than recent school graduates. The number of new recruits with degrees in the ranks is increasing from year to year. By way of illustration, according to the General Staff's information, nearly one in five conscripts this spring turned out to be a higher educational institution graduate. As appropriate according to the law, the military commissariat afforded the VUZ graduate the choice: be conscripted into the Army for twelve months or serve on contract for two years...

(continued)



Continued: The Changing Face of the Russian Conscription System

Apparently, draft evasion is becoming less common as less than .002% of draftees failed to report, continuing an ongoing trend. In some areas, like the North Caucasus, there are more young men wanting to serve than there are billets available. In these situations, the young men are not inducted for military service. This can cause problems, as based upon recent legislation, young men who do not serve, with certain exceptions, face a ten-year prohibition from state service. Due to this situation, Russia has amended its conscription legislation to exempt these young men from any negative consequences regarding this situation.

Other legislative changes to the draft system have involved better leveraging of the education system. Although Russian conscripts only serve one year, Russia is attempting to make the best use of these conscripts by allowing educational deferments, and then assessing these conscripts for military service after they have obtained a valid military occupational specialty (MOS) and/or higher education.

The Russian Federation has a solid education system, with a 98% literacy rate. This system is similar to the German model, where after approximately the 9th grade (15-16 year olds) Russian students are tracked to either a university or vocational education. In Soviet times, only young men on the university track could apply for draft deferments. After the completion of their studies these young men would serve as conscripted officers. The Russian Federation abolished the practice of conscripting officers, but education deferments are still granted. In theory, the young men that received these deferments were supposed to serve in some reserve capacity, but rarely did they ever wear a uniform after graduation.

Russia appears to be revisiting the issue of how educational draft deferments are handled in order to make better use of Russia's human capital and education system. According to the accompanying interview of Colonel General Vasiliy Tonkoshurov, Chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff Main Organizational and Mobilization Directorate, in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, "This spring, almost one in every five conscripts sent to the troops to perform military service has a higher education." Apparently at least a portion of university graduates that receive educational deferments are now serving in the ranks. The accompanying excerpt from the 16 July issue of *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* states that these new graduates are given a choice, serve one year as a conscript or two years as a contract serviceman. Some of these graduates may be placed into the newly-formed 'science companies' that perform research and development tasks, in which both conscripts and contract serviceman may serve, there have been reports that some of these serviceman volunteer for commissioned service after their mandatory service. Perhaps the most interesting development is a new program that allows educational deferments for young men pursuing a vocational education. According to the excerpt from a 13 July article in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, educational deferments for students on the vocational track are now being granted, and they will be allowed to serve one year as a conscript or two years as a contract serviceman upon the completion of their studies. If Russia is able to grant educational deferments for students on university and vocational tracks, and actually assess most of these young men into the ranks after the completion of their studies, Russia will develop a more educated enlisted force, and reduce educational deferments being used to avoid service. This reform is being done in parallel with a strengthening of the Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF) program that imparts military skills and MOSs to secondary school students. In the spring draft, more than 17,000 conscripts entered the service with a valid MOS provided by a DOSAAF organization. These efforts may help to solve some of the problems related to Russia's relatively short 12-month conscription period. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Yuliya Kozak, "Служба не в тягость, а в радость (Service Is Not a Burden but a Joy)," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 16 July 2017. <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/component/k2/item/33815-sluzhba-ne-v-tyagost-a-v-radost>

...In an interview, Colonel General Vasiliy Tonkoshurov, chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff Main Organizational and Mobilization Directorate, discusses draft results...

[Kozak] How many people today are trying to evade their military duty?

[Tonkoshurov] It is no secret that the prestige of military service has recently increased significantly. And there are not infrequent cases of yesterday's drafted service members staying on under contract. To "dodge" the Army, as the young people say, has again become unprestigious... This fact is also confirmed by the fact that the number of citizens failing to present themselves at the military commissariats is falling substantially every year and at present is no more than 0.2 percent of the number of those summoned to draft events.

[Kozak] And what are the results of the medical examinations carried out during this draft? How is the health of this year's conscripts?

[Tonkoshurov] A positive trend has also been observed on this issue for some time now. Since 2008 there has been an annual reduction in the proportion of citizens exempted from the draft for military service on health grounds. Since 2012 alone, an increase in suitability has been observed from 69.9 percent to 78 percent -- that was the figure recorded in the course of this draft campaign...

[Kozak] Preparation for Army service in the Voluntary Society for the Promotion of the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF), as was established in Soviet times, is today being revived. How many conscripts who already have a military specialty have joined the ranks of the Armed Forces?

[Tonkoshurov] They really account for a considerable proportion. In the course of this spring's campaign more than 27,000 citizens in this category were sent into the formations and troop units. Of these, more than 17,000 underwent training in the Russian DOSAAF. First and foremost, these are vehicle drivers. For the first time after a long break, Navy specialists were trained in the Defense Society by way of an experiment. They have been training recruits for the Airborne Troops here for two years now.

[Kozak] Since recently, graduates of higher educational establishments have had the right to choose: to serve for one year under the draft or two years under contract. How many of these new recruits are there, and are they taking advantage of this opportunity?

[Tonkoshurov] This spring, almost one in every five conscripts sent to the troops to perform military service has a higher education. It is true that these conscripts were granted the opportunity to choose. About 2,500 conscripts took advantage of this. The most talented specialists with diplomas were selected to man scientific companies, where something like 650 people are serving today. In the spring 356 young guys were sent to join these companies.

"This spring, almost one in every five conscripts sent to the troops to perform military service has a higher education."

Russia Implements New Logistic Depot System and Inventory Controls

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discusses a Russian initiative to consolidate 330 bases and warehouses into 24 logistics complexes (PLK) [перевалочно-логистических комплексов (ПЛК)] by 2020. This initiative will involve some sort of privatization, and will reportedly save an estimated 250 million dollars annually. In addition it will require 50,000 fewer federal employees and military personnel.

The first of these new complexes has been established in the Moscow suburb of Naro-Fominsk. The Nary PLK provides storage for approximately 220,000 tons of material and 4,700 items of weaponry and special equipment. The Nary PLK is managed by a director with deputies for logistics, production, and security, with a total staffing of about 1,200 people. This complex has replaced 27 bases and warehouses, and allowed 31 military units to be disbanded. *(Continued)*



General Bulgakov inspecting 150th Motorized Rifle Division supply depot

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12132326%40egNews&utm_medium=more&utm_source=rnews&_print=true CC 4.0

“Beginning this year, military seamen will etch special QR-codes on torpedoes, missiles, and other weapons. The “electronic tags” will become a mandatory attribute both for packaging with munitions, transporter-launcher canisters, and also for the missiles and torpedoes themselves.”

Source: Yuriy Gavrillov, “Шойгу проверил строительство высокотехнологичного армейского склада (Shoygu Inspected a New Military Logistics Center),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 19 July 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/07/19/shoygu-proveril-stroitelstvo-vysokotekhnologichnogo-armejskogo-sklada.html>

Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu inspected how they are building the first military production-logistics complex in Naro-Fominsk Rayon near Moscow in the Russian Federation. Its construction was stipulated by the “Effective Army” Program. We are talking about not a single facility but the creation of an entire network of state-of-the-art army depots. There will be a total of 24 of them on Russian territory. We know that similar complexes will appear in Armavir, Novosibirsk, the Village of Vanino of Khabarovsk Kray, and other locations right after the one in the Moscow area. So, the Ministry of Defense hopes that with them some well-organized military materiel storage facilities will appear in Russia.

What is more, new production-logistics complexes like “Nary” will permit the reduction of the number of currently operating military storage facilities and save resources for their maintenance...The Moscow production-logistics complex occupies a land area of 182 hectares. High-rise apartment buildings, administrative buildings, and also areas for the storage of equipment and petroleum, oil, and lubricants will be accommodated on it. Previously, while inspecting this construction site, Sergey Shoygu stated that they will not only create the needed infrastructure here but also introduce the automation of the inventory of the materiel with the employment of state-of-the-art technologies. What is more, it is precisely automation that will provide the transportation of everything that is being stored in the warehouses.

Various types of military equipment – from entrenching tools to gas-turbine tank engines - will be delivered to the logistics facility in Naro-Fominsk Rayon. While taking into account the favorable location of the production-logistics complex, its transport accessibility, the availability there of state-of-the-art loading and unloading equipment, and also the capability at Nary to prepare any materiel for transportation using packages, parcels, or shipping containers, this center’s efficiency coefficient actually promises to be very high.

It is estimated that, besides warehousing and transport functions, this complex will also be outstanding for the repair and servicing of army equipment. For which they will build several specialized shops here – to maintain small arms and military uniforms, the mothballing of materiel, etc.

(continued)



Continued: Russia Implements New Logistic Depot System and Inventory Controls

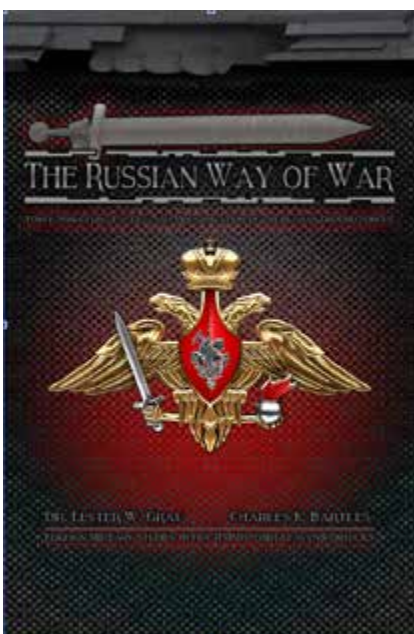
The accompanying article from *Izvestiya* discusses the use of Quick Response Code (QR) technology by Russian logisticians to securely track inventories and hinder the introduction of unapproved and/or counterfeit parts and materials into the supply chain. Although not mentioned explicitly, both of these reforms are likely intended to stymie internal graft and corruption. These problems are particularly endemic to the areas of procurement, military construction, and logistics. Consolidating and privatizing logistic facilities and creating an inventory control system could prove beneficial as a corruption control measure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Dmitriy Litovkin, Aleksey Ramm, “На ракеты и торпеды нанесут QR-коды (They Will Inscribe QR-Codes on Missiles and Torpedoes),” *Izvestiya Online*, 28 July 2017. <https://iz.ru/624114/dmitrii-litovkin-aleksei-ramm/na-rakety-i-torpedy-nanesut-qr-kody>

Beginning this year, military seamen will etch special QR-codes on torpedoes, missiles, and other weapons. The “electronic tags” will become a mandatory attribute both for packaging with munitions, transporter-launcher canisters, and also for the missiles and torpedoes themselves. The codes will be accomplished in the form of a super-secure laser etching. The innovation will simplify the system for the storage, monitoring, and expenditure of munitions and will permit them to completely monitor the items’ life cycle. Furthermore, it will become an impediment for deliveries of uncertified components, and also of illegal trafficking of the end product outside the jurisdiction of the Navy command authorities....According to the experts, a QR-code – is a sort of digital “finger print” for a specific item or munition. They covertly apply the super-secure laser marker to the torpedo or missile. Special “stickers” have been developed for boxes and transporter-launcher canisters with items. The markers have undergone a test cycle for climactic effects and also resistance to counterfeiting...

The marker is completely destroyed during an attempt to “wipe out” or break the QR-code. It is impossible to apply a repeat marker on that same section of the item. In the process, the marker’s service life is limited only by the time of the operation of the specific types of items and packaging. Special equipment for their inconspicuous identification and information readout was developed together with the QR-markers. One could do this not only at the storage locations but also under field conditions or directly on the Navy’s ships.

*Arseniy Shcheltsin, the director of design activity of the Institute for the Development of the Internet, told *Izvestiya* that, in contrast to the barcodes, the QR-codes are more secure because the information key has more symbols...“If the information is worth nothing of state importance, then a cheaper variant – is the barcode,” the expert said. “It is easier to read. It is used as the standard for sales. Everything is more complex in the case with the QR-code. One can realize its development using two methods. The simple method is when the initial information is entered into the QR-code, the code is printed and it is already impossible to make changes. But one can use the QR-code as an access code to the information system with minimal rights for the operators. In all cases, specialized devices and software programs are needed to read it”.*



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES

At any given time, assessments of the Russian Armed Forces vary between the idea of an incompetent and corrupt conscript army manning decrepit Soviet equipment and relying solely on brute force, to the idea of an elite military filled with Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were the “polite people” or “little green men” seen on the streets in Crimea. This book will attempt to split the difference between these radically different ideas by shedding some light on what exactly the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/199251/download>



Russian Railroad Troops and Logistic Support

OE Watch Commentary: Since the Russian Empire spanned a vast landmass (11 time zones), it is no surprise that the Russian military was keenly interested in the nation's railways. Russia's first rail line opened in 1848, with the Imperial Russian Army being one of the first users. Rail transport proved to be the fastest and most reliable means of transport for the Russian Army to connect its many far flung outposts that were protecting the country's borders. The Russian Empire, as many other European nations, also planned to use railroads for large-scale military mobilization and for the support of armies in the field. Despite the technological advancements of the last 150 years, rail transport is still the most important means of transportation in today's Russian Federation. The economy would grind to halt in the event of any large-scale disruption of the nation's railways. Just as rail transportation is essential for the country's day-to-day functioning, rail transportation is still important for the Russian Armed Forces. The accompanying article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses Deputy Defense Minister General Dmitry Bulgakov's inspection of the Railroad Troops conducting bridging operations. The accompanying interview from *Strazh Baltiki* of Captain 1st Rank (O6/U.S. Navy Captain equivalent) Vadim Eduardovich Zykov, chief of the Baltic Fleet Military Transport Communications Service, describes the importance of rail operations for supporting Russian military forces in Kaliningrad.



The Russian Federation Railway Troops medium emblem.

Source: Government of Russia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Railway_Troops_of_Russia.jpg, Public Domain

The Russian Federation currently has a vast rail infrastructure including at least 85,000 km (53,000 miles) of rail, 167,000 switches, 138 tunnels, and 30,000 bridges. This rail infrastructure is primarily maintained and repaired by civil institutions, but due to the importance of the railways to the military, remoteness of some lines, and vulnerability of railroads to attack, the Russian Armed Forces have long used special military railroad units, now known as the Russian Railroad Troops, to maintain and repair Russian railroads when needed. Although the use of civil institutions for railroad maintenance is much cheaper, the Russian Railway Troops are usually used in restricted areas, to support civil efforts resulting from natural disasters, and in combat conditions when civil support is not feasible.

The Russian Railroad Troops have approximately 25,000 personnel, including an estimated 1,800 officers, 5,000 contract NCOs, 2,500 civilian personnel, and conscripts. In terms of organization, the Russian Railroad Troops are commanded by Lieutenant General Oleg Ivanovich Kosenkov, and are part of the Material Technical Support (MTO) commanded by Deputy Defense Minister, General Dmitry Bulgakov. *(Continued)*

Source: Aleksey Trofimov, "От Замысла До Воплощения (From Scenario to Accomplishment)," *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 14 July 2017. http://www.redstar.ru/images/files/2017/07-2017/075-14-07-2017_c-v-o.pdf

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Army General Dmitriy Bulgakov has inspected the Railroad Troops' readiness for upcoming exercises...Participating in the event were chiefs of Central Military District's railroad troop directorates, separate railroad formations' commanders and staff chiefs, and also the command of two separate logistic support formations, and the department [kafedra] heads from the Railroad Troops Military Institute and the Military Academy of Logistics. The servicemen's professionalism was being assessed by Russian Federation Deputy Defense Minister Army General Dmitriy Bulgakov...

According to the scenario, a notional enemy had destroyed a section of the railroad bridge over the Yenisey River. The military railroad engineers had been set the task of restoring, on the double, the disrupted movement of military trains over that section...Around 500 soldiers, as well as 100 items of equipment, were assigned to its execution. One of the subunits swiftly assembled a trestle-frame bridge, and another removed the consequences of the railroad tracks and ties that were damaged by an "explosion." The railroad formation personnel laid a 200-meter pontoon rail and road crossing over the water obstacle. The river's rapid current -- more than three meters per second -- posed a particular problem. Anchors weighing many tons were used for securing the floating bridge in the water. The railroad engineers coped with all the assigned tasks within the set deadline, displaying excellent special skill...

Rounding up its results, RF Deputy Defense Minister Army General Dmitriy Bulgakov appraised the military railroad engineers' standard of professionalism highly, noting that the Railroad Troops were, and continue to be, an important component of the state's military organization and an integral part of the Armed Forces...



Flag of Federal Service of the Railway Troops 2007

Source: Government of Russia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian-railway-troops-flag-2007.gif>, Public Domain

“In overall total, more than 70,000 tons of various cargos were transported for the Baltic Fleet in 2016, which approximately equates to 2,000 railroad cars. Around 90 percent were delivered to the region by ferry”

(continued)



Continued: Russian Railroad Troops and Logistic Support

The Russian Railroad Troops consist of 10 Railroad Brigades divided into four corps headquartered in Smolensk, Volgograd, Yekaterinburg, and Khabarovsk, but operational control is maintained by their respective military districts. A railroad brigade typically consists of at least three different types of battalions that may be geographically distant from their brigade headquarters. The rail battalion can lay and repair track, build small bridges and other structures, and destroy rail infrastructure in wartime. The horizontal construction battalion operates bulldozers, cranes, graders and other heavy equipment. The third type of battalion is the bridge battalion. These units operate pontoon bridging systems and the sectional railway bridges that can span lengths of over 500 meters, (spanning most Russian rivers), and can build smaller bridges from construction materials that can support weights up to 50 tons. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Vladimir Dashevskiy, “Ключевое Звено Логистики Балтфлота (The Baltic Fleet’s Vital Logistics Echelon),” *Strazh Baltiki Online*, 16 June 2017. http://sc.mil.ru/files/morf/military/archive/SB_16_06.pdf

On the history and present-day life of the Baltic Fleet Military Transport Communications Service, and also on the people who shoulder responsibility for resolving logistics issues of the country’s large strategic formation, we conversed with Captain 1st Rank Vadim Eduardovich Zykov, chief of the Baltic Fleet Military Transport Communications Service and deputy chief of the Baltic Fleet Transport Directorate...he was the chief of the Military Transport Communications Service of the Black Sea Fleet Transport Directorate...

[Dashevskiy] What distinguishes your work here, and what are the specifics of Baltic Fleet logistics?

[Zykov] Many problems are similar to those I used to have to solve in the Black Sea Fleet.

Here, the territory is isolated from every direction, and the situation in Crimea is similar. Just the same as there, the main transport artery is a ferry connection. Of course, the distance is substantially greater in the Baltic region. There, the ferry crossing does not exceed one hour, whereas here the journey from Ust’-Luga takes around 36 hours. There is an overland route via neighboring Lithuania. But only fuel from Russian oil refineries is delivered to the region that way. Also, those deliveries constitute approximately five percent of the total volume of fleet cargoes that are delivered to the region...

[Dashevskiy] What are the volumes of military cargos being transported -- if it is not a secret?

[Zykov] In overall total, more than 70,000 tons of various cargos were transported for the Baltic Fleet in 2016, which approximately equates to 2,000 railroad cars. Around 90 percent were delivered to the region by ferry...In addition, Baltic Fleet military units are in charge of a total of around 30 km of railroad access lines, which must also be maintained in serviceable condition. And, supporting the entire array of tasks which our service performs, there are people...



Special troops are represented by parade battalions from Railway troops, Engineer troops and CBRN defence troops

Source: By Vitaly V. Kuzmin <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/keyword/Victory%20Day%20Parade;alabino;2012/i-wHG8Xv/A>, CC BY SA 4.0

Russia Opens Rail Line Bypassing Ukraine

OE Watch Commentary: Interconnected infrastructure (rail, roads, pipelines, etc.) is a legacy of the Soviet Union. The post-Soviet republics are still untangling infrastructure issues and have had to work closely with their neighbors on otherwise internal matters due to this legacy. Russia's annexation of Ukraine and activities in Eastern Ukraine have caused major economic and infrastructure issues on both sides of the border. The accompanying articles from Russian sources discuss one such issue.

The first accompanying passage from *Interfax* announces that Russia has now opened the Zhuravka-Millerovo railroad line, a line



Russia Opens Rail Line Bypassing Ukraine
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/world/more.htm?id=11974743@egNewsCC 4.0

constructed to avoid passing through Ukrainian territory as the previous route did. The construction of this segment was reportedly planned well before 2014, as part of Russia's "Developing Russia's Transportation System (2010-2020)" federal program that planned to start building a 748-km railroad line (Prokhorovka-Zhuravka-Chertkovo-Bataysk) in 2018 that would bypass Ukraine. Due to the deteriorating situation with Ukraine, alternate routes were considered to avoid Ukrainian territory and reopen the line. Russia decided on the Zhuravka-Millerovo railroad to reopen the route, but not substantially extending the line. This 270 km stretch of electrified double-track (almost all rail in Russia is electrified) replaces 37 km of electrified double-track that connected the towns of Zhuravka and Millerovo, and reportedly has enough throughput for 240 passenger or freight trains per day in both directions. The new rail line will not only connect the towns of Zhuravka and Millerovo, but will also serve as an important connection between the Western and Southern Districts. Thus, it would likely be an important asset for any conflict with Ukraine or the West, making it a strategic asset.

According to JSC Russian Railways Vice President Oleg Toni (the primary contractor), there are 2,500 civilian contractors and 1,500 units of equipment involved in the construction of the line, at a cost of approximately \$1 billion, but Russia is not solely entrusting this project to a contractor. The Russian Railroad Troops are also heavily engaged in the project, having began work in March 2015. In all three rail battalions, five horizontal construction battalions, and a bridge battalion were pressed into service for the project, bringing over 1,500 personnel and 700 pieces of heavy equipment. *(Continued)*

“The Railroad Troops have once again demonstrated their proficiency and professionalism during the accomplishment of their assigned mission.”

*-Colonel General Vasiliy Tonkoshurov, chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces
General Staff Main Organizational and Mobilization Directorate*

Source: “Two-track railroad bypassing Ukraine put into de facto operation in southern Russia,” *Interfax*, 7 August 2017

A railroad that Russia has built in the Rostov and Voronezh regions to bypass Ukrainian territory has been put into operation, an informed source told Interfax-AVN on Monday...“Working traffic on the Zhuravka-Millerovo stretch has been opened. Therefore, it can be said that this electrified two-track railroad built to bypass neighboring Ukraine has begun operations,” he said...“Traffic on this stretch will intensify, and relevant plans are being implemented by the Transport Ministry, Russian Railways, and other relevant institutions,” the source said.



Continued: Russia Opens Rail Line Bypassing Ukraine

According to the accompanying article from *Gazeta.ru*, the Railroad Troops constructed 177 km of the total 270 km of rail that was built. (Other reports mentioned that electrification aspect of the entire project was conducted by the civilian contractor). The article also mentions that the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, General Sergei Shoygu, gave an award to the 39th Railroad Brigade and made some comments, demonstrating Russian beliefs about the strategic importance of the Zhuravka-Millerovo rail line, and the Railroad Troops role in constructing it. The accompanying interview of Deputy Defense Minister and Logistics (MTO) Chief, General Dmitriy Bulgakov in *Krasnaya Zvezda* shares his view on the performance of the Railroad Troops, and again underscores how the Railroad Troops are proving to be a key asset (as are the Pipeline Troops) for solving some of the infrastructure problems due to the Ukraine situation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“...well-earned appreciation of the brigade personnel’s high standards of skill, courage, steadfastness, and professionalism. The brigade...actively participated in restoring the country’s transport arteries and in building very major and strategically important railroad main lines.”

-General Sergei Shoygu, Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation

Source: Yuliya Kozak, “Приказано обеспечить (We Have Been Ordered to Support),” *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, 31 July 2017. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/33958-prikazano-obespechit>

A contemporary army’s combat capability depends to an enormous extent on the effective operation of the Armed Forces Logistics Support System. Today this is a well-organized mechanism, which successfully operates even in extreme and emergency situations.

*On the eve of the celebration of Rear Services Day, Russian Federation Deputy Defense Minister General of the Army Dmitriy Bulgakov told *Krasnaya Zvezda* about how the MTO system is operating today, which technologies are being introduced within its enhancement, and what the main vectors of the development of the Russian Army’s logistics support are...*

[Kozak] At what stage is the construction of the Zhuravka-Millerovo Railroad to bypass Ukraine?

[Bulgakov] In the concluding stage. The Railroad Troops have once again demonstrated their proficiency and professionalism during the accomplishment of their assigned mission. On 6 August, the military railroad personnel will celebrate their professional holiday and, while approaching their anniversary, they have something of which to be proud.

Source: Ivan Zhukovskiy, “Российские отпускники поедут мимо Украины (Russian Vacationers Will Bypass Ukraine),” *Gazeta.ru* Online, 7 August 2017. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2017/08/07/10822345.shtml>

Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu awarded the Order of Zhukov to the 39th Separate Railroad Brigade for having constructed the railroad that bypasses Ukrainian territory, the Russian Federation Defense Ministry Information and Mass Communications Department reported on Monday [August 6, 2017]. The branch line that the soldiers laid between Zhuravka and Millerovo stations in Voronezh and Rostov Oblasts has connected Russia’s southern and central regions.

According to Shoygu, the award is “well-earned appreciation of the brigade personnel’s high standards of skill, courage, steadfastness, and professionalism.” “The brigade, which was formed shortly after the great victory, actively participated in restoring the country’s transport arteries and in building very major and strategically important railroad main lines,” the minister said by way of a reminder. “Without any doubt, the building of the Zhuravka-Millerovo railroad section to an extremely tight schedule will enter the brigade’s glorious chronicle. It is hugely significant for supporting the intensiveness and security of journeys in the country’s southern regions,” Shoygu said at the award conferral ceremony...Millions of Russian citizens from the country’s central region will now not have to pass through two frontier posts on the border with Ukraine. The railroad’s construction began in April 2015. The overall length of the railroad track from Zhuravka to Millerovo was more than 270 km. Of that stretch, 177 km were built by military construction battalions. The remaining track section was built by civilian railroad workers.

In addition to actual railroad tracks, the corresponding infrastructure and eight new stations are due to be added on the Zhuravka-Millerovo section, not only vacationers, but also local inhabitants will make use of the branch. The decision to construct a railroad bypassing Ukraine for trains traveling from the country’s central areas to the southern regions was made at the height of the armed conflict in the Donetsk Basin. The railroad section that had operated previously ran along a 37 km stretch across Luhansk Oblast territory. The station at Zorynivka is located on it.



Training to Fight in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: While the overall situation in Syria remains unstable, the Kremlin leadership apparently intends to maintain a military presence within Syria for the foreseeable future to restore order. The first excerpt from the official Russian news agency *TASS* points out that in late July, President Putin “signed into law a Russian bill ratifying a protocol to an agreement between Moscow and Damascus about the setting up of a Russian air base in Syria,” which “will be in force for 49 years and ‘automatically’ renewed for 25-year periods.”

The pro-Kremlin media frequently features reports about Russian military advances in eliminating the terrorist threat and stabilizing the country. Quoting Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, the second excerpt points out, “the Syrian army has really achieved considerable success. Over the past two months, more territory has been liberated than what was under Syrian government control when we [Russia] entered [Syria].”



Chief of the Russian General Staff met the President of Syria Bashar al-Assad at the Hmeymim Air Base
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://syria.mil.ru/en/index/syria/news/more.htm?id=12131240@egNews>, CC 4.0

The third excerpt from the Russian military news source *Krasnaya Zvezda* describes how lessons-learned from the Syrian conflict are being incorporated into military training exercises. It describes an exercise conducted in July 2017, at the relatively new combined arms training facility at Mulino (Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast) in the Central Military District. The exercise scenario was built around units from the Ministry of Defense and National Guard capturing a rebel-held town, “freeing hostages taken by the rebels and preventing the terrorists breaking out from their encirclement.” Besides employing massive amounts of firepower, the exercise incorporated the latest Russian UAV and Electronic Warfare (EW) technologies. For instance, instead of using “propaganda leaflets calling for voluntary surrender and a laying-down of arms,” Russian military personnel employ “a special EW system [mounted on a drone] which sends out the corresponding information to the mobile phones of all subscribers in this area in the form of text messages.” (A brief video of the exercise can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALGNb-2baSw>)

The training facility at Mulino allows for a full spectrum of combined arms operations, where tailor-made scenarios are developed for learning to defend against the specific challenges confronted in Syria. The article describes how Russian air and ground assets trained to eliminate “so-called mobile weapon positions. These being medium machineguns mounted on the beds of trucks or light pickup vehicles... which are currently being employed by the terrorists of ISIL.” The article concludes on a positive note, emphasizing that the enemy tactics which Russian military forces are confronting in Syria are being replicated, war-gamed and defeated at modern combined arm training facilities like Mulino. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“President Vladimir Putin has signed into law a Russian bill... about the setting up of a Russian air base in Syria...”

Source: “Путин подписал закон о ратификации протокола о размещении авиагруппы РФ в Сирии (Putin Signs Into Law Protocol Regarding Stationing of Russian Airbase in Syria),” *TASS*, 26 July 2017. <http://tass.ru/politika/4442263>

President Vladimir Putin has signed into law a Russian bill ratifying a protocol to an agreement between Moscow and Damascus about the setting up of a Russian air base in Syria, Russian state news agency TASS reported on 26 July.... The protocol says that the agreement will be in force for 49 years and “automatically” renewed for 25-year periods.

Source: “Шойгу заявил об увеличении подконтрольной Дамаску территории за два месяца в 2,5 раза (Shoygu says that the area controlled by Damascus has increased 2.5 times over the past two months),” *Interfax.ru*, 13 August 2017. <http://www.interfax.ru/world/574657>

“The Syrian army has really achieved considerable success. Over the past two months, more territory has been liberated than what was under Syrian government control when we entered [Syria]. That is to say, we have in fact made it 2.5 times greater than what it was before. When I say we, I mean the Syrian army with our support,” Shoygu told Russian state-owned Rossiya 2 TV in an interview.

(continued)



Continued: Training to Fight in Syria

Source: Dmitriy Semenov, “С учётом сирийского опыта (Considering the Syrian Experience),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 21 July 2017.
<http://redstar.ru/index.php/syria/item/33866-s-uchjotom-sirijskogo-opyta>

...Units and subunits of all combat arms and individual services of the Armed Forces and also subunits of the Russian National Guard were employed in the rehearsal of training issues in the notional area of concentration. It was no accident that Mulino was chosen as the location for so significant a stage of the assembly. Conditions for study of a wide range of elements of combat training, with their demonstration on an enlarged scale, in real time have been created here today at the range facilities, which have been prepared to a high quality.... According to the legend, the assault detachment composed of a reinforced motorized rifle battalion had to take out the defending adversary at the approaches to the locality and, interacting with elements of the military police of the Russian Ministry of Defense and men of the Russian National Guard, to capture the township, freeing hostages taken by the rebels and preventing the terrorists breaking out from their encirclement.

Both the possibilities of the personnel and the potential of the modern types of arms and technical resources were demonstrated during optimization of the elements of the exercise. ... Or one further novelty, which is this time absolutely innovative: there's no longer any need today, apparently, as used to be the case earlier, to scatter over the adversary's positions propaganda leaflets calling for voluntary surrender and a laying-down of arms. This is now done by a special EW system, which, thanks to those same drones, sends out the corresponding information to the mobile phones of all subscribers in this area in the form of text messages.

The most advanced methods of the conduct of combat operations, with consideration of the events in the Syrian Arab Republic included, were rehearsed at the training sessions in Mulino. Colonel-General Andrey Kartapolov, commander of the Western Military District, emphasized that even the most notional locality prepared for defense as part of the demonstration exercise had been equipped per Syrian “templates”.... Truly, together with the traditional procedures and methods of the conduct of combat operations – the mounting of fire attacks on exposed command and observation posts of the adversary, suppression of his artillery and mortar batteries, and the employment of air weaponry such as multi-role fighter bombers and attack helicopters -- issues whose study was dictated precisely by the Syrian operation were worked up at the practice drill. They included the elimination of so-called mobile weapon positions. These being medium machineguns mounted on the beds of trucks or light pickup vehicles. It is such “carts” which are currently being employed by the terrorists of ISIL (an organization banned in Russia) when countering government forces in Syria and Iraq. Or “jihad-mobiles” – explosives-packed specially equipped means of transport converted from regular vehicles or tractors. The possibility of the rebels' use of such adaptations is now also being taken into account in the training of the troops and the preparation of the personnel for combat operations. The range in Mulino makes it possible to practice these and other issues in full. Even the terrain here is reminiscent of Syrian terrain at times – there is both sand and flat country. ...

Russian EW Developments

OE Watch Commentary: Given that the Russian GDP (and associated defense budget) is much smaller than that of the US, over the past several years, Kremlin leaders have focused on weapon systems which might give Russia an asymmetrical advantage over their chief geopolitical rival. Electronic Warfare (EW) is one such category. The accompanying excerpt from the pro-Kremlin news source *Gazeta.ru* features the highlights of a recent interview with a top official (Yuriy Mayevskiy, Deputy General Director of the KRET AO for Research and Electronic Warfare System General Designer) responsible for developments within this industry.

Mayevskiy begins by asserting that Russian EW systems “are far stronger and more sophisticated than the American systems,” and that Russia is even capable of jamming the AWACS (Airborne Early Warning and Control). Later he points out that Russian EW developers closely followed and derived important lessons-learned from American military operations in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq and other regions, drawing distinctions between the need to defend against both air and ground forces. He goes on to claim that “in conceptual terms in the electronic warfare sphere [Russia] is at the forefront of development or we are outperforming foreign countries.” He comments that the current sanction regime has forced Russian manufacturers to rely upon “import substitution,” but this has had an “insignificant” impact since domestic industry has “been working intensively on [developing] our own electronic component base.”

Mayevskiy goes on to list some specifics of the Russian EW arsenal, for instance: “the Rychag-AV... the Prezident-S system, ...the series of Krasukha-type jamming stations that are unrivaled anywhere,” designed against a wide spectrum of targets. He goes on to warn that American “optimism” about being able to degrade Russia's air defense systems is based upon the false assumption that modern Russian air defense systems are similar to those fielded in the 1970s. The article concludes by describing how the conflict in Syria is serving as a testbed for improving and fielding new EW systems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...across a whole range of basic parameters our [EW] systems are far stronger and more sophisticated than the American systems...”

(continued)



Continued: Russian EW Developments

Source: “Мы их «Патриота» тоже не боимся (We Also Have No Fear of Their Patriot),” *Gazeta.ru*, 22 July 2017. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2017/07/22/10798658.shtml>

... [Gazeta.ru] How true are the claims made by some specialists that our EW systems lag way behind Western systems? Some believe that state-of-the-art American assets represent some value that for us is unattainable.

[Mayevskiy] An assertion that is absolutely incorrect. Because across a whole range of basic parameters our systems are far stronger and more sophisticated than the American systems. ... So, if we are combating an AWACS, then by definition our electronic warfare system has to be more effective than all the rest.

[Gazeta.ru] And we are able to jam the AWACS?

[Mayevskiy] Yes, of course. We have been compelled to develop and manufacture such equipment. I suppose the Americans are acting in exactly the same way with regard to our electronic assets....

[Gazeta.ru] It can be said that any adversary always has weak and strong aspects. Where are we stronger and where do we lag behind in the EW context?

[Mayevskiy] I would say that in conceptual terms in the electronic warfare sphere we are at the forefront of development or we are outperforming foreign countries in this respect. Experience demonstrates that as a rule our ideas, our concepts surpass the contemporary world standard for the development of EW equipment. At the same time, there are some difficulties associated with the implementation of concepts and ideas.... Among these problems is that of import substitution for several elements of the electronic component base. Over the last few years we have been working intensively on our own electronic component base, and this program is proceeding pretty well....

[Gazeta.ru] And generally speaking, this switch from borrowing a foreign component base to establishing our own very likely increases the reliability of the equipment, its resistance to influences emanating from a potential adversary?

[Mayevskiy] There has been no abrupt transition in this respect, nor could there have been. Despite the fact that we previously made use of a number of elements of imported output, the proportion of these was insignificant....

[Gazeta.ru] Without revealing any state secrets, or a successful technology, can you cite an example when, for instance, we are responding unconventionally to existing threats and outstripping the competition?

[Mayevskiy] I can name a product for the collective protection of aircraft, the Rychag-AV, as an example of EW equipment that is completely unrivaled anywhere. The Prezident-S system, which possesses very good characteristics, also employs unconventional solutions. There is the series of Krasukha-type jamming stations that are unrivaled anywhere. We have ample examples.

[Gazeta.ru] You come across statements put out by the American military saying that they have no fear of our PVO [air defense] systems because with their own EW assets they have the capability to jam literally all the systems' electronics.

[Mayevskiy] Believe it or not, but we also have no fear of their air defense systems, because we also are able to jam them. In this connection we must not forget that this “optimism” of theirs can only be based on their experience of combating Soviet air defense assets in third world countries whose development mainly dates back to the 1970s. I'm not sure they'll retain this “optimism” when they've encountered the Russian Federation's modern air defense systems (newly developed and modernized in recent years) in real combat, not to mention our combat crews....

[Gazeta.ru] Did our developers of EW assets take into consideration -- for instance -- the experience of the American military campaign in Iraq?

[Mayevskiy] Undoubtedly. Any experience of the employment of EW in an armed conflict is viewed by us as experimentally acquired data.... For us, there are in principle two types of modern conflict: the “Yugoslav,” when there were no boots on the ground, and the “Iraq,” when there was a classic invasion -- air supremacy was secured initially and then the mission was accomplished in the course of a ground operation.

[Gazeta.ru] How are our EW facilities performing in Syria?

[Mayevskiy] The Russian air grouping in Syria is securely protected by our electronic warfare systems. The pilots feel confident enough, and they are ensuring high combat effectiveness in the way aircraft and armament are employed. Helicopters are protected by the Vitebsk system. Certain assets from the pool of EW ground equipment have also been used there. They have also demonstrated their high effectiveness in accomplishing the assigned missions. It may be said that at the contemporary stage, even given the limited scale of the EW equipment's combat use, we have achieved pretty high marks....





Improving Russian Military Medical Care

OE Watch Commentary: Since the collapse of the USSR, health care in Russia has suffered from the same vicissitudes as other aspects of Russian society. While on paper, citizens enjoy free medical care, the system has been plagued by under-funding, corruption, and a wide disparity between urban and rural medical care. Until quite recently, these same problems have (to a lesser degree) hampered medical care for those connected to the military and security services. The situation appears to be improving. The accompanying excerpt from the popular daily, *MK Online*, describes a visit to the renovated Military-Medical Academy, a military hospital in St. Petersburg, and how this updated facility will respond to the medical needs of those serving in the military.

The article begins by describing the 219-year long history of this military hospital, pointing out that “despite the establishment’s renown and international authority, hardly any work ha[d] been done toward improving the academy. The last clinical sub-department here was built as long ago as in 1913.” This lack of capital improvement changed under Defense Minister Shoygu, who proposed a few years ago that the hospital be renovated and equipped with modern medical technology. Today the modernized facility includes “15 academic departments, 15 medical-diagnostics centers, 27 operating theaters, eight research laboratories, and 22,000 items of the most up-to-date equipment.”

Besides being “able to accommodate 630 inpatients simultaneously,” the hospital “boasts an ultralow-temperature bank, which makes it possible to maintain a strategic stock of donated blood in case of emergency situations or armed conflict.” It also possesses “the Russian Army’s first center for coordinating organ donation and transplant surgery, and a center for storing blood and tissue, which has a capacity unequalled anywhere in Russia.” Equally impressive is the facility’s ability “to offer telemedicine consultations and practical aid to serious cases, including to those who are located in the most remote parts of Russia.”

While Russian military power has traditionally been measured by the number of trained uniformed personnel and the quantity of advanced weapon systems, the support infrastructure to maintain such a force is equally vital. To further strengthen the country’s military potential, this article suggests that Russian military leaders have recognized the importance of improving and modernizing the country’s military healthcare system. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Here it is possible to administer high-tech aid to patients, train future doctors, and develop research in any sphere of medicine...”

Source: “Aleksandr Stepanov, “Путин откроет уникальную клинику Минобороны: мы посмотрели, что внутри (Putin Will Open a Unique Defense Ministry Clinic: We Took a Look Inside),” *MK Online*, 27 July 2017. <http://www.mk.ru/politics/2017/07/27/putin-otkroet-unikalnuyu-kliniku-minoborony-my-posmotreli-cto-vnutri.html>

The multi-specialty clinic at the Military-Medical Academy named for Kirov is a unique Russian Defense Ministry complex equipped with the newest innovative medical technology. Here it is possible to administer high-tech aid to patients, train future doctors, and develop research in any sphere of medicine....

...The Saint Petersburg medical academy is one of Russia’s oldest educational establishments. This year is its 219th. Despite the establishment’s renown and international authority, hardly any work has been done toward improving the academy. The last clinical sub-department here was built as long ago as in 1913.

It is clear that entering the new century with old baggage is very difficult; the decision was therefore made to build modern wings here. It was Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu who proposed the idea, and Vladimir Putin who endorsed the initiative, and it took off from there, as we say....

Everything here is the last word in medicine. The building houses 15 academic departments, 15 medical-diagnostics centers, 27 operating theaters, eight research laboratories, and 22,000 items of the most up-to-date equipment, the majority having no equivalents in Russia. The clinic will be able to accommodate 630 inpatients simultaneously....

...Another of the clinic’s proud boasts is an ultralow-temperature bank, which makes it possible to maintain a strategic stock of donated blood in case of emergency situations or armed conflict. The low-temperature storage facility makes it possible to hold in reserve 3,000 doses of erythrocytic and 8,000 doses of thrombocytic material, as well as up to 5,000 liters of blood plasma...

Colonel Anatoliy Zavrazhnyy, the head of the multi-specialty clinic at the Military-Medical Academy, gave up a few minutes for MK. He spoke about the innovations that exist in this center alone. “We house the Russian Army’s first center for coordinating organ donation and transplant surgery, and a center for storing blood and tissue, which has a capacity unequalled anywhere in Russia. This is especially relevant for the Armed Forces. And a center for coordinating the work of all of the Russian Army’s medical establishments,” the medic relates with pride....

“Here we are able to offer telemedicine consultations and practical aid to serious cases, including to those who are located in the most remote parts of Russia....”



Strains in the Russia-Kazakh Relationship?

OE Watch Commentary: Since it was willing to employ force to protect its perceived interests in Ukraine, Russia's armed aggression has complicated the Kremlin's relations with its other neighbors. This aggressive sentiment serves as the background to a recent article from the centrist news source, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, where the author expresses his indignation at Kazakh authorities for their willingness to participate in a NATO peacekeeping exercise and work with the Americans to reduce WMD threats.

The author begins by bemoaning that the “core feature of the [peacekeeping] exercises is that Russian servicemen are absent from them,” and that “the instruction and training of the Kazakhstani men and officers within the Kazbat peacekeeping battalion is performed exclusively to the standards of the North Atlantic alliance.” He goes on to contrast the Kazakh willingness to participate in UN/NATO peacekeeping missions with its reluctance to assist its CSTO partner, Russia, with its mission in Syria. He mistakenly claims that “Kazakhstani service personnel... have taken part in the NATO operation in Afghanistan.” The author then goes on to suggest that Kazakh authorities might be considering drawing closer to the US since senior defense officials “concluded ... a plan of military cooperation for 2018-2022,” and that since “content of this plan is not being disclosed officially,” it “is giving rise to questions.”

To drive home the point that the Kremlin does not appreciate Kazakh closer relations with the US, the author then resorts to the canard that American attempts to control WMD within the region by helping to construct research facilities are “not entirely peaceful” and “present a potential danger for the Russian Federation.” That this normally centrist news source would now be suggesting that the US plans to use these research facilities to produce “biological weapons” reflects the depths to which US-Russian relations have sunk.

The author concludes on an ominous note, quoting a Russian military expert who asserts that “the Kazakhstani leadership is sitting on two stools,” and that “it is conniving at the clearly anti-Russian actions of the United States and other NATO countries.” This expert goes on to claim that “the United States is actively assimilating the Central Asian military theater. The presence of the Pentagon's service personnel in Kazakhstan affords an opportunity for objectively reconnoitering Russian military facilities.” Finally, he accuses “American advisers” with the recent decision to change the “Kazakh alphabet [from Cyrillic] to Latin script.” This could have dire consequences, since “more than half the population of Kazakhstan considers Russian its native language.” If this article is any indication, the Kremlin leadership may be considering employing greater pressure to keep Kazakhstan within its embrace. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Vladimir Putin and President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev (2012)

Source: Russian Presidency, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/trips/16505/photos/13365>,
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Continued: Strains in the Russia-Kazakh Relationship?

“You get the impression that the Kazakhstani leadership is sitting on two stools. On the one hand it is with Moscow, on the other, it is conniving at the clearly anti-Russian actions of the United States and other NATO countries”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Пентагон формирует в Казахстане антироссийский рубеж (The Pentagon Is Forming an Anti-Russian Line in Kazakhstan),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 9 August 2017. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2017-08-09/1_7047_kazakhstan.html

The Steppe Eagle 2017 international peacekeeping exercises have wrapped up in Kazakhstan with the participation of NATO and CIS countries at the Ilisky training range in Almaty Province. Such maneuvers have been held in the country regularly since 2003. A core feature of the exercises is that Russian servicemen are absent from them, the instruction and training of the Kazakhstani men and officers within the Kazbat peacekeeping battalion is performed exclusively to the standards of the North Atlantic alliance.

This time also Kazakhstani soldiers, together with military personnel from the United States and Britain, rehearsed at the exercises, whose main phase lasted more than three months, a set of various peacekeeping assignments. Saken Zhasuzakov, defense minister of Kazakhstan, believes that Steppe Eagle has become “an important instrument for the consolidation of cooperation and an enhancement of the level of interoperability of Kazbat subunits with NATO entities.” Positive assessments of the maneuvers were made also by Major-General Jan Toft, director of NATO’s Cooperation and Regional Security Division. The Kazakhstani defense department quoted President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who in his address to the UN Security Council noted that “Kazakhstan supports the continued improvement of the UN peacekeeping system and intends to increase the number of its military observers and peacekeepers in UN peacekeeping missions.”...

It is understandable that Kazakhstan wants to take a more active part in peacekeeping operations. But literally a month ago Kairat Abdrakhmanov, leader of the country’s foreign ministry, strictly ruled out the participation of Kazakhstani blue helmets in Syria lest they became “hostages of the situation”. ...Aspersions were clearly cast here at Russia, which for almost two years has been attempting in Syria to deal with the terrorists and reconcile the antagonists.

Kazakhstani service personnel, who together with their counterparts from the Russian Federation and other CIS countries are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, have taken part in the NATO operation in Afghanistan. But as distinct from Russia, Turkey, and Iran, are emphatically refusing to take part in such a mission in Syria. Of course, this is Kazakhstan’s right, but if the allied relations of Moscow and Astana are considered, this position is in clear contradiction with that of the Russian Federation.

This subject came to be discussed in the expert community when meetings of a Kazakhstani delegation led by Lieutenant-General Talgat Mukhtarov, deputy republic defense minister, with Pentagon representatives took place in July in Washington. Kazakhstan and the United States concluded at that time a plan of military cooperation for 2018-2022. The content of this plan is not being disclosed officially, and this in itself is giving rise to questions.

Many experts and politicians claim that there are American military facilities, which could present a potential danger for the Russian Federation and other countries of the CIS, on the territory of Kazakhstan. For example, the subject of the building with Pentagon money of biological centers in Georgia and Kazakhstan was raised during an exchange at the end of May 2017 during RF Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu’s government hour with members of the Federation Council. It is known, in addition, that with Washington funds totaling \$130 million such a facility was built in Almaty and commissioned in September 2016. The laboratory is officially intended for infectious-disease diagnostics, research, storage of the strains of particularly hazardous viruses, search for vaccines, and so forth. All this could be called simply biological weapons. But due supervision here on the part of the Russian Federation and other CIS countries is lacking, about which Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spoke back last September, emphasizing that the United States’ refusal “to create a mechanism of supervision of compliance with the requirements of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention prompts the thought that this research is not entirely peaceful.”...

“Russia and Kazakhstan are united by allied relations. In the military sphere included. We are jointly conquering space and organizing joint military international games and military exercises. Kazakhstan acquires Russian weapons at preferential prices.... But, unfortunately, these relations are accompanied by troublesome facts,” Lieutenant-General Yuriy Netkachev, military expert, believes. “You get the impression that the Kazakhstani leadership is sitting on two stools. On the one hand it is with Moscow, on the other, it is conniving at the clearly anti-Russian actions of the United States and other NATO countries.” NG’s source is certain that “through participation in Steppe Eagle-type military maneuvers the United States is actively assimilating the Central Asian military theater. The presence of the Pentagon’s service personnel in Kazakhstan affords an opportunity for objectively reconnoitering Russian military facilities.”

“The United States is instructing Kazakhstani servicemen free of charge, instilling in them its values and ideology. I am certain that the planned transition of the Kazakh alphabet to Latin script has been organized with the assistance of American advisers. This is a clear provocation and a shaping of the prerequisites for social conflicts. After all, more than half the population of Kazakhstan considers Russian its native language. For them, particularly for the Slavs, this will be an alien phenomenon,” the expert says.



Russia’s Northern Fleet and Pacific Fleet Share the Russian Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages discuss Russia’s activities in the Russian Arctic, including a new type of unit called the ecological platoon. The Russian Arctic coastline stretches 24,140 kilometers (15,000 miles). The Northern Fleet Operational Strategic Command is the main striking force in the Arctic. However, the Russian Pacific Fleet is building a base on Cape Schmidt, located on the headland of the Chukotka Peninsula across from the Bering Straits. The Eastern Military District, to which the Pacific Fleet belongs, has been delivering supplies to Cape Schmidt and the small naval facility and weather station on Wrangel Island. This would indicate that the Pacific Fleet controls the eastern entry to the Northern Sea Route. Does its control extend further to Kotelny Island in the New Siberian Island Group? Regardless, both the North Sea Fleet and Pacific Fleet are involved in cleaning up the old trash dumps of scrap metal left behind from the Soviet era. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Russian Navy reports progress in building east Arctic base,” *The Independent Barents Observer*, 8 June 2017. <https://www.arcticnow.com/arctic-news/2017/06/08/russian-navy-reports-progress-in-building-east-arctic-base>

A total of seven new buildings and facilities have been built on the [Cape Schmidt] compound. Another 17 are under construction and will be handed over to the Navy in the course of the year. Cape Schmidt is located on the coast of the Chukotka Sea. The base on site will be operated by the Pacific Fleet. In the late 1980s, the town housed more than 4,500 people. By 2016, the population had shrunk to only 150.

The town’s revival came with the Russian Armed Forces’ decision in 2014 to reconstruct local infrastructure, including the airfield. A total of 1.5 billion rubles have been invested in the base. Construction started in October 2014 and was originally to be completed by the end of 2015. The Russian Armed Forces have over the last years invested heavily in the development of new and upgraded bases along the country’s Arctic coast. Among the other east Arctic bases are Kotelny in the New Siberian Islands and the Wrangel Island.

Source: “Eastern District Helicopters Deliver Cargo to Arctic Garrisons in Extreme Conditions,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 24 July 2017. <http://www.mil.ru>

The Eastern Military District’s army aviation crews deployed in the Arctic zone have delivered cargo to the district’s remote garrisons on Wrangel Island and Cape Schmidt under extreme conditions. Mi-26 and Mi-8amtsh helicopters delivered 11 tons of cargo and rotated servicemen on duty in military units on Wrangel Island and Cape Schmidt. In addition, the Eastern Military District’s army aviation helicopters delivered an environmental platoon, which will clean up the territory of Wrangel Island. The flight routes pass through several major mountain passes which experience difficult climatic conditions -- low temperatures and strong winds, that demand top skills and flying experience from the aircrew.

Source: “Military ecologists remove almost 2,000 tonnes of scrap metal from Wrangel Island over 2 years,” *Interfax*, 8 August 2017. <http://www.interfax.com>

An Eastern Military District ecological unit has collected 1,815 tons of scrap metal, including 36,000 pressed empty gasoline barrels, from Wrangel Island in the Arctic Ocean over the past two years. According to an official statement “All of the collected scrap metal was removed from the island by third-party ships and Pacific Fleet support vessels. More than 10 hectares of the island have been cleaned up.”

More scrap metal is being collected and prepared for removal from the island. “Before the end of October, 20 servicemen of an Eastern Military District ecological platoon will collect about 600 tons of scrap metal and send it to the mainland. They are using presses, generators, blow torches, a KS-45722 crane, and TEU containers.”

Wrangel Island is a Russian island in the Arctic Ocean which lies between the East Siberian and Chukchi seas. It is an administrative unit of the Iultinsky district of the Chukchi autonomous region.....

“Seventeen new buildings, power generation stations and a freshwater well are under construction in Cape Schmidt, the east Arctic Navy base. Two diesel-powered electricity generators and a fresh water extraction unit are ready for use. The system has the capacity to pump eight cubic meters of water per hour. Previously, the personnel on site had to melt snow to get needed fresh water.”



Military base and the “Temp” airdrome renovation on New Siberian Islands (Kotelny Island)
Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/mcis/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=13078@cmsPhotoGallery>, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>



Northern Fleet Puts to Sea in Support of Operation Zapad

OE Watch Commentary: The Northern Fleet has been busy this summer. There was the huge Naval Day parade in St. Petersburg, support to Syria and now a large-scale exercise that, according to the excerpted article, is a prequel to the joint Russian-Belarus drills “Zapad-2017,” scheduled for 14-20 September. This Western Military District exercise is important as it is headed by the Commander of the Russian Navy-Admiral Vladimir Ivanovitch Korolev. Admiral Korolev is a submariner who rose to command the Black Sea Fleet and the Northern Fleet, as well as the Arctic Strategic-Operational Command, before becoming the top sailor in the Russian Navy. He is clearly no stranger to the cold waters of the north. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Northern Fleet announces big-scale exercise”, *The Independent Barents Observer*, 9 August 2017. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2017/08/northern-fleet-announces-big-scale-exercise>

The Northern Fleet, the most powerful of Russia’s five fleets, is unfolding a special exercise which includes key elements of the fleet’s capabilities.

The exercise will be headed directly by Russian Navy Head Commander Vladimir Korolyev and will last for several days.... Included are about 50 ships, submarines and support vessels as well as aircraft and helicopters from the Air Force and Air Defense.... The exercise is being held as several of the most powerful Northern Fleet vessels are on their way home after participation in a Navy parade outside St. Petersburg. Among them are the battle cruiser “Pyotr Veliky” [Peter the Great] and typhoon-class submarine “Dmitry Donskoy”. It is likely that the returning vessels will take part in the exercise.

In the course of the exercise, antisubmarine and anti-sabotage training will be conducted along with navigational, hydrographical, anti-mine and search and rescue operations.

“According to the Navy representatives, the exercise is held as a preparatory phase to the large-scale joint Russian-Belarus drills ‘Zapad-2017’ scheduled for the period 14-20 September.”



III Winter Military World Games (Ships set out from Northern Fleet headquarters in Severomorsk)

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/cism2017/photo/gallery.htm?id=42612@cmsPhotoGallery>, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode>



Russian Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) Expansion into the Pacific

OE Watch Commentary: Russia has three Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminals in the Arctic-Murmansk, the Yamal Peninsula and the Gydan Peninsula. The last two are owned by the Russian Novatek Corporation. Russia is pumping a lot of oil and gas from its Arctic oilfields. LNG transported from the Arctic region requires expensive ice-class LNG carrier vessels. As the accompanying passage discusses, Novatek is considering building an LNG transshipment facility on the eastern coast with a capacity for 20 million tons a year. This would provide a point where regular LNG carrier vessels could pick up the product for further distribution in the Asia-Pacific region. As a Novatek official notes, construction of the terminal is “a mega-project...” that would last “for 40 years at a minimum and perhaps for all of 100,” adding that “this is a permanent business.” LNG terminals have special security and disaster response requirements-many of which must be met by the military. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The terminal is needed to optimize the cost of delivering LNG from Novatek projects in Russia’s Arctic sector (on the Yamal and Gydan peninsulas) to the main LNG consumer markets in the Asia-Pacific region. LNG would be delivered to the terminal in ice-class LNG carriers on the Northern Sea Route and then transferred to conventional LNG carriers, which are significantly less expensive.”

Source: “Novatek may build LNG transshipment terminal in Kamchatka” *Interfax*, 2 August 2017. <http://www.interfax.com>

Lev Feodosyev, Novatek’s deputy CEO and commercial director stated that Novatek is evaluating the technical aspects of a project to build an LNG transshipment facility on Kamchatka’s eastern coast with a capacity for 20 million tons a year. “We see that this makes commercial sense,” Feodosyev said at a meeting in Kamchatka. “Kamchatka is the first region with deep-water, ice-free bays with direct access to the Pacific Ocean. Geography itself has dictated our appearance here.” He declined to provide approximate figures on how much investment the project will require or the size of the savings it would generate. “It is too early to say. The cost could vary substantially depending on the concept that is ultimately selected.”

Feodosyev also declined to name a precise construction date. “We are to finish the design of the Arctic LNG 2 project [Gyadin Peninsula] by the end of 2018. Naturally, having arrived at investment decisions for this project, we must understand the transport concept. Accordingly, we will have to come to a decision for ourselves concerning transshipment.” Feodosyev added that the terminal will be designed only with Novatek projects in mind....

A Novatek delegation including specialists from the Atomflot state enterprise and CJSC GT Morstroy and representatives of leading foreign engineering firms from France, South Korea and Japan has already reconnoitered Kamchatka’s eastern shore and made a technical assessment of potential sites for the terminal. The specialists also have to settle on how much capacity to build, and whether an LNG storage facility will be built or if the terminal will have a system for transferring LNG directly from one ship to another....

In turn, Atomflot General Director Vyacheslav Ruksha told journalists that construction of the terminal is “a mega-project that requires absolutely different approaches. “Transshipment will be for 40 years at a minimum and perhaps for all of 100. Therefore it is extremely important. This is a permanent business. Here there is work for decades.”



Gas production launched at Bovanenkovo field
Source: Russian Presidency Website, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/16703>, CC 4.0



Russia's National Guard Forms a Science Company

OE Watch Commentary: Lieutenant General Yevgeniy Fuzhenko, chief of Rosgvardiya's (Russian National Guard) Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate, told journalists that Rosgvardiya will be forming its first science company in the fall. It will include both conscripts and contract servicemen. Science companies were the invention of Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, who announced that "gifted students of civilian educational institutes, whose scientific achievements are in demand for accomplishing military scientific tasks" should be formed into military science companies. Here, young servicemen can learn from professionals in their area of expertise. Currently there are 649 servicemen located in other Defense Ministry science companies. As the excerpt below notes, there are specific directions of work for the new servicemen to follow in their work for Rosgvardiya, to include public relations on social networks. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

“The main directions of activity we are planning as of today are Internet research, multimedia technologies, and software. The second block is participation in developing preliminary specifications for designing arms, military vehicles, and various equipment. And the third block is the study of domestic and foreign arms as well as domestic and foreign experience of state security and counterterrorism,” the General said.”

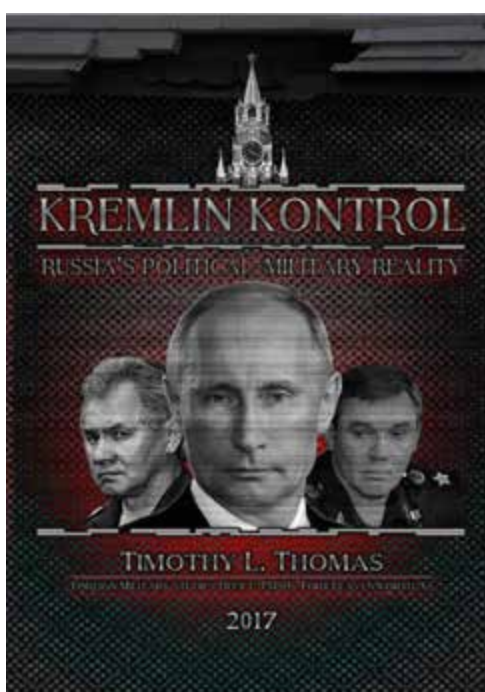
Source: “Armed Forces Department: PR and Science Summoned to Rosgvardiya: First Scientific Company Will Appear in Rosgvardiya in the Fall,” *Gazeta.ru*, 27 July 2017.

The National Guard Adds a Science Company

“The main directions of activity we are planning as of today are Internet research, multimedia technologies, and software. The second block is participation in developing preliminary specifications for designing arms, military vehicles, and various equipment. And the third block is the study of domestic and foreign arms as well as domestic and foreign experience of state security and counterterrorism,” the General said.

Preference in screening and selection for the Rosgvardiya scientific company will be given to winners of Olympiads and contests, to state scholarship holders, and to authors of scientific works “of special applied importance for the National Guard troops,” Fuzhenko said. The Rosgvardiya Department for Coordination with the SMI [Mass Media] also announced that a team will be formed in the scientific company which will engage in studying PR technologies and improving the department’s image. The group will number seven persons, Rosgvardiya added.

In a conversation with Gazeta.Ru, FSB [Federal Security Service] Major General (Retired) Aleksandr Mikhaylov, former chief of the special service’s Public Relations Center, supposed that conscripted personnel recruited for the new Rosgvardiya subunit would engage in department PR on social networks.



KREMLIN KONTROL by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

In 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country’s security forces and reestablished the nation’s military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>