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ON THE COVER: TEXT BACKGROUND IMAGE: Zapad-2017: Countersabotage training by Russian units (Borisovsky range).-
Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=45295@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.

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A Russian Critique of “Zapad”

OE Watch Commentary: Most of the major Russian media were unsparing in their praise while covering the recent Zapad 2017 military exercises. Evening TV newscasts were filled with scenes of advancing armor, streaking aircraft, and exploding munitions. While the exercise scenario was built around the need to defeat “a terrorist assault force” from an imaginary country near the Baltics, daily news reports emphasized the growing strength of Russia’s conventional military and its ability to defend against Western military forces. This disconnect between the exercise scenario and the actual conduct of military operations was broached in a recent interview with political analyst Stepan Sulakshin in the Russian weekly, *Sobesednik Online*.

The interview begins with Sulakshin asserting that “the Zapad-2017 exercises – are an extremely demonstrative political and geopolitical event,” not because they are based in reality, but rather because “they demonstrate that degradation is occurring... in the Russian military leadership as in the rest of the spheres of the country’s life.” The expert criticizes the country’s political and military leadership for staging what he describes as “really the picture of the Great Patriotic War.” He insists that these conventional displays of firepower are not indicative of “future war” and not designed to handle genuine terrorist threats. Instead of proclaiming that the West presents a genuine military threat, Russian authorities state that “the formations in the field are combating terrorists.”

“It was announced quite recently that we are Europe and that our values are the same as Europe’s, and now we are demonstrating our military capabilities to them on the border with Europe.”

Sulakshin points out the inherent contradiction in the current Kremlin approach: insisting that Russia is an integral part of Europe, while at the same time “demonstrating our military capabilities to them on the border with Europe.” He posits that this incongruity might be explained by domestic concerns over the “future presidential election” as the current “political regime [wants] to assert its right to existence.” Moreover, he suggests that these exercises “are also attempting in part to frighten the West.” The article concludes with speculation as to why the presidents of Russia and Belarus failed to meet during the course of the Zapad exercise, speculating that “personal relations are so strained” and that this suggests “incompatibility.”

As the recently completed Zapad 2017 exercise indicates, there is no question that the Russian military continues to develop its conventional warfare capabilities. However, as this article suggests, there are doubts among some observers whether these increased military capabilities will address the actual threats Russia will face in the future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Oleg Ushakov, “Запад-2017: как Путин и Лукашенко попытались напугать Европу (Zapad-2017: How Putin and Lukashenko Attempted To Frighten Europe),” *Sobesednik Online*, 19 September 2017. <https://sobesednik.ru/politika/zapad-2017-kak-putin-i-lukashenko-popytalis-napugat-evropu>

...What is the Russian Army, against whom are the RF and Belarus preparing to fight and why did Putin and Lukashenko not meet at one range? Center for Scientific and Political Thought and Ideology General Director Stepan Sulakshin answered these and other questions of Sobesednik.ru:

[Sulakshin] The Zapad-2017 exercises – are an extremely demonstrative political and geopolitical event. First: they demonstrate that degradation is occurring at those same rates in the Russian military leadership as in the rest of the spheres of the country’s life. They show us the battlefield, tanks, and howitzers and this is really the picture of the Great Patriotic War. A future war will absolutely not be that.... The second factor. This is simply some sort of mumbo-jumbo: the combined Russo-Belarusian formations repelled a terrorist assault force. Listen, it turns out that the terrorists don’t have a “suicide belt” and not a gas canister, but aircraft and airborne troops. This is called not terrorists and not terrorism. And where is the precise military doctrine? Where is the serious designation of the probable enemy and the preparation for actual threats? These are Potemkin villages, which instill a sense of horror....

[Ushakov] But whom do we want to defeat using sheer numbers?

[Sulakshin] You know, we intend to beat the terrorists. This issue is bypassed in silence in the military doctrine. The Americans have precisely designated the threats: the DPRK, Iran, and Russia. Therefore, military planning there is adequate, transparent, and intelligible both for the allies and for the entire world. And what a load of rubbish is being communicated to the world from the Russian side – that the formations in the field are combating terrorists? This is also evidence that we are not observing professional readiness for military threats by Russia.

...It is also alarming that a value platform, an ideological base, for which countries also fight, does not exist for Putin’s Russia. It was announced quite recently that we are Europe and that our values are the same as Europe’s, and now we are demonstrating our military capabilities to them on the border with Europe. From all appearances, these are the latest historical attempts of a totally incompetent political regime to assert its right to existence. They are asserting this primarily to the Russian people in the period immediately preceding the future presidential election, and they are also attempting in part to frighten the West....

...[Ushakov] With regard to the lack of a meeting of Putin and Lukashenko: if, as you said, they received “black marks” from the West, then why did they not at least demonstrate that they are in agreement in front of the television cameras?

[Sulakshin] Apparently, the personal relations are so strained that this is already called “incompatibility”....



Polish Views of "Zapad"

OE Watch Commentary: Given their long, difficult history with Russia, many Poles tend to regard their large eastern neighbor with fear and wariness. These concerns have escalated since Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine and the Kremlin's continued emphasis on military modernization. As the two accompanying excerpts from the popular Polish newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* illustrate, these apprehensions were on full display during (and after) the recent Zapad 2017 Russia-Belarus military exercise.

The first excerpt, published just as the exercise was getting under way, claims that Zapad's primary objective is "to frighten the societies in many counties of Eastern and Northern Europe that fear an act of aggression." Since improving and modernizing its armed forces, "Russia has turned into a power that could intimidate anyone." The author claims that this psychological "battle over mind control... is the real war that Russia is waging." The author further asserts that Russia's improved military status is also driven by a desire to restore the prowess of the USSR, where the Kremlin's "position is almost the same as back in the times of the Soviet Union," and that Putin wants to send the message that "everyone is taking us seriously." Moreover, this focus on defense preparedness has a domestic aspect as it reminds the Russian population "that the West poses a real threat to Russia, which is why he [Putin] should remain in office."

The second excerpt was published as the Zapad exercises were ending and also claims that the primary objectives "were chiefly political." The author asserts that even though none of the earlier threats of possible Russian aggression materialized, NATO countries must remain vigilant in the future. The author warns that "the moral of the Zapad drill is simple: we should take into account an act of aggression on the part of Russia at all times and prepare for it, regardless of whether the warnings of experts are justified or temporarily unfounded." He goes on to say that the more exercises are held, "the easier it will be in the future to conceal actual preparations for an act of aggression." The article concludes with a categorical statement: "Russia is an enemy and should be treated like one." Considering their troubled history with Russia, and given that Poland lies just to the West (Zapad) of any possible Russia-Belarus attack, these dire Polish reactions to the recently completed Zapad military exercise are understandable. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Poland in Europe.
Source: MoukhametovR, via Wikimedia Commons https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Image_of_Poland_in_Europe.jpg gif CCA-SA 3.0.

“Moscow wants to conceal its readiness for a war with NATO...”

Source: Marek Kozubal, "Zapad, czyli jak przestraszyć świat (Zapad Drill, or How To Spook the World)," *Rzeczpospolita*, 15 September 2017. <http://www.rp.pl/Swiat/309149876-Zapad-czyli-jak-przestraszyc-swiat.html>

Russian and Belarusian soldiers are countering an attack of infiltrators. In reality, this is a display of Russia's game of appearances called maskirovka....

...Undoubtedly, Russia has already achieved its goal with the help of Belarus. It has managed to frighten the societies in many counties of Eastern and Northern Europe that fear an act of aggression. In the eyes of many of them, Russia has turned into a power that could intimidate anyone. It has used this method for many months in order to win the battle over mind control. That is the real war that Russia is waging....

...The drill carries greater importance in [Russian President] Vladimir Putin's domestic policy. He wants to tell Russian citizens, "Look, our position is almost the same as back in the times of the Soviet Union, everyone is taking us seriously." He also wants to show them that the West poses a real treat to Russia, which is why he should remain in office....

Source: Andrzej Talaga, "Talaga: Rosja naszym wrogiem (Talaga: Russia Is Our Enemy)," *Rzeczpospolita*, 20 September 2017. <http://www.rp.pl/Rzecz-polityce/309199899-Talaga-Rosja-naszym-wrogiem.html>

The Zapad 2017 exercises are coming to an end. The drill was not merely aimed at testing military skills -- its goals were chiefly political.

It was not a cover for a military operation against NATO or Ukraine or for occupation of Belarus but a virus released into NATO's immune system. The more exercises are held that allegedly serve as a prelude to a war, the easier it will be in the future to conceal actual preparations for an act of aggression and the softer the public will be in the West, including in Poland.

The moral of the Zapad drill is simple: we should take into account an act of aggression on the part of Russia at all times and prepare for it, regardless of whether the warnings of experts are justified or temporarily unfounded. Moscow wants to conceal its readiness for a war with NATO...

...When another drill is held at NATO's borders, it will be therefore more difficult to formulate radical warnings. After that, they will not even attract the interest of the public. And that is exactly the purpose. Media outlets and opinion leaders, also in Poland, were right in making warnings, but they have unintentionally become a tool in Russia's hybrid warfare....

...That is exactly how an attack on the Baltics and Poland could look. Maneuvers provide the best cover for an attack and will do so also in the future. It pays for Russia to escalate tensions before every drill to prove repeatedly that the fears are unfounded and to strike when no one believes in the warnings any longer.

That is not a scenario of a certain war but an option in which Moscow is investing forces and financial resources. The Zapad 2017 drill was not a prelude to war and it may not serve as one in the following years, but Poland should always take this option into account. Russia is an enemy and should be treated like one.



Kazakhstan’s Parallel Military Exercise

OE Watch Commentary: Kazakhstan’s Armed Forces carry out a number of field training exercises in a given year, but as the accompanying excerpted news articles report, the recent Kazakh exercise “Karatau-2017” received attention for its size and the fact that it took place around the same time that Russia and Belarus carried out “Zapad-2017.” The accompanying articles provide insight into Kazakh and Russian perspectives on Karatau-2017.

The first article from *Inform Buro*, a Russian-language news website in Kazakhstan, reports on several notable things about Karatau-2017, including that in the exercise’s scenario “two large illegally formed groups committed an incursion through the border in the south and southeast” and that “Syrian motives were involved in the exercise to some extent.”

Past exercises of Kazakh forces typically involved a scenario of combating a terrorist group which crossed the border into Kazakhstan, but this one also included a situation in which the group “not only captured territory and populated areas, but destroyed military units” and “took small arms and armored vehicles.” This additional aspect of the exercise scenario could be related to Kazakh leadership watching what happened in Syria as the article notes. However, it is worth remembering the incident in the city of Aqtobe in June 2016, when a couple dozen men with alleged ties to a terrorist group attacked a National Guard facility. The group killed three service members and wounded several before a National Guard unit drove them off. Security analysts and media in Kazakhstan thought the group attacked the National Guard in order to seize weapons, but never confirmed this.

The *Inform Buro* article also notes some of the equipment used in the exercise and how “the theater of military operations was controlled by unmanned aerial vehicles, one of which was armed,” and how the Kazakh forces “have new, tactically linked, radio systems...produced in Kazakhstan under a joint venture.” This is in addition to Kazakh forces using “a modified version of the ‘Arlan’ armored vehicle.” The use of the radio systems and the Arlan armored vehicles show how the armed forces are utilizing a couple of the locally produced pieces of equipment only a few years after production started. The UAV mentioned is likely a variant of the Wing Loong acquired from China a few years ago and the exercise marks one of the first times that Kazakhs used it in an exercise for its offensive capabilities.

Lastly, the articles from *Tengri News*, a Kazakh government news website, and *Ratel*, an independent Russian language website with news on Kazakhstan, report on other exercises that took place around the same time as Zapad-2017. Some Russian media believed the exercises were directed against Russia, but as the articles note, the exercise in Atyrau involved a joint effort to “eliminate the terrorists who had captured a worker’s village,” while the exercise outside Astana took place “to check the readiness of the forces and capabilities of the operational headquarters” of the capital. The exercises do not appear to have involved a large number of personnel and focused only on counterterrorism scenarios. Ultimately, while some in Russia saw Karatau-2017 with alarm, the exercises from a Kazakh perspective is a chance for the armed forces to prepare for various scenarios and test new weapons and equipment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: Bedenko, Grigoriya. “Стратегические учения ‘Капатау-2017’” (The strategic exercise “Karatau-2017”),” *Inform Buro*, 23 September 2017. <https://informburo.kz/stati/strategicheskie-ucheniya-karatau-2017-fotoreportazh.html>

The Armed Forces of Kazakhstan wrapped up the strategic exercise “Karatau-2017” this week, the largest in the past several years. The main feature of the exercise is that for the first time, the tactic of combating a conventional enemy was reconfigured with the use of new military equipment...The operational-strategic exercise began on 12 September and according to the scenario, two large illegally formed groups committed an incursion through the border in the south and southeast...The main goal is check the combat readiness of personnel. Also, reconnaissance forces had to carry out a special operation...

The active phase of Karatau-2017 took place at two Kazakhstan facilities: Matybulak in Zhambyl Oblast and at the Koktal training site in the Zharkent area. The first is for training on the plain, the second is for training combat training in the mountains. Tank units and motorized rifle troops were transferred to areas where the forces of the enemy are concentrated...

Lieutenant-General Murat Maikeev, Chief of the General Staff: “...We used the usual and entirely new weapons. The theater of military operations was controlled by unmanned aerial vehicles, one of which was armed...

It is interesting that Syrian motives were involved in the exercise to some extent...the potential enemy, numbering more than a hundred, not only captured territory and populated areas, but destroyed military units. Accordingly, they took small arms and armored vehicles. In order to suppress the group, heavy weapons, including anti-tank systems, were utilized. The fighting started with artillery units, armed with howitzers, multiple rocket launcher systems and air support. Units with armored vehicles then conducted operations, finally knocking out the enemy in hard to reach terrain...At the Koktal training site, reconnaissance units used the Skylark UAV...We have new, tactically linked, radio systems. These are produced in Kazakhstan under a joint venture. (Also), there is a modified version of the “Arlan” armored vehicle...In the future, we will increase the supply of these to units...

Source: “В Атырауской области прошли учения “Каспий-Антитеррор-2017”” (The exercise “Caspian-Antiterror-2017” took place in the Atyrau Oblast),” *Tengri News*, 17 September 2017. https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/atyrauskoy-oblasti-proshli-ucheniya-kaspiy-antiterror-2017-326712/

The Regional Command “West” took part in the operational-tactical exercise “Caspian-Antiterror-2017”...according to the aim of the exercise, special purpose units needed to coordinate their actions and jointly eliminate the terrorists who had captured a worker’s village and rescue hostages...

(continued)



Continued: Kazakhstan's Parallel Military Exercise

“It is interesting that Syrian motives were involved in the exercise to some extent...the potential enemy, numbering more than a hundred, not only captured territory and populated areas, but destroyed military units.”

Source: “Антитеррористические учения проходят близ Астаны (An antiterrorism exercise is taking place near Astana),” *Ratel*, 16 September 2017. http://www.ratel.kz/kaz/antiterroristicheskie_uchenija_prohodjat_bliz_astany

An antiterrorism exercise is taking place near Astana – in the village of Koshy...The goal of the exercise is to check the readiness of the forces and capabilities of the operational headquarters as part of an emergency response to indicators of terrorism in the areas near the capital...



БПЛА Wing Loong на военном параде в Астане. 7.05.2017 (The UAV Wing Loong at a military parade in Astana. 7.05.2017).

Source: by Kalabaha1969, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AWing_Loong_\(3\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AWing_Loong_(3).jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0



Russia Takes Note of Conflicting Kazakh Exercise

OE Watch Commentary: Since the annexation of Crimea and its military involvement in southeast Ukraine and Syria, even Russia's closest neighbors have expressed concern with the Kremlin's more assertive foreign policy and continued focus on military modernization. Kazakhstan shares a 4,250-mile border with Russia and ethnic Russians make up over 20% of the Kazakh population. While on the surface, Kazakh-Russian relations remain strong, the excerpts from the accompanying articles from Russia and Kazakhstan suggest that tensions may be growing.

The first excerpt, from the Russian centrist daily, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, complains that Kazakh military authorities dared to stage an international exercise at the same time Russia was involved in staging "Zapad-2017, which was being carried out by the Russian Federation and Belorussia." The article includes a quote from a Russian military expert who labels the Kazakh exercise as "troubling," explaining that "at a time when Russia is concentrating its forces along a western strategic axis, a Kazakhstani strike group appears in its rear. Why?" The article quotes another Russian source who bemoans the fact that Kazakhstan refused Russia's offer "to participate in a peacekeeping force stationed in the de-escalation zone in Syria... , while at the same time expressing a desire to cooperate with UN forces under the auspices of NATO."



Russia-Kazakhstan Border.

Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kazakhstan_political_map_2000.jpg, Public Domain.

The second excerpt, from a Kazakh source, addresses some of the negative accusations found in the Russian article. The author points out that "Kazakhstan signed an agreement on military collaboration with the USA for 2018-22," and reminds the reader of earlier preposterous Russian charges regarding Kazakh international military contacts. The article goes on to point out that the author of the Russian article "was not even interested in asking the opinion of the Kazakh side on this matter." The Kazakh article includes a quote from a local expert who asserts that "Russia considers partnership with Kazakhstan as its own complete domination in the region," and that any independent move on the part of the Kazakh military leadership "triggers a nervous reaction from Moscow." Another Kazakh expert explains that this Russian "paranoia" may stem from the "degradation of the expert community in [Russia]... and the replacement of analysis with propaganda." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, "Назарбаев поднял армию в ружье (Nazarbayev Calls Military Forces to Arms)," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 13 September 2017. http://www.ng.ru/cis/2017-09-13/2_7072_nazarbaev.html

Kazakhstan, together with Sweden, Finland, Ukraine, and the NATO countries... abruptly brought its forces to their highest state of combat readiness the day before the Russian Federation and Belorussia initiated their joint strategic exercises -- "Zapad-2017." Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense reported the start of operational-strategic exercise "Karatau-2017" in the eastern, southeastern, southern, and western regions of the country, which is the first time such maneuvers have been launched in virtually the whole of the country and in such proximity to the borders of the Russian Federation. The massive character of the exercises is also a first.

According to the Military Department of Kazakhstan, "more than 1,500 pieces of military equipment and more than 40 aircraft and helicopters were involved in the operational-strategic exercise together with almost 10,000 military personnel. Naval vessels were also deployed in the Caspian Sea." Kazakhstan, as is generally known, is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and an ally of the Russian Federation, though there are questions as to the reasons behind the exercises.

First, it is not known whether observers from Russian were invited to the exercises.... Second, the start of the operational-strategic exercise "Karatau-2017" coincided for some reason with the start of similar maneuvers, namely, "Zapad-2017," that were being carried out by the Russian Federation and Belorussia....

"I do not think Kazakhstan has succumbed to the hysteria that Ukraine and the NATO countries have shown regarding the 'Zapad-2017' exercises, but its military activity in the Volga region and in the Caspian is troubling. At a time when Russia is concentrating its forces along a western strategic axis, a Kazakhstani strike group appears in its rear. Why?" asked Colonel Eduard Rodyukov, a corresponding member of the Academy of Military Science....

"There has been a longstanding tendency for Kazakhstan to distance itself from military cooperation with Russia," notes military expert Lieutenant General Yuriy Netkachev. In confirmation of this, he cites the fact that Astana refused Moscow and Ankara's offer to participate in a peacekeeping force stationed in the de-escalation zone in Syria. Kazakhstan did this while at the same time expressing a desire to cooperate with UN forces under the auspices of NATO...

(continued)



Continued: Russia Takes Note of Conflicting Kazakh Exercise

“The issue is that Russia considers partnership with Kazakhstan as its own complete domination in the region...”

Source: Vyacheslav Polovinko, “Оно нам НАТО? (Do you need NATO?),” *Novaya Gazeta Kazakhstan Online*, 17 August 2017. <http://eurasianews.info/politika/ono-nam-nato.html>

Russian newspapers are actively focusing on Kazakhstan again... The publications are playing the same old tune that Russia’s geographically and geopolitically closest partner is actually not that close ideologically, and it is uncontrollably being drawn to NATO. Last week a report headlined “Pentagon is forming an anti-Russian frontier in Kazakhstan” by observer Vladimir Mukhin was published in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. It talked about the completed “Stepnoy Oryol-2017” [“Steppe Eagle-2017”] military exercises where, as the author emphasized, the Russian military was absent and all the training of the troops was done “exclusively according to the standards of the North Atlantic Alliance”.

It seems that there is nothing wrong in the training itself, the publication said. However, Kazakhstan signed an agreement on military collaboration with the USA for 2018-22. There are some biological centers in the country’s territory and nobody can say with certainty that they are being used for peaceful purposes....

Besides, it is always dangerous when America is around the corner. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* cited a military expert, Yuriy Netkachev, who suggested that Kazakh soldiers were being influenced even mentally. “The USA is training Kazakh military servicemen at no cost, instilling its own values and ideology in them. I am sure that the scheduled switch of the Kazakh alphabet to the Latin script has been organized with US advisers. It is a clear provocation....At the same time, the publication was not even interested in asking the opinion of the Kazakh side on this matter..

The director-general of the Central Asian foundation for the development of democracy, PhD Tolgonay Umbetaliyeva, easily discerns the logic of Russia that is worried about “approaching NATO”. “The issue is that Russia considers partnership with Kazakhstan as its own complete domination in the region,” the political expert said.... On the whole, Russia is irritated by Kazakhstan’s multi-vector [foreign] policy, the expert suggested. Of course, it is not mentioned directly, but Astana’s any significant actions in relation to countries that are geopolitical rivals for Russia triggers a nervous reaction from Moscow. ...

...Over the last few years, their reaction has been close to paranoia, the director of the risk assessment group, Dosym Satpayev, noted. ... But Russia is picking on it time and time again, which is testament to the degradation of the expert community in the neighboring country and the replacement of analysis with propaganda,” Satpayev added.





Telephone Threats

OE Watch Commentary: Even though the Kremlin-sponsored media provided extensive coverage of the Zapad-2017 military exercise, many Russians were more concerned with a series of nation-wide telephone bomb threats. Not surprisingly, some Russian analysts claimed that this “telephone terrorism” was just another weapon in the West’s “hybrid war” arsenal, directed at interfering with the Zapad exercise. These allegations are examined in the first brief accompanying excerpt from the centrist news site, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*.

The author begins by describing the scale of the bomb threats, pointing out that one day alone, “people were evacuated from more than 200 civilian facilities in Omsk, Stavropol’, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Magadan, Vladivostok, Perm’, Kaliningrad, Krasnoyarsk, Yakutsk, and other cities.” Rather than considering that these threats stem from domestic sources, the author blames “foreign forces” who allegedly want “to intimidate the population and force the country’s security agencies to operate on an emergency footing.” According to one source quoted in the article, “the calls are coming from Ukrainian territory.” Another expert suggests that “the bomb calls are a new kind of hacker attack aimed at destabilizing the situation in the country,” and will likely “peak in 2018 when the Russian presidential election takes place.”

The article points out that with modern technology, “it is very difficult to determine where the call came from.” Regardless, accusing foreign enemies, the author quotes a “specialist in the sphere of cybersecurity,” who asserts that “the mass bomb calls are an “element of hybrid war by the West,” designed to “hinder the organization of the Zapad-2017 joint strategic exercises.” This expert points out that NATO has enhanced its cybersecurity and communication assets and “that cyber wars are in the front rank in the arsenals of the NATO strategists.” The article concludes with the bold assertion that the main objective of the US and NATO is “to undermine the foundations of the Russian state system.”

The telephone bomb threats have continued since the end of the Zapad exercise and according to the second excerpt from the Russian daily, *Kommersant*, in early October, the Federal Security Director claimed that four Russian citizens living outside of the country were responsible. While the perpetrators have yet to be identified or apprehended, Russian authorities will likely continue to blame the West (Zapad) when domestic problems occur. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...All the indications are that foreign forces are involved in the attempts to intimidate the population and force the country’s security agencies to operate on an emergency footing.”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Против РФ развязали гибридную войну: Накануне учений ‘Запад-2017’ страну атаковали лжетеррористы (Hybrid War Unleashed Against Russian Federation. Pseudo-Terrorists Attack Country Ahead of Zapad-2017 Exercises),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 15 September 2017. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2017-09-15/2_7074_war.html

The start of the Zapad-2017 Russian-Belarusian joint strategic exercises was unexpectedly marked by the appearance of a real enemy -- telephone terrorism. Calls about the planting of bombs at dozens of facilities throughout Russia proved false. But they destabilized the situation in many cities, including Moscow. There have as yet been no detailed explanations from the security agencies, except for the fact that criminal proceedings have been instituted in relation to instances of the threat of terrorism. The scale of the action is impressive. On Tuesday [12 September] alone, according to the media’s calculations, people were evacuated from more than 200 civilian facilities in Omsk, Stavropol’, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Magadan, Vladivostok, Perm’, Kaliningrad, Krasnoyarsk, Yakutsk, and other cities....

...All the indications are that foreign forces are involved in the attempts to intimidate the population and force the country’s security agencies to operate on an emergency footing. RIA Novosti yesterday cited a source in the law enforcement agencies who reported that “there is operational information confirming that the calls are coming from Ukrainian territory.” At the same time many experts believe that the telephone terrorists were operating with the help of numerous IP telephony services. ... this makes it possible to call from any country anonymously over the Internet. And it is very difficult to determine where the call came from....

...Some of the media cited Andrey Masalovich, a specialist in the sphere of information security and a leading expert on competitive intelligence, who believes that the bomb calls are a new kind of hacker attack aimed at destabilizing the situation in the country. The expert believes that actions of this kind will intensify in the near future. And they will peak “in 2018 when the Russian presidential election takes place.” ... A similar opinion is held by Reserve Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandr Ovchinnikov, a specialist in the sphere of cybersecurity. He believes that the mass bomb calls are an “element of hybrid war by the West.” The calls, the expert suggests, were prompted by the special services of unfriendly states in order to disrupt the operation of the local organs of power, the MVD [Ministry of Internal Affairs], and other security agencies. The purpose of the attack, in his opinion, is to hinder the organization of the Zapad-2017 joint strategic exercises....

...But the mass telephone operations by the pseudo-terrorists coincided with the start of active maneuvers by NATO, Ukraine, and other countries near Russia’s borders,” the expert points out. Ovchinnikov reminds us that a NATO cybersecurity center [NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence] operates in Estonia, and the Alliance’s Strategic Communications Center [of Excellence] in Latvia.... “we know that cyber wars are in the front rank in the arsenals of the NATO strategists,” Ovchinnikov notes....

Previously Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported, citing authoritative sources, that after the events of 2014 information and psychological operations subunits were deployed in Ukraine with the support of the United States and NATO, their main objective being to “undermine the foundations of the Russian state system.”

Source: Nikolai Sergeyev, “Минировали из-за границы (Mining from abroad),” *Kommersant*, 5 October 2017. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3429981>

Director of the Federal Security Service of Russia, Alexander Bortnikov, said that organizers of the large-scale bomb-hoaxes of buildings throughout the country have been established. We are talking about four Russians who are now abroad.



China: Not So Concerned with “Zapad”

OE Watch Commentary: The Zapad-2017 exercise has attracted attention from many countries, causing particular unease and concern among neighboring states. Chinese media coverage on Zapad-2017, however, has been limited. The collective perception on the exercise was that it was a unique military exercise and that western media was being “hysterical” about it, indicating “rising insecurity in the Western hemisphere” regarding Russia.

The accompanying article from a Chinese source provides a good example. While it concedes that Zapad is the largest exercise since the Cold War between Russia and Belarus, it claims that the exercise has been conceived “as a response to the increase in military deployment of NATO in Poland and the Baltic states.” It claims that, “western media released another wave of hysterical statements on the potential invasion by Russia.”

It also claims that some analyses are “trying to drive a wedge between China and Russia” because they suggest

that Russia’s “provocative actions” will jeopardize China’s economic gain in Eastern and Middle Europe. However, Beijing seemed to have no concerns with the matter, suggesting that the “invasion theory fabricated by European media is extremely unlikely to come true.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Chen)**



Zapad 2017.

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12142199@egNews, CC 4.0.

“Despite the fact that Belarus has set the exercise site further from its border, western media released another wave of hysterical statements on the potential invasion by Russia. Some media [are] even ... trying to drive a wedge between China and Russia.... Let it be clear that the ‘invasion theory’ fabricated by European media is extremely unlikely to come true. Their paranoid statement will only reveal the rising insecurity in the West hemisphere.”

Source: “俄罗斯与白俄冷战后最大军演登场，一带一路受影响？(Russia and Belarus jointing force in the largest exercise since the Cold War, will it affect the OBOR?),” *Phoenix International Think Tank*, 6 September 2017. http://pit.ifeng.com/a/20170906/51889157_0.shtml

Russia and Belarus will conduct the “Zapad-2017” joint exercise in mid-September. Involving 12,700 troops, it is the largest scale military exercise by Belarus after the Cold War era. Rolling out against the backdrop of the U.S. secretary of Defense Mattis attending the Ukrainian Independence Day parade during his first official visit to Ukraine, the exercise has been conceived as a response to the increase in military deployment of NATO in Poland and the Baltic states. Despite the fact that Belarus has set the exercise site further from its border, western media released another wave of hysterical statements on the potential invasion by Russia. Some media even argued that Russia’s “provocative actions” will jeopardize China’s economic gain in Eastern and Middle Europe, trying to drive a wedge between China and Russia.

... Belarus has ... become an increasingly important part of China’s Eastern Europe trade. Belarus started soliciting infrastructure investment from China since 2013 in order to avoid the terms in European loans, while China was seeking agricultural import from Belarus just like it did from Ukraine. Moreover, Belarus has lowered its economic risk as a result of the devaluation of the Rubi by its trade with China, the driving force of its trade growth.

Let it be clear that the “invasion theory” fabricated by European media is extremely unlikely to come true. Their paranoid statement will only reveal the rising insecurity in the Western hemisphere. As China, we will collaborate with all parties and push for a peaceful solution of Ukraine’s issues.



Turkish Perspectives on “Zapad”

OE Watch Commentary: Turkish media coverage of Zapad 2017 has not been extensive, and has largely focused on three aspects of the exercise: controversy surrounding troop numbers, the scenarios of the exercises, and whether NATO should be worried or not. The general consensus appears to be that Russia is sending an aggressive message to the West and that NATO should be worried, given the geopolitical and military trends in the region.

The first accompanying passage, written by Dr. Can Kasapoğlu, a defense analyst at an Istanbul-based think-tank, and published in Turkey’s state-run *Anadolu* news agency, provides a good summary of the main issues covered in the Turkish press. The analyst focuses on the controversy surrounding troop numbers and lack of transparency as one of the problems with the exercise. He continues to discuss the problematic nature of the scenarios, which claim to be focused on “anti-terrorism.” Kasapoğlu notes that it is not realistic to claim a focus on “anti-terrorism,” when the instruments involved in the exercises include “SS-26 Iskander tactical ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, strategic bombardment planes, wide ranging amphibious elements, many tanks and elite air landing units.”

He concludes by saying that NATO should be worried based on an analysis of the geopolitical and military trends in the region, especially regarding Russia. Regarding geopolitical trends, he points out that “NATO member countries in the region are limited in their capacity to continue existing without the alliance’s capabilities.” However, Kasapoğlu claims that the main concern to NATO is the fact that Russia maintains the upper hand in tactical nuclear weapons, and the huge progress Russia has made in anti-access/area-denial concepts. Considering how far Russia has come since the 1990s, he points out that NATO should be concerned about what Russia may do if it senses a vulnerability in the defense of the Baltic region in the 2020s or 2030s.

The second accompanying passage from the pro-government *Yeni Safak* similarly reports on NATO announcements that Zapad may be taking place with a higher number of soldiers than reported, reminding that the same thing happened with Zapad 2009 and 2013. It also features a NATO official’s statements that indicate that Zapad is a reflection of Russia’s “recent, more aggressive behavior.”

The third accompanying passage, from the Moscow-based *Sputniknews* (in Turkish), appears to be Russia’s attempts to counter these views in Turkey. The article claims that “the West has been instigating hysteria against Russia due to the exercise.” It claims double standards against Russia and notes, “while the West has been criticizing Zapad-2017, NATO and its allies have stepped up their presence on the Russian border...” It should be noted that *Sputniknews* was established by the Russian government-controlled news agency *Rossiya Segodnya*. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Should NATO really be worried? The answer to this question is ‘yes’.”

Source: Dr. Can Kasapoğlu, “Zapad tatbikatı: NATO gerçekten endişelenmeli mi? (The Zapad Exercise: Should NATO really be worried?),” *Anadolu Ajansı (Anatolian Agency)*, 15 September 2017. <http://aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/zapad-tatbikati-nato-gerçekten-endişelenmeli-mi/910945>

Regarding Russia’s exercises, the concerning aspect from the perspective of the security of NATO and Europe, is the fact that the exercises are far from transparent... The most important problem is the fact that both Moscow and Minsk have shown the participant numbers to be below 13,000... By doing so, they circumvent the Viyana Document that allows OSCE to monitor the exercises. This document foresees a more stringent reporting and monitoring requirement for exercises with over 13,000 participants. In fact, the Zapad 2013 exercise had a similar transparency problem, and it was followed by Moscow’s hybrid intervention into Crimea and then eastern Ukraine...

Another serious problem with Russian exercises in general and Zapad in particular is their scenarios. Officially, many of the military activities around Zapad are characterized as “anti-terror operations.” On the other hand, the Russian Armed Forces’ anti-terror instruments include SS-26 Iskander tactical ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads, strategic bombardment planes, wide ranging amphibious elements, many tanks and elite air landing units. Therefore, it is not realistic to say that Zapad, which has amassed a force as big as one that could invade a mid-size country, on the borders of the Baltic and Poland, is an anti-terror exercise...

Should NATO really be worried? The answer to this question is ‘yes.’ This is [due to] geopolitical and military trends.... [As for geopolitical trends]... There is a serious discrepancy between political maps and strategic cultural maps within the old Soviet geography; and NATO member countries in the region are limited in their capacity to continue existing without the alliance’s capabilities. [As for military trends]... The Russian Armed Forces’ bad performance in the 1994-1996 Russian-Chechen war had raised questions about whether “the disintegration of the Soviets are continuing.” Twenty years later, the same Russia has annexed Crimea, without a single casualty. With its tracking/surveillance missiles fired from the Caspian Sea, it was able to fly over Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian airspace, shoot its targets... and change the outcome of the Syrian war with a relatively small force...

The main concerning question

Moscow’s goal now is to equip at least 70% of its armed forces with modern equipment by the early 2020’s, and employ about 500,000 professional soldiers in addition to its serviceman. Let’s not forget that Russia maintains the upper hand in tactical nuclear weapons (both in terms of numbers and function); and has made huge progress in A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) concepts, which limit the enemy’s ability to maneuver. What would Moscow, which has made such progress from the early 1990’s to the late 2010’s, do if it senses a vulnerability in the defense of the Baltic region in the 2020’s or 2030’s? The second issue that should concern NATO is related to pessimistic answers to this question.

(continued)



Continued: Turkish Perspectives on "Zapad"

"...it is not realistic to say that Zapad, which has amassed a force as big as one that could invade a mid-size country, on the borders of the Baltic and Poland, is an anti-terror exercise."

Source: "NATO: Rusya agresif bir mesaj veriyor (NATO: Russia is sending an aggressive message)," *Yenisafak.com.tr*, 19 September 2017. <http://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/nato-rusya-agresif-bir-mesaj-veriyor-2795922>

NATO has announced that ZAPAD 2017, Russia's joint military exercise with Belarus may be taking place with a higher number of soldiers than officially reported. In his statement, a NATO official said, "In a July NATO-Russia Council [meeting], NATO and Russian officials informed each other about military exercises. Russia said that ZAPAD 2017 would have less than 13,000 soldiers. But we think that the number of soldiers participating in the exercise is much higher than officially reported." The official reminded that the same situation had taken place in the 2009 and 2013 ZAPAD exercises, which is being repeated with ZAPAD 2017.

"ZAPAD 2017 is sending an aggressive message"

The NATO official said, "ZAPAD 2017 is consistent with Russia's recent, more aggressive behavior. Russia continues to increase its defense budget and its military presence on our borders." The NATO official who highlighted that Russia's actions in Ukraine clearly reveal its tendency to use military force against its neighbors, said "ZAPAD 2017 has a military goal. And the exercise deliberately sends an aggressive message."

Source: "Gerçekler histeriye karşı: Zapad-2017 tatbikatı hakkında bilinmesi gerekenler (Facts vs. hysteria: Facts about Zapad-2017 that must be known)," *TrSputniknews.com*, 15 September 2017. <https://tr.sputniknews.com/analiz/201709151030160612-gercekler-histeriye-karsi-zapad2017/>

Yesterday, Russia, along with Belarus, launched its largest exercises in recent years, Zapad 2017, with the participation of 12,700 soldiers. While the West has been instigating hysteria against Russia due to the exercise, Sputnik gathered the facts...

The exercise is being used as a tool to instigate anti-Russian hysteria...

Double Standards

While the West has been criticizing Zapad-2017, NATO and its allies have stepped up their presence on the Russian border... Sweden is conducting its largest exercise in 20 years. Furthermore, its troop numbers are much higher than Zapad and its goal is to prepare for a 'Russian attack.' In the summer months, NATO conducted 18 different exercises in different parts of Europe. According to US General John Healy, 40,000 troops took part in these exercises. Meanwhile, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria participated in the US-led 'Saber Guardian' 2017 which include 25,000 troops and 22 allies.



Zapad 2017: Iskander-K Tactical Ballistic Missile System launched a missile during active phase of drills (Leningrad Region).

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=45272@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.



It Wasn't "Zapad" and It Wasn't Coincidental

OE Watch Commentary: As reported in the last *OE Watch*, the Northern Fleet conducted a major cruise and an exercise prior to Zapad. They then began another exercise that ran concurrently with Zapad, but was not part of Zapad according to the Ministry of Defense. Whatever it was, it was impressive. After a busy training summer, Arctic air, ground and naval forces rolled out yet another set of exercises and muscle-flexing to demonstrate the Russian High Command's ability to command and control several major exercises at once. The accompanying articles discuss this exercise. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Officially, the [exercise]... is not a part of... Zapad-2017. Training scenarios, however, are similar to... stopping an enemy attack from the west.”

Source: “Motorized Rifles From the Northern Fleet’s Arctic Brigade land on Golomyanny Island in the Severnaya Zemlya Archipelago,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 28 September 2017. <http://www.mil.ru>

For the first time in modern Russian history, personnel and equipment of the Northern Fleet’s Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade landed from the large landing ship Kondopoga on Golomyanny Island in the Severnaya Zemlya Archipelago.

The landing was carried out using a ramp lowered onto the beach. Following the landing, the Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade’s subunits used four MT-LBV multipurpose armored vehicles equipped with large-caliber Kord machine guns to rehearse several procedures involved in raids on unfamiliar terrain in the Arctic....

...Once ashore from the landing ship, the Arctic motorized rifles, supported by assault naval infantry groups from the major antisubmarine ship Severomorsk,... established a beach head. After a target range was set up, the motorized rifle troops conducted live firing from assault rifles, machine guns, mortars, and grenade launchers....

Source: Atle Staalsen, “Russia engages in Military Exercises near Norway,” *The Independent Barents Observer*, 20 September 2017. <http://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2017/09/20/russia-engages-in-military-exercises-near-norway/>

The Northern Fleet, Russia’s most potent Naval force, is unfolding a series of exercises which fully coincide with the major ongoing drills in the Baltic region. On Monday, a number of Northern Fleet units took part in drills on the Sredny Peninsula, a piece of land located only few kilometers from the Norwegian border. From the local shooting range of Pumanki, naval infantry conducted a series of coastal defense exercises, including the landing of forces and the shooting of missiles....

According to the Northern Fleet, in the course of the drills, Su-24 fighter jets and Mi-8 helicopters simulated combat along with more than 600 men and eight 8x8 wheeled amphibious armoured BTR-80 personnel carriers.... Noise was massive as 122mm self-propelled 2S1 howitzers ... rolled along the Arctic beaches accompanied by fires from 82mm mortars and Bal mobile coastal missile systems....The training scenario included the attempted intrusion into the area by enemy forces and subsequent fighting.... In a second phase of the training, the Northern Fleet forces entered the fighting.... With heavy air support, the enemy attack was halted...

The exercise came after a major flotilla of Northern Fleet vessels set out on 15 September from Severomorsk...and moved into the Barents Sea, not far from the maritime border to Norway. At the same time, Russian Armed Forces unfolded their major joint training « Zapad-2017».... Concern from neighboring Sweden and Finland has been growing. As a response, Sweden began its Aurora 2017, an exercise which simulates an attack on the Nordic country and the response of forces from nine countries. The exercise is the biggest in Sweden in years. Finnish forces are also taking part.

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “Cruise Missiles criss cross the Barents Sea,” *The Independent Barents Observer*, 21 September 2017. <http://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2017/09/21/cruise-missiles-crisscross-the-barents-sea/>

Officially, the massive bombardment at land and sea that has taken place on the Kola Peninsula and in the Barents Sea ... is not a part of the exercise Zapad-2017. Training scenarios, however, are similar to what takes place along the borders to the Baltics in the south; stopping an enemy attack from the west.

In fact, the war-game scenario reminds one of Operation Barbarossa, Hitler-Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, with divisions moving in from Poland through the Baltic en route to Leningrad and Moscow. Simultaneously with divisions attacking the Kola Peninsula from Kirkenes in Norway through the Fisherman Peninsula and Litsa area enroute towards Murmansk.

Yesterday, the Barents Observer reported on massive firing by Northern Fleet naval infantry and air force combat actions. Now, Russia’s Ministry of Defense reports more on the war games in the Barents Sea.

Five cruise missiles were launched from different warships towards targets on land and sea. The first launch came from the Teriberka area north of Murmansk where the Bastion coastal missile system launched and hit a target 400 kilometers away. Then, a massive missile attack was launched against a ‘group of enemy vessels’. The cruise missiles were launched from the heavy missile cruiser Pytor Velikiy as well as from the two nuclear-powered Oscar-II class submarines Voronezh and Orel. The Defense Ministry reported that the distance from launch vessels to targets was between 200 and 300 kilometers...and that the missiles were Granit anti-ship cruise missiles. Finally, Russian missiles were launched from the destroyer Admiral Ushakov towards a convoy of ‘enemy landing vessels.’ Here, the supersonic anti-ship cruise missile Moskit was used.

The Ministry stated that all the areas of missile firings were closed off to civilian shipping. In total, more than 20 warships took part in the Barents Sea exercise, in addition to 10 diesel- and nuclear-powered submarines, about 20 support vessels and up to 30 aircraft. More than 5,000 soldiers took part in the exercise....



The Aerospace Troops Get a Ground Forces Commander

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS, Воздушно-Космические Силы), was formed on 1 August 2015 by merging the Russian Air Force and the Russian Aerospace Defense Forces in an attempt to place the responsibility for air, space, and missile defense under a single commander. The VKS now consists of three main commands, the Air Force (VVS), Space Forces, and Air Defense and Anti-Missile Forces. The accompanying articles from *Gazeta.Ru* and *Izvestiya* discuss a leadership change at the VKS.

The former VKS Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Viktor Bondarev, vacated the position due to being appointed to the Federation Council. Interestingly, instead of appointing a pilot, space officer, or air defender as the VKS Commander-in-Chief, the Russian leadership has chosen a Ground Forces officer for the position. The future VKS Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Surovikin has had a distinguished career. He graduated from the Omsk Higher Combined-Arms Command School in 1987, and subsequently from the M.V. Frunze Academy and the General Staff Military Academy. Colonel General Surovikin had several high profile staff positions and commands including the 201st Motorized Infantry Division in Tajikistan, and the 42nd Guards Motorized Rifle Division in Chechnya, Eastern Military District. Most recently he commanded the Russian forces in Syria, effectively integrating ground forces, aviation, air defense, and space assets. In addition, Colonel General Surovikin was also involved in setting up the Russian Military Police Corps, which has reportedly performed well in Syria.



Sergey Surovikin.

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://structure.mil.ru/management/info.htm?id=11854308@SD_Employee, CC BY 4.0.

“Colonel General Sergey Surovikin, commander of the Russian Grouping in Syria, will be appointed Commander-in-Chief of Aerospace Forces (VKS) in the near future.”

Although senior officers in the Ground Forces, Naval Infantry, and Airborne occasionally “switch services,” this is the first time a Ground Forces officer has been appointed to an aviation and strategic air defense position since Soviet times. A Ground Forces officer serving as the VKS Commander-in-Chief may seem odd and is an abhorrent idea to most Russian Air Force pilots, but the few Soviet Ground Forces officers that served in senior aviation and strategic air defense positions were quite well regarded by the troops they lead. The appointment of Colonel General Surovikin may have something to do with the very different communities that the VKS consists of. There was some concern that if a pilot, space officer, or air defender was appointed as the VKS Commander-in-Chief, the other communities would suffer due to institutional bias, as these communities have little interaction and there has been a history of predatory behavior (in terms of resourcing) when these officers obtain positions of authority over the other communities. *(continued)*

Source: Mikhail Khodarenok: “Генеральская смена: что ждет нового главу ВКС (General Replacement: What Awaits the New Commander-in-Chief of the Aerospace Forces),” *Gazeta.Ru Online*, 22 September 2017. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2017/09/22/10902470.shtml>

Colonel General Sergey Surovikin, commander of the Russian Grouping in Syria, will be appointed Commander-in-Chief of Aerospace Forces (VKS) in the near future, RIA Novosti reports with reference to two sources in the Russian Federation Defense Ministry... “Colonel General Surovikin will begin duties as VKS Commander-in-Chief in October of this year,” the Agency writes. The military department clarified that this information already has been communicated to Aerospace Forces leadership personnel....

...Previously some publications examined possible candidates who would be proposed for the VKS Commander-in-Chief slot being vacated. Named among them were Lieutenant General Igor Makushev, chairman of the Defense Ministry Scientific-Technical Council, and Space Troops Commander Colonel General Aleksandr Golovko. That said, Col Gen Surovikin was considered the least likely candidate to fill the VKS Commander-in-Chief post...

According to Gazeta.Ru information, the appointment of the new VKS Commander-in-Chief is far from the final one of a series of similar reshufflings. In the near future it is quite possible that a new CINC Ground Troops also will be appointed. Such appointments largely are connected with the fact that a considerable number of Armed Forces senior-grade officers are at an age close to the maximum of being on active military service. So the wave of reshufflings and advancements in branches of the Armed Forces and the Defense Ministry central staff simply is inevitable.

(continued)



Continued: The Aerospace Troops Get a Ground Forces Commander

In contrast, a Ground Forces commander would have no 'loyalty' to any of these communities. In addition there is a belief that a combined arms commander would have more of a holistic view of running the VKS due to his combined arms experience. In order to be effective, a combined arms commander must view all elements of the combat arms branches (motorized rifle, tank, artillery, and air defense) and specialty branches (engineer, electronic warfare, signal, MTO, NBC defense) equally in terms of effective execution of assigned combat and operational missions. They cannot "have a soft spot," for any particular branch of arms, as this would be contrary to the combined arms concept. Perhaps Colonel General Surovikin's appointment is intended to bring this sort of combined arms thinking to the VKS. There are some fundamental differences between Surovikin's combined arms experience and his new duties as VKS Commander-in-Chief. A combined arms commander controls his forces in tactical circumstances, while the service branch Commander-in-Chiefs have no little or no operational control of the forces. The operational control of most VKS assets belongs to the respective Operational-Strategic Command (OSK) commanders; Long-Range Aviation (DA) and Military Transport Aviation (VTA) are operationally controlled by the VKS Commander-in-Chief, but their employment is directed by the General Staff. In short, Colonel General Surovikin will have to adapt his combined arms tactical approach to tackle some very different institutional problems if he is to be successful as the new VKS Commander-in-Chief. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Russian aerospace forces emblem.

Source: Russian government, Ministry of Defence via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_aerospace_forces_emblem.png, Public Domain.

Source: Aleksey Ramm, Dmitriy Litovkin, Nikolay Surkov, and Yevgeniy Andreyev, "У Воздушно-космических сил появился шорт-лист (Aerospace Forces Shortlist Has Emerged)," *Izvestiya Online*, 30 August 2017. <https://iz.ru/638261/aleksei-ramm-dmitrii-litovkin-nikolai-surkov-evgenii-andreev/u-vozdushno-kosmicheskikh-sil-poiavilsia-short-list>

The Ministry of Defense has chosen the primary contenders for the post of Aerospace Forces (VKS) commander in chief...

Lt. Gen. Igor Makushev was born 6 August 1964 in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. He graduated in 1985 from the Chernigov Higher Military Aviation School for Pilots, and in 2006 from the Military Academy of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff. He has a reputation as an experienced fighter pilot and combat commander. Makushev has climbed all the steps of his career ladder -- from pilot to deputy commander of an air army. He has the qualification category "military pilot-expert marksman" and has logged in excess of 3,000 hours. As deputy commander of the 16th Air Army he took part in the peace enforcement operation against Georgia in August 2008. Igor Makushev came to the notice of the general public when at briefings in the summer of 2014 he presented the Russian military department's position in connection with the loss of the Malaysian Boeing 777. In his current position Gen. Makushev is tasked with providing scientific validation for prospective areas of the growth, development, training, employment, and support of the Armed Forces...

In contrast to Makushev, the second candidate has emerged not from among airborne personnel but from the space forces. Col. Gen. Aleksandr Golovko was born 29 January 1964 in Dnepropetrovsk. He graduated from the Kharkov Higher Military Engineer Command School for Missile Troops (1986), the F.E. Dzerzhinskiy Military Academy (1996), and the General Staff Military Academy (2003). During the period 1986 through 2001 he served in different command and engineer positions with military units of the G.S. Titov Main Test Center for Spacecraft Testing and Control (GITsIU KS). In 2007 he took charge of the GITsIU KS, and he became chief of the Plesetsk Space Center in 2011. In December 2012 Golovko was appointed commander of the Aerospace Defense Troops...

Sergey Surovikin graduated from the Omsk Higher Combined-Arms Command School in 1987, and subsequently from the M.V. Frunze Academy and the General Staff Military Academy. He has progressed through all the stages of an officer's career. In the 1990s he served in Tajikistan with the 201st Motorized Infantry Division, and in the 2000s he commanded the 42nd Guards Division in Chechnya. In 2012 he headed the Russian Federation Defense Ministry's working party on the establishment of the military police. Surovikin was appointed commander of the Eastern Military District in October 2013. The reason for the advancement of Surovikin's candidacy for the post of Aerospace Forces commander in chief was the fact that he had commanded the troop grouping in Syria, where he had been able to effectively integrate ground forces, aviation, PVO [air defense] assets, and the space grouping within a single system.



The Future Looking Bright for the Russian Aerospace Forces

OE Watch Commentary: Most mainstream Russian military professionals believe that aerospace (air and space) are a now a theater of military action (TVD). In the Russian view, the aerospace TVD has become a theater of military operations on par with ground and naval TVDs. The 2015 consolidation of the Aerospace Defense Forces and Air Force into the Aerospace Forces (VKS) is likely one consequence of this thinking. The VKS is now a single, unified command for air, space, and missile defense that is intended to integrate both offensive and defensive assets. The accompanying article from *Interfax* describes how Russia is not just making organizational changes to more successfully compete in the aerospace TVD, but is also increasing her number of modern aircraft. According to *Interfax*, the Russian Ministry of Defense has procured more than 50 aircraft in 2016, and will procure over 70 aircraft in 2017.

Russia's proposed State Armament Program (GPK) for 2018-2025 envisions the delivery of some 400 aircraft per year. This number seems incredibly large given recent aircraft procurements and the current state of Russian finances. It is important to note that the GPK provides arms for all branches of service in the Ministry of Defense, and the other Russian militarized security services (National Guard, Border Troops, etc.). This number also likely includes major aircraft refurbishments such as for the Tu-160, Tu-22M3, etc. Although it is very unlikely that Russia will procure 400 new aircraft, Russia will still likely procure many new aircraft. The accompanying article from *Izvestiya* explains that Russia will increase the number of flight officers that aviation academies are producing. Russia's two main aviation academies could churn out as many as 1,000 air crewmen per year. Russia is also interested in increasing qualitative aspects of hands-on aviation training, increasing the number of flight hours for graduates from 60 hours to 90 hours. This institutional change appears to confirm VKS beliefs that they will be receiving many more aircraft in the next few years.

Russia may procure a few expensive new aircraft, but the vast majority of Russian aircraft purchases will be of the more affordable varieties, that are a fraction of the cost of comparable Western aircraft. Although the numbers are murky, top US fighters such as the F-22 and F-35 cost between \$80-\$130 million, while many Russian fighters are in the \$30-\$50 million dollar range. (The Su-25K 'Frogfoot' ground attack aircraft is a relative bargain, costing only \$11 million.) While pundits will be quick to point out that these cost difference are more than made up for by the capability advantages of the Western aircraft, it should be noted that Russia has also heavily invested in relatively cheap electronic warfare technologies to defend aircraft against air-to-air missiles and air defense systems to deny air space. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: "Russian Defense Ministry to procure over 70 aircraft, more than 40 anti-aircraft missile systems by year end," *Interfax*, 11 August 2017.

The Russian Defense Ministry will procure over 40 anti-aircraft missile systems and more than 70 aircraft by the end of this year, Aerospace Forces Commander Col. Gen. Viktor Bondarev said.

"In all, units of the Aerospace Forces will receive another 70 aircraft, more than 40 anti-aircraft missile complexes, and about 70 radar systems by the end of this year," Bondarev told the newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda in an interview.

Last year, the Aerospace Forces received about 50 aircraft, among them Sukhoi Su-34, Su-35S and Su-30SM, as well as Yakovlev Yak-130, Kamov Ka-52 combat helicopters, and Mil Mi-8AMTSh and Mi-8MTV-5-1 transport helicopters, he said...

Source: Nikolay Surkov and Aleksey Ramm, "Подготовку летчиков пустят на поток (Flight Crew Training to Be Stepped Up)," *Izvestiya Online*, 2 October 2017. <https://iz.ru/645337/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/letchikov-budut-gotovit-tysiachami>

The Russian Federation Air and Space Forces have sharply increased the volume of flight personnel training. In the next five years higher military educational establishments will be producing hundreds of pilots every year. In parallel the military is promising to increase the intensity of flight training by 50 percent. The demand for pilots has increased in connection with the formation of new units and purchases of new aviation equipment.

As Izvestiya was told at the Air and Space Forces High Command, the number of pilot school graduates could reach 1,000 a year within the next five years. The number of graduates at the Krasnodar College alone, which is the main Air Force training center, is set to increase sharply -- from 25 to 600 a year. Earlier this year Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu told State Duma deputies that the Air and Space Forces were 1,300 flight personnel short. At the same time the head of the military department stated that this problem will be resolved by as early as 2018.

Currently the training of flight personnel for the Air and Space Forces is handled by only two training establishments: the Krasnodar Higher Military Aviation Pilots College Named for Hero of the Soviet Union A.K. Serov and the Air Force Academy Named for Professor N.Ye. Zhukovskiy and Yu.A. Gagarin military scientific training center. The Krasnodar College brings together under its roof several training centers across the country where pilots are trained for all types of combat aircraft. The military scientific training center's branches in Syzran and Chelyabinsk train helicopter pilots and navigators.

In 2017 a total of just over 60 people graduated from the Krasnodar College, whereas in previous years the number of pilots graduating did not exceed even 30 or so. By as early as 2018 the number of graduates will reach 600. Syzran and Chelyabinsk will add an extra several hundred experts.

The intensity of flying training is also being increased. Under the new plans, graduates' flying hours will increase by half -- from 60 to 90 hours a year. This will be achieved, in particular, because the students will start flying after only their second year. The appearance in colleges of new equipment -- Yak-130 aircraft, which will replace the well-obsolete Czechoslovak L-39s -- will also be a big help.

The increased demand for new pilots is linked to the intensive utilization of military aircraft, which, according to the command, are the first to go into battle in modern conflicts, and the formation of new air units in the Russian Federation. Under the new State Armament Program (GPK) for 2018-2025 the Air and Space Forces will take delivery of something like 400 aircraft a year...



Russia Trying to Increase the Number of Electro-Optical Satellites

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from *Izvestiya* discusses the need for more electro-optical satellites to support ongoing and future Russian military operations. Russia has had to enact a number of stop-gap measures to support the space-based ISR collection for the Syrian campaign including: using platforms with less than optimal resolution, changing the flight paths of ISR platforms, and relying on civilian and/or commercial space-based ISR platforms to meet operational requirements.

A partial solution to this problem is the 14F156 Razdan electro-optical satellite series. These satellites will be in a low-earth orbit (LEO) and have a lens with a size of over two meters, giving the system a spatial resolution of approximately 30 centimeters. In addition to the primary electro-optical payload, produced at the Zverev Plant in Krasnogorsk, the satellite will likely carry additional payloads, such as for communications, missile-warning, or signals intelligence.

Perhaps the most interesting capability of the system is its ability to transmit the raw imagery data to ground stations. Typically, Russian imagery from satellites was not transmitted via radio transmission, but was instead ejected from the satellite in a capsule, which had to be retrieved after entering the atmosphere. The last such satellite (Kobalt-M series) was launched as recently as June 2015. (Kobalt satellites were put into orbit once a year and operated in space for about three months.) Russia has used imagery reconnaissance satellites (Yantars and Araks series) capable of transmitting data via ground station, but they were a rarity and had major technical limitations. Clearly, the long times between when the imagery was captured to when the imagery was provided to the end user prevented the imagery's use for most tactical applications. The rapid development of digital imagery technologies, computers, and electronics in the last 10 to 15 years has enabled Russia to revisit the concept of quickly transmitting imagery data from satellites to ground stations. The Razdan will reportedly be capable of high bandwidth transmissions to ground stations, or possibly crosslinking to another satellite for transmission to ground stations.

The addition of the new 14F156 Razdan satellites will increase Russian ISR capabilities, but given the size of the current electro-optical fleet and LEO satellite life spans, the launch of three Razdan satellites will not likely give Russia the needed quantity of high spatial resolution satellites, capable of supporting tactical requirements, as needed. Considering Russia's excellent capability to launch satellites, it is possible that Russia will transition from a strategy of infrequently launching a few very large and expensive satellites, to frequently launching smaller, lower flying satellites with a much shorter life span, as mentioned in the last few sentences of the *Izvestiya* excerpt. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Anton Lavrov, "Сверху видней: о необходимости наращивания группировки спутников оптической разведки (Visible From Above: The Necessity to Strengthen the Optical Reconnaissance Satellite Array)," *Izvestiya Online*, 22 September 2017. <https://iz.ru/645741/anton-lavrov/orbitalnaia-gruppirovka-otpravilas-na-voynu-v-sirii>

Reconnaissance played a huge role in the recent operations for the liberation of Palmyra and the unblocking of Deir-ez-Zor. It was able to uncover the militants' defensive system and quickly detect their mobile groups. Since our military has no strategic reconnaissance drones available to it as yet that would hover continuously over the battlefield, a large burden was placed on the Aerospace Forces (VKS) satellite array. From the very beginning of the Syrian operation the Ministry of Defense has engaged no fewer than 10 private and civilian satellites for reconnaissance there. To do this, it even had to change the orbits of some of them to optimize the opportunities to monitor that part of the world. What does the Russian Defense Ministry have in orbit? Its satellite array consists of about 80 units. It is the second largest in the world after the US grouping. But most satellites have a communication role.

In the fight against terrorists and militants, radar reconnaissance or electronic eavesdropping satellites such as the Kondor and Lotos-S, and even the Bars-M mapping satellite, have a very limited application. The bulk of the work falls on optical, imagery reconnaissance satellites...

Now the main resource of the Ministry of Defense for imagery reconnaissance is two Persona satellites. They are big, heavy machines with powerful telescopes aimed at the Earth. Image resolution is around one meter per pixel. That is inferior not only to US reconnaissance satellites, but also many commercial Earth remote sensing satellites. However, such features do enable them to be used to detect small targets, down to tracking individual vehicles and identifying their type. And, most importantly, the pictures can be ordered, received and processed in the shortest possible time...

The experience of the Syrian operation has forced the Defense Ministry to press ahead with the creation of new optical reconnaissance satellites in the Razdan series. Its image resolution is expected to be brought to 30 centimeters per pixel, which is three times better than current Russian military and civilian satellites. The first Razdan is due to go into orbit in 2019, and another two before 2025...The number of heavy military and civilian imagery reconnaissance satellites is to be doubled by 2025, while the quality of their pictures will be greatly improved. This is unlikely to be sufficient to fully meet defense requirements, however, and the solution may be lighter satellites. Thanks to modern technologies, their efficiency will be no worse than that of the heavy machines of the previous generation, while the cost of production and launch of one such reconnaissance satellite is significantly lower...



Russia's Counter to the "High Frequency Global Communications System"

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses Russia's Murmansk-BN, an Electronic Warfare (EW) system designed to counter High Frequency (HF) radio communications. According to the press officer of the Radio-Electronic Technology Concern (KRET): "The national strategic EW system (The Murmansk-BN) being developed with the active participation of KRET is an asymmetrical response to the concept of 'network-centric combat command and control based on an integrated information and communications environment' being implemented in the US and NATO member states' armed forces. The development of this EW system can be described as the realization of the concept of network-centric defense. It is primarily designed to be effective against short-wave systems, such as the US High Frequency Global Communications System, which provides communications between all defense department command-and-control agencies, aircraft and ships of the US and its NATO allies."



Unannounced combat readiness inspection of EW centre finished at the Northern Fleet.
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12066395@egNews, CC 4.0.

The Murmansk-BN can reportedly disrupt communications up to 1,900-3,100 miles, by intercepting enemy short-wave radio communications, analyzing them, and then jamming them throughout the entire frequency band, thereby preventing EW mitigation tactics such as frequency tuning. (The HF band is a major part of the shortwave band of frequencies, so communication at these frequencies is often called shortwave radio.) Unlike most Russian EW systems that usually consist of just one or two vehicles, the Murmansk-BN consists of seven KamAZ trucks, weighing up to 35 tons. The four antenna mast vehicles each reach a height of 100 feet. This massive system takes up to 72 hours to deploy and occupies an area of a quarter square mile. The Murmansk-BN can be found in Russia's EW Brigades. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The Murmansk-BN is designed to detect short-wave radio communication lines in the adversary’s strategic and operational echelons of command and control and for the technical analysis and electronic jamming of detected targets.”

Source: Yuriy Avdeyev, “Под защитой «Мурманска» (Under the Protection of ‘Murmansk’),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 25 September 2017. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/34531-pod-zashchitoj-murmanska>

Questions pertaining to the detection and suppression of electronic targets located at a distance of up to 4,000 kilometers were rehearsed for the first time. The specialists of Central Military District’s electronic warfare troops, in conjunction with units from other military districts, rehearsed the infliction of an electronic strike on the communications and command-and-control systems of the hypothetical anniversary’s strategic force grouping...

Deliveries of these complexes to the troops began two or three years ago, and after commissioning, they began to be used to perform combat training tasks.

The Murmansk-BN is designed to detect short-wave radio communication lines in the adversary’s strategic and operational echelons of command and control and for the technical analysis and electronic jamming of detected targets. The complex’ antennae segment is mounted on four telescopic struts with a height of around 32 meters. The system operates in the entire shortwave band and can jam several dozen radio frequencies simultaneously. At the same time, the target-seeking speed is several times higher by comparison with previous systems of this kind.

Specialists name the complex’ mobility as another fairly important advantage. The Murmansk-BN is housed in seven motor vehicles. It possesses the ability to be deployed on virtually any terrain to which it can be delivered. Its autonomy of operation is ensured by powerful diesel generators...It would not be superfluous to mention an extremely important feature of the work of electronic warfare units. On the plane of command, they all operate in an integrated fashion and in conjunction with other branches of the forces and combat arms.

This is why, although Murmansk-BN played the leading role in the exercises that have just ended, there were also other complexes of the combined electronic warfare unit operating in its support, albeit with a number of restrictions



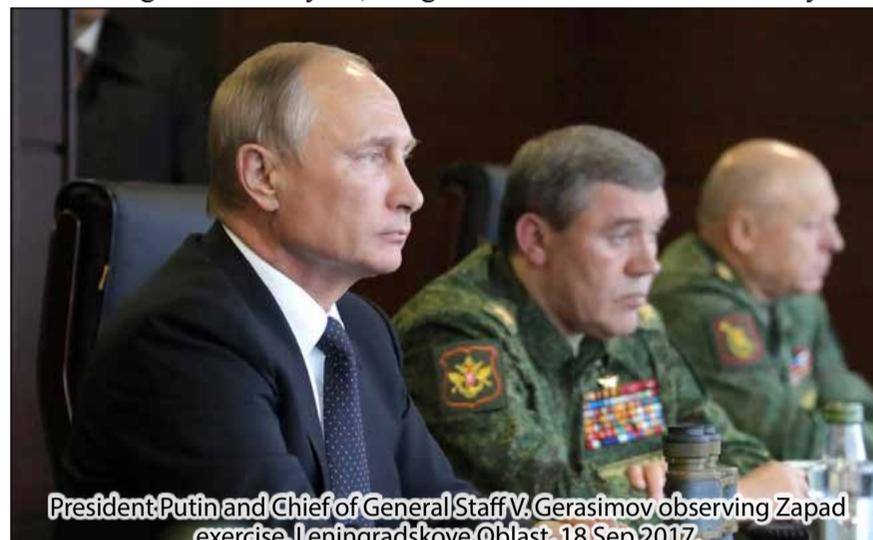
The Russian Military and the Russian Presidential Election

OE Watch Commentary: Russian presidential elections are scheduled for 18 March 2018 (which happens to be the 4th anniversary of Russia's annexation of Crimea), and while he has yet to announce his candidacy, the overwhelming consensus is that Vladimir Putin will be elected to his fourth (and presumably final) term as the Russian Commander in Chief. As in other countries, the Russian military prides itself on remaining outside of politics. Nevertheless, a recent article by retired General L. Shevtsov in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (VPK, *Military-Industrial Courier*) dealt with Russian politics and the upcoming presidential election.

Shevtsov begins by asking why the Soviet state did not collapse in 1941 when it was under great military pressure, yet fell apart in 1991 when it was not at war and was even armed with nuclear weapons. His answer: great leadership under Stalin and incompetent leadership under Gorbachev. Shevtsov insists that given Russia's autocratic tradition, the country must have a strong leader if it is to survive and thrive.

While Shevtsov does not specifically name Vladimir Putin as a "great leader," reading between the lines, it is clear that he rates Putin nearly as high as Stalin. Looking at Russian history, he goes on to warn that unless a successor is groomed early on, the great leader is often followed by the mediocre (or worse). He insists that the current leadership should consider "who will be in charge soon or in six years? This issue is important even for people far from politics." He encourages all Russians to shake off their political apathy and do their civic duty by voting in the upcoming election.

Although Shevtsov remarks that "in Russia, the replacement of the leading person is comparable to a large or small revolution," at this point, there is little doubt that Putin will remain Russia's leader. In Russia's current top-down system of presidential politics, the leader is chosen beforehand, while the people go through the democratic ritual of casting a ballot. In such a faux-democratic model, high voter turn-out is interpreted as a legitimizing factor. If Shevtsov's sentiments are shared by other senior military leaders, President Putin can rely upon solid support from those in uniform in the upcoming presidential "election." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



President Putin and Chief of General Staff V. Gerasimov observing Zapad exercise, Leningradskoye Oblast, 18 Sep 2017.

Source: President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55644/photos/50390>. CC BY 4.0.

“Our country, as history shows, can only be successfully managed by a man of outstanding abilities and, most importantly, one who places the idea of great state power over all other considerations, including personal ones...”

Source: Leontiy Shevtsov, "Случайная власть (Accidental Authority)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 11 September 2017. <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/38873>

...The USSR - a nuclear power with powerful aircraft - collapsed in 1991 without armed intervention, which, according to the Russian president, was the main tragedy of the 20th century. The conclusion is that there are other reasons. But all of them, let the political scientists have different views on this score, derived from the main one - the lack of a worthy professional leadership of the state, the responsibility and power of the first person....

In Russia, the replacement of the leading person is comparable to a large or small revolution, depending on the scale of the personality of the leader and his deeds. This is our mentality.

Our country, as history shows, can only be successfully managed by a man of outstanding abilities and, most importantly, one who places the idea of great state power over all other considerations, including personal ones....

... Is it possible to compare the potential of the Soviet Union in 1941 and 1991, especially the military one. These are incomparable indicators. A weak country of the 1941 model, being in political and economic isolation (then the word sanctions were not reprimanded), defeated the world's strongest army, while the mighty Russia of 1991 with nuclear weapons lost the cold war.

The reason is obvious: in 1941, the head of state was a person who managed to rally and organize the Fatherland for struggle, and not the mediocre and the talkers, who, while adoring their posts, betrayed and disgraced the country....

...As a rule, everything happens approximately according to the following scheme. One gets a ravaged country and at the expense of talent, decency, power, inhuman sacrifice makes the impossible - raises the Fatherland to the proper height. Then comes a man of average ability, but thanks to the state made before him, he keeps it afloat, which gives his associates a reason to talk about the greatness of the "successor"... And the third comes. As a rule, mediocrity, an unprincipled individual, which completes the collapse....

...In the battle for the preservation of Russia as a power, we have almost emerged militarily on the scale of the Soviet Union, and in the economic sphere, after many years of decline, progress has been made. And these are the two most important indicators of a great country. But another important period is coming - the election of the head of state.

...And the people ask themselves: who will be in charge soon or in six years? This issue is important even for people far from politics.

...We want to have a strong personality at the head, who should provide us and our descendants with a decent life, and care for the welfare of the state. But, unfortunately, a good third or even more of the population avoid participation in the electoral process, referring to busyness on household plots, preferring watching TV and lying on the couch to fulfilling their civic duty. That is, we demand responsibility from the first person, yet we ourselves do not fulfill elementary duties, we refuse constitutional rights....

...Of course, very much is determined by the first person who has served the established term and must transfer power to another.... Hence one of the most important tasks facing the first person is to take care of the successor or successors....



The Russian Camouflage Regiment

OE Watch Commentary: Deception (maskirovka) remains a key component in Russian military operations. The brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin news source *Izvestiya* describes how the Russian Defense Ministry has recently finished reconstituting the “45th Separate Engineer-Camouflage Regiment” which has been designed to “make important military and social facilities invisible to satellites, reconnaissance aircraft, and unmanned air vehicles [UAV].”

The unit’s headquarters are situated in Vladimirskoye Oblast, with subordinate units located in the Western Military District. Alongside the unit’s abilities to quickly camouflage key military facilities, the unit also has the capability of deploying a complete arsenal of “inflatable models of tanks, guns, infantry fighting vehicles, PVO [air defense] systems, and other weapons systems.” These decoy weapon systems are designed to not only confuse the enemy, but to also force him to expend intel and fire assets to identify and destroy.

Even though the regiment just completed its reconstitution in June 2017, “its units took an active part in the recently concluded Zapad-2017 military exercise.”

Although the article does not provide specific information regarding electronic warfare (EW) assets, it suggests that this unit is capable of camouflaging the electronic signature of deployed units. Indeed, the article claims that the unit is equipped with “special devices that make it possible to seriously reduce the effectiveness of optical and radar reconnaissance systems.” It appears that the Russian military continues to expand and develop both its EW and camouflage capabilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



“Soldiers in just a few minutes can deploy decoys of artillery and missile systems and even build a dummy airfield.”

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Yevgeniy Andreyev, “Минобороны вернуло «надувной» полк (Defense Ministry Restores ‘Inflator’ Regiment),” *Izvestiya Online*, 22 September 2017. <https://iz.ru/634072/aleksei-ramm-evgenii-andreev/minoborony-vernulo-naduvnoi-polk>

The Russian Defense Ministry has restored a unique military unit; the 45th Separate Engineer-Camouflage Regiment will make important military and social facilities invisible to satellites, reconnaissance aircraft, and unmanned air vehicles [UAV]. Soldiers in just a few minutes can deploy decoys of artillery and missile systems and even build a dummy airfield. To do this, the regiment’s arsenal includes inflatable models of tanks, guns, infantry fighting vehicles, PVO [air defense] systems, and other weapons systems. Because of the unusual equipment, the 45th Regiment has been nicknamed the “inflator” regiment by the military.

According to experts, modern reconnaissance equipment has a unique capacity to obtain information. And its capabilities only increase with every year. So it is very important to conceal our troops and facilities in a timely and effective way.

Izvestiya was told by the Defense Ministry that the regiment’s formation was completed in June of this year. Now the 45th Camouflage Regiment had already taken part in several events. In particular, its units took an active part in the recently concluded Zapad-2017 military exercise.

...The unique regiment, in addition to inflatable models, was equipped with modern engineering vehicles. The arsenal of the 45th Separate Engineer-Camouflage Regiment also includes special devices that make it possible to seriously reduce the effectiveness of optical and radar reconnaissance systems.

The regiment’s units can disguise both the positions of their own troops and headquarters and complex technical facilities. For example, the deployment placements of tactical missile systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, and radar stations. The 45th Separate Engineer-Camouflage Regiment can also conceal social facilities from surveillance. This list includes bridges, roads, power plants, etc.

Yet another task for the unique military unit is the creation of fake positions of arms and military equipment and military facilities. This is resolved not only through the use of inflatable models of equipment. Regimental personnel carry out excavation and construction work to restore technical buildings, runways, roads, and other facilities....



Automating the Antitank Detection/Response Cycle

OE Watch Commentary: Previous editions of *OE Watch* have discussed Russian artillery efforts to reduce their detection/response cycle to near-real-time at the tactical (reconnaissance fire system) and operational (reconnaissance strike system) levels. The antitank mission is also a part of the Russian artillery mission. One of the four artillery battalions in the Russian maneuver brigade is an antitank battalion. The accompanying passage from *Izvestiya* discusses a new automated command and control system for antitank subunits.

This new command and control system (PTRK) appears to be the Russian effort to bring the reconnaissance fire system to antitank artillery systems. The brigade antitank artillery battalion has a battery of six MT-12 Rapira antitank cannon and two anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) batteries of six each 9M123 Khrizantema or 9P162 Kornet-T tank destroyers. The MT-12 cannon fires a 100mm round or ATGM. The antitank platoon of the motorized rifle battalion has nine Metis launchers and every motorized rifle squad has the ubiquitous RPG-7 antitank grenade launcher. Evidently the PTRK will not be tied into the rifle squad, but pretty much with all other antitank weapons. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Artillery units of the Western MD repelled attack of tanks of the simulated enemy.
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, Website, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12104185@egNews, CC 4.0

“The Russian military will receive a unique defense system against tanks, self-propelled guns, and other armored vehicles. This automated system commands and controls antitank missile systems in real time. The innovation detects and classifies targets and determines their direction of travel and speed. Then it selects which PTRK can most effectively destroy the enemy armored vehicle, and transmits the targets’ coordinates to the selected crews. In the experts’ words, this innovation will actually become an insurmountable obstacle on the path of an enemy armored vehicle.”

Source: Alexi Rahm, “Sheltering the Russian Infantry with an Antitank Wall. The Latest Automated Command and Control System will create a Smart Echeloned Defense,” *Izvestiya*, 2 October 2017. <http://iz.ru>

A Ministry of Defense representative stated ... that the fundamental decision for the development of the new automated command and control system (Автоматизированная система управления-ASU) for antitank subunits has already been made. Now, they are determining which elements will be included in the new ASU.

This... innovation will permit the creation of an echeloned intelligent antitank defense system. It will merge the weapons of the motorized rifle battalions with the antitank tank batteries and battalions of the regiments, brigades, and divisions. The automated command and control system determines the armored approach routes – sectors of terrain, which are suitable for enemy armored vehicle movement. Data ... from ground units and subunits and also from unmanned aerial vehicles provides information about the discovery of tanks, armored vehicles, armored transport vehicles, and self-propelled artillery. The system determines their routes of advance and automatically rank orders these targets based upon their immediate threat. Then, the automated command and control system compiles a target destruction plan and transmits their coordinates to the antitank weapons crews.

Khrizantema long-range antitank missile systems will be part of the “antitank wall’s” first line of defense. These unique systems are equipped not only with optical-electronic instruments but also with radar. The Khrizantema systems are capable of destroying targets during the day and at night under any weather conditions at a range of up to 6,000 meters.

Later on, Kornet and Shturm-S antitank missile systems will engage the tanks, armored infantry vehicles and self-propelled artillery. These systems easily destroy targets at ranges up to five kilometers. Metis short-range antitank systems will complete the defeat of the enemy in close combat when the armored targets come within two kilometers of our troops’ positions.

“The experience of contemporary wars and military conflicts shows that armored vehicles have not lost their significance,” Military Historian Aleksey Khlopotov stated.... “Tanks, armored infantry vehicles, and armored transport vehicles are capable of conducting decisive maneuvers, breaching a defense, and conducting raids within the depth of the defense. As during the years of the Second World War, combating armored vehicles remains a priority task of weapon systems development. The Russian Army has a serious arsenal of antitank weapons. But they were not fully integrated into an automated, integrated antitank system. The new automated command and control system will permit us to create an insurmountable obstacle on the path of enemy armored vehicles.”

The Russian Armed Forces are paying close attention to the development of state-of-the-art command and control and weapons control systems. A special place is allotted to the description of the capabilities of combined-arms subunits in the Asymmetric Warfare Group’s Russian New Generation Warfare Handbook report that was recently published by the Pentagon. In particular, the American experts note that Russian artillery and antitank weapons are capable of finding and destroying targets in real time thanks to automated command and control systems and unmanned aerial vehicles.



More on the August 2017 Arctic Riverine Exercise

OE Watch Commentary: The 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade have conducted another riverine amphibious landing from large amphibious ships at the Dudinka river port. The accompanying passage from *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, discusses this large-scale Arctic riverine exercise.

Amphibious assault landings are complex, and require coordinating air and shipborne fires while moving vehicles and personnel to shore in a coordinated manner. Riverine landings add to the complexity of the mission due to the current of a major river moving sideways against the landing ships as they try to beach and offload. The riverine portion of this operation involved sailing from the Arctic Ocean up the powerful Yenesei River to conduct a landing at the river port of Dudinka,



Joint amphibious exercise held on the Taymyr.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/structure/forces/navy/news/more.html?id=12139155@egNews>, CC BY 4.0.

followed by a march to a training area for ground combat exercises. Dudinka is the river and rail port that connects the major industrial center of Norilsk with Russia and is vital to the Russian economy. This exercise is similar to the 2015 exercise, but it involved more men and material and the complicating factor of a mined beach head. The Northern Fleet is fast becoming an expert on large-scale Arctic riverine exercises. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Laptev Sea Map.

Source: by NormanEinstein via Wikimedia Commons, https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igarka#/media/File:Laptev_Sea_map.png, CC BY-SA 3.0.

(continued)



Continued: More on the August 2017 Arctic Riverine Exercise

“Summing up preliminary results of the joint exercise, Northern Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov called it an unusual event for Northern Fleet, noting that a high level of coordination among participants succeeded in executing joint assigned missions.”

Source: Olga Chernysheva: “Battle in Medvezhka Estuary: Northern Fleet Personnel Once Again ‘Won Back’ the Heart of the Arctic – Taimir,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 29 September 2017. <http://www.redstar.ru>

The joint exercise to protect important industrial facilities on the Taimir Peninsula was a striking episode in Northern Fleet combat training. It was the second time that Northern Fleet personnel had performed combat training missions there. Compared with 2015, the event was larger in scale: involving almost twice the number of personnel and combat equipment and, for the first time, employing self-propelled and rocket artillery.

Northern Fleet ships and support vessels, ground troops and naval infantry subunits, Northern Fleet Naval Aviation, as well as airborne subunits from the Central Military District took part in this exercise. Two thousand servicemen and 200 major pieces of military equipment, including Su-24 bombers, wheeled and tracked fighting vehicles, as well as the Grad multiple-launch rocket system [MLRS] deployed, enabling crews to improve their tactical expertise during the training.

This was the sixth Arctic deployment in succession in which Northern Fleet surface forces have taken part. The detachment included large ASW ship Severomorsk, large landing ships Kondopoga, Aleksandr Otrakovskiy, and Georgiy Pobedonosets, as well as support vessels: tanker Sergey Osipov, rescue tug Pamir, and the mooring lighter KIL-164. The detachment of ships and vessels sailed some 1,900 nautical miles on the transit from Severomorsk.

In connection with renovation of the Noril'sk airport runway, maritime transport was the primary method of delivering subunits, arms, and special equipment.... Northern Fleet ships and vessels transported personnel and everything necessary....

The exercise was launched at Dudinka and then shifted to Noril'sk. Northern Fleet ships arrived [at the river port of] Dudinka on 18 August to take part in a tactical exercise with the landing of an amphibious assault force on an austere Yenisei River beach.

The first simulated battle took place on 21 August. According to the scenario, terrorists had mined the shore in the vicinity of Dudinka and captured an important industrial facility. A joint force of Northern Fleet forces supported by aviation and Spetsnaz of the Central Military District had to retake it in order to support the amphibious assault force landing, and its subsequent advance into the interior of the peninsula.

Combat began with the delivery of an airstrike against terrorist positions and infiltration of Spetsnaz teams into their rear to adjust gunfire from the ships. On receiving target designations, gunners of the large ASW ship Severomorsk opened fire against reinforced enemy positions on shore. After that, ship-based helicopters delivered teams of military engineers to the beach. The engineers cleared approaches to the beach through the mines and prepared a site for unloading equipment, marking it with signal flares. Naval infantrymen who had disembarked onto fast boats from aboard the Severomorsk supported the engineers' work. After preparing a position for the landing of the amphibious assault force equipment, landing ships Georgiy Pobedonosets, Kondopoga, and Aleksandr Otrakovskiy approached the shoreline one after the other. Over 30 pieces of wheeled and tracked equipment of the naval infantry, the Arctic Brigade, and the Airborne ... disembarked onto the austere beach.

Now, according to the scenario, the theater of combat subsequently shifted inland to Noril'sk. The assault force had to make a 100 kilometer march across the Taimir Peninsula. Tracked vehicles were loaded onto railroad flatcars and accompanied by security subunits which had been formed from Northern Fleet naval infantry.

The active phase of the Northern Fleet and Central Military District joint exercise began on 28 August in the northern part of Krasnoyarskiy Krai in the vicinity of Chernaya Mountain and Yergalakh Mountain in the foothills of the Plutorana Plateau. The joint force had to protect the main industrial hub of the Arctic region.

Main fighting took place in the vicinity of facilities of the Noril'sk Nickel enterprise, near facilities located a short distance from the city in the estuary of Medvezhka River. According to the scenario, Northern Fleet reconnaissance and assault landing personnel discovered several teams of commandos here. They called in an artillery strike on the enemy concentrations. Grad MLRS batteries and 2S1 self-propelled howitzers moved up to the firing line.

Under cover of artillery, Northern Fleet Arctic Brigade and airborne troops advanced to the enemy positions. Their mission was to surround and destroy the enemy commandos. Su-24 bombers and Northern Fleet Naval Aviation helicopters provided fire support from the air.

On 30 August, having made a short forced march in the reverse direction, subunits of naval infantrymen, soldiers of the Arctic Brigade and a paratrooper company task force began loading equipment onto the large landing ships moored at Dudinka. A total of over 50 pieces of equipment took part in the forced march: Rys armored cars, armored personnel carriers, MLRS on Ural truck chassis, and Army all-terrain vehicles.

Summing up preliminary results of the joint exercise, Northern Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov called it an unusual event for Northern Fleet, noting that a high level of coordination among participants succeeded in executing joint assigned missions. This was one of the main objectives of the exercise.



Russia Capable of Spoofing GPS Signals?

OE Watch Commentary: For many years now, militaries around the world have utilized satellite jamming technology to interfere with GPS signals, forcing foes to temporarily utilize less reliable technologies instead. According to a recent article in *Moscow Life*, a pro-Kremlin news website known for its access to security services sources, Russia has recently developed new technology which takes GPS interference one step further.

The new technology alters GPS signals rather than terminating them altogether. This strategy allows the interference to go undetected for longer periods of time, causing pilots and captains to rely on the hacked signals rather than reverting to other means of assessing their locations. The author claims that Russia tested the technology on 22 June off of Russia's Black Sea coast near Novorossiysk. At that time, a "foreign vessel" notified the US Maritime Administration of a malfunction in the navigation system, causing the equipment to suggest the vessel was located "dozens of kilometers inland, near Gelendzhik airport" outside Novorossiysk. After equipment checks showed no malfunction, the author reports, the captain contacted nearby vessels. "On at least 20 vessels, the automatic identification system showed exactly the same location as his -- deep inland. So the chances of it being a random glitch are zero."

According to the author, a similar pattern of GPS spoofing was previously detected by Pokemon Go players in Moscow. The popular game, played on a cell phone, requires the use of GPS coordinates. Players outside the Kremlin experienced a sudden and dramatic shift in the location of their GPS readouts. The author again related the coordinate shift to an airport, referencing the change as "some distance away towards Vnukovo airport."

The author indicates that this new GPS spoofing technology could have major implications for the security of the Kremlin, preventing attacks by GPS-guided munitions, though "inertial guided munitions do retain a precision capability in such conditions." It could also inhibit bombing attempts, causing adversaries to believe they are on target while Russian GPS manipulation leads them off course.

The author notes that "experts are predicting that non-Western countries with sophisticated military technology will go down the road of GPS spoofing," pointing out the dangers of replication by terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. He notes that "misdirecting GPS signals in the English Channel or some other narrow and busy strait would be enough to cause a large number of ships to collide or run aground." **End OE Watch Commentary (Johnson)**

“This kind of scheme has significant advantages over jamming: if the spoof satellite signal goes undetected, the enemy will launch its missiles and drop its bombs fully believing that they are on target and will not try to use alternative homing systems. The munitions will go ‘off-course.’”

Source: Andrey Borisov, "СМИ: Россия испытала секретную систему борьбы с западной GPS (Media: Russia Tests Secret System To Counter the West's GPS)," *Moscow Life*, 11 August 2017. <https://life.ru/1034673>

Satellite jammers are already familiar, but this new development differs in that it fools GPS receivers by tampering with the signal....More than 20 different ships in Russia's Black Sea coastal waters suddenly discovered that their receivers all thought they were in the same place: dozens of kilometers inland, near Gelendzhik airport. This happened 22 June but has only now emerged....

A foreign vessel near Novorossiysk notified the US Maritime Administration 22 June 2017 that its GPS navigation system had located it 32 kilometers inland. The captain checked the equipment and when it appeared to be in working order contacted 20 other vessels in the vicinity to find out if he was alone in having this issue. On at least 20 vessels, the automatic identification system showed exactly the same location as his -- deep inland. So the chances of it being a random glitch are zero. The report is still undergoing expert evaluation but the most likely conclusion is already obvious: Russia is testing a hitherto purely theoretical weapon that fools an enemy's GPS.

For a long time the only way of countering GPS -- without which the precision of NATO air, artillery, and missile strikes will inevitably suffer -- has been to block the signal from the relevant satellites. But in recent years the United States has developed a number of systems that make the signal usable against even powerful jamming. And even if the signal can be obscured, GPS receivers immediately notice. Experts are predicting that non-Western countries with sophisticated military technology will go down the road of GPS spoofing.

This kind of scheme has significant advantages over jamming: if the spoof satellite signal goes undetected, the enemy will launch its missiles and drop its bombs fully believing that they are on target and will not try to use alternative homing systems. The munitions will go "off-course." GPS inaccuracies can also lead NATO aviation astray.

Large-scale signal distortions have been detected in the past near the Kremlin, where people trying to play Pokemon Go were "transported", according to their GPS readouts, some distance away towards Vnukovo airport. Ways of fooling the signal like this mean that an attack on the Kremlin with GPS-guided weapons is unrealistic. Although inertial guided munitions do retain a precision capability in such conditions.

...Western experts are voicing fears that similar systems could also in theory be created by terrorist groups like Islamic State. Misdirecting GPS signals in the English Channel or some other narrow and busy strait would be enough to cause a large number of ships to collide or run aground....



Egypt's Expanding Military

OE Watch Commentary: Egypt has ranked among the top global arms importers since the election of Abdel Fattah Sisi to the presidency in 2014. The shopping spree has not been without controversy, especially given Egypt's economic difficulties. How can the Egyptian military spend lavishly on weapons amidst widespread deficits, poverty, and inflation? The question has been on the minds and lips of many Egyptians over the past several months. The accompanying passages provide insight into this debate.

According to the first accompanying passage there are several good reasons for Egypt to amass weapons. The author, a prominent Egyptian columnist, relays a series of explanations and answers, including the need to defend Egyptian national security against potential threats along its borders. These growing threats include anarchy in Libya, deteriorating relations with Sudan, insurgency in the Sinai, the Nile water conflict with Ethiopia, traditional enmity with Israel, and potential claims on Egypt's Mediterranean gas deposits by Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Turkey.

A different line of argument holds that Egypt is importing weapons for offensive rather than defensive purposes. This view is illustrated by the second accompanying passage, written by an Egyptian political researcher who specializes in the country's foreign policy. The argument holds that the weapons purchases will help Egypt project military power regionally in order to reverse years of decline amidst a rapidly changing strategic landscape. According to the author, Egypt's military leaders believe that "only military prowess will enable Egypt to maintain its traditional political leverage and to avoid being swept away by the rapid reconfigurations of power in the region."

Concurrent with the stockpiling of expensive new weapons systems, since 2014 the Egyptian military has deepened and expanded its stake in the Egyptian economy. As summarized in the third accompanying excerpt, from a Qatari-sponsored daily published in London, the military's economic activities continue to expand, particularly in infrastructure and to new sectors such as cinema. On the 44th anniversary of the October 1973 war, the military announced that it was-- for the first time-- entering the film industry by teaming up with prominent screenwriters and filmmakers to sponsor three movies based on the October War.

How close to reality is the image of strength and competence projected by the Egyptian Armed Forces? Critics might point to how in August 2017 the Iraqi Army considered cancelling an order for Egyptian weapons and ammunition due to concerns about poor quality, as relayed in the fourth accompanying passage. The more common critique centers on the Egyptian military's inability to resolve the situation in the Sinai as proof of a venal institution more interested in money and politics than in securing the national interest (Also see: "Duelling Perspectives on the Egyptian Army," *OE Watch*, Jan-Feb 2017). **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source: هل يحتاج الجيش المصري إلى الرافال والميسترال والغواصات؟
Imad al-Din Hussein. "Does the Egyptian Military Need the Rafale, Mistral and Submarines?" *Deutsche Welle (Arabic)*, 7 September 2017. <https://goo.gl/YPfejZ>

On the western border, which is around 1,200 kilometers long, there is no central Libyan government or unified army able to control the border... the Sudanese border is also still inflamed... and becoming more dangerous as relations between Cairo and Khartoum deteriorate... everyone knows the eastern border's dangers given ISIS activity... Israel... remains the main enemy in Egyptian military doctrine both new and old, something which should not be forgotten... another challenge is securing Egypt's share of the Nile waters, following Ethiopia's insistence on building the Renaissance Dam... another important challenge is the secret struggle over Mediterranean gas reserves between Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Turkey...

Source: Nael Shama. "Egypt's Power Game: Why Cairo is Boosting its Military Power," *Pambazuka News*, 14 September 2017. <http://www.pambazuka.org/democracy-governance/egypt%E2%80%99s-power-game-why-cairo-boosting-its-military-power>

Sisi is following in the footsteps of his predecessors. His decision to boost Egypt's military strength is driven by his knowledge that his country has limited room for maneuver, and that its frail economy cannot eliminate its dependence on the largesse of wealthy Arab states, let alone compete with their economies. Only military prowess will enable Egypt to maintain its traditional political leverage and to avoid being swept away by the rapid reconfigurations of power in the region... The Egyptian president admitted that he did not purchase vast amounts of arms for defense purposes, but to project Egypt's power in the Arab world... In a region that is in a state of great flux and challenge, Sisi's power gamble may fail to produce the desired results. Also, given Egypt's huge economic troubles, it stands to reason that his stupendous spending on arms is grossly irrational.

Source: الجيش المصري يتوغل في الاقتصاد تزامناً مع احتفالات نصر أكتوبر
"The Egyptian Military Penetrates the Economy While Celebrating the 'October Victory'," *al-Quds*, 7 October 2017. <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=803887>

The 44th Anniversary of the October 1973 war coincided with the Egyptian military penetrating further into the national economy... and the expansion of the activities of the Egyptian Military Institutions to new sectors such as cinema. The conclusion of 84 new projects overseen by the Armed Forces' Engineering Authority was also recently announced... there will be many new major projects this year overseen by the armed forces, including the biggest conference and expo center... Since Abdel Fattah Sisi became Egypt's leader, the military's economic activities have expanded, especially in infrastructure. Sisi has relied on the Armed Forces' Engineering Authority, one of the army's branches, and tasked it with building the new Suez Canal, hundreds of low-income homes, as well as laying down the basic infrastructure for the new Egyptian capital, which the Egyptian president announced would be built east of Cairo.

(continued)



Continued: Egypt's Expanding Military

“... Only military prowess will enable Egypt to maintain its traditional political leverage and to avoid being swept away by the rapid reconfigurations of power in the region...”

Source:

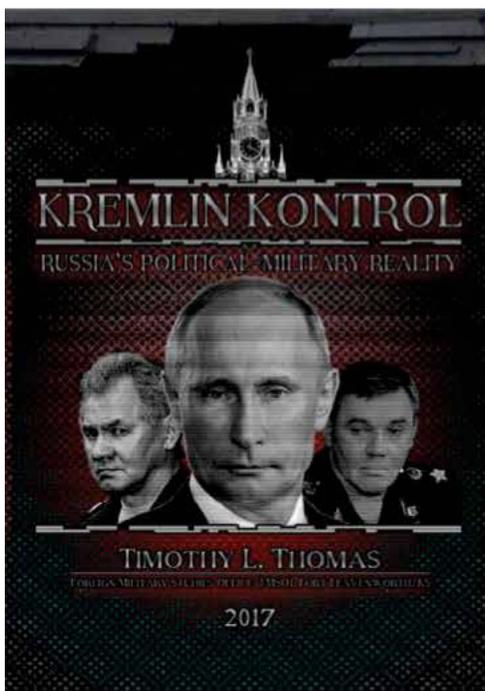
Ahmed al-Naimi. “Iraq Reconsiders Weapons Deal with Egypt for these Reasons,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 10 August 2017. <https://goo.gl/8xFQnM>

العراق يراجع صفقة تسليح مع مصر لهذه الأسباب

A prominent Iraqi official in Baghdad said on Thursday that Iraq is embarking on a comprehensive reconsideration of the weapons deal signed with Egypt last year, which calls for Iraq to be provided with ammunition, medium and light weapons, and armored vehicles. The reasons are related to the poor quality of the weapons and the vehicles not functioning. This comes on the heels of an Iraqi Defense Ministry report discussing the flimsiness of the vehicles recently received by the Iraqi Army and problems with some of the medium weapons, especially shoulder-fired missiles...



Egyptian Navy's new S42 submarine and Gowind 2500 corvette arriving in Alexandria, Egypt.
Source: Egyptian Defense Ministry via Facebook; <https://www.facebook.com/EgyArmySpox/photos/a.219625808168409.52727.217455035052153/1160372327427081>; Public Domain.



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>



ISIS: Concealment and Deception

OE Watch Commentary: Concealment and deception are fundamental elements of the fighting doctrine of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Their importance is highlighted by the accompanying excerpt, taken from the September 2017 issue of ISIS's weekly Arabic-language newsletter *al-Naba* (Issue #97). The article, entitled "How to Fight under the Eyes of the Crusader Aircraft," argues that with proper training and planning, ISIS fighters should be able not only to elude US precision airstrikes but turn them into "a major vulnerability that will paralyze the enemy's own ability to fight or at least reveal the position of enemy fighters."

To make his argument, the anonymous author begins by emphasizing the importance of concealment. In a battlefield with highly precise armed UAVs hovering overhead, he cautions, "your main goal is to conceal your position. This is the starting point for contemporary fighting." With proper cover, he continues, an ISIS fighting group can focus on exploiting the vulnerabilities of enemy units, particularly their light armaments, limited ammunition, and poor training in concealment. "The mujahideen's greatest mistake," he notes, "is to deal with them [special forces] as if they were a strike force, when in fact they are a feeble force used by the Crusaders as fish food." They carry light weapons in order "to provoke the mujahideen and draw them into battle" but "their true weapons are their communications equipment and laser guidance systems."

According to the author, mastering the "reconnaissance by fire" ruse ("firing before knowing the enemy's location in order to prompt a response that reveals his position") is "the key to modern fighting." ISIS fighters should not fall for this ruse and instead employ it regularly; rather than fire, ISIS fighters can use small, cheap surveillance UAVs to make enemy units "emerge from their burrows and fire toward the miniature UAV, which is recording them and all their weapons." Once the enemy force has revealed itself, concealed ISIS fighters can plan accordingly.

Concealment and deception are and will remain fundamental battlefield concepts for ISIS. Their mastery is considered essential, as summarized in the fundamental rule outlined by the author: "The enemy's goal is to know your position, the mujahideen's goal is to strike the enemy without revealing his position."

End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)

“... They [special forces] are a feeble force used by the Crusaders as fish food. Mujahideen must never eat this food...”

Source:

كيف تقاقل تحت أعين الطائرات الصليبية؟

"How to Fight under the Eyes of the Crusader Aircraft," *al-Naba*, 14 September 2017.

Available at: <http://jihadology.net/2017/09/14/new-issue-of-the-islamic-states-newsletter-al-naba-97/>

It is beautiful to watch the enemy searching for you everywhere like a madman, as you hide holding your ground... [After US warplanes became active in Syria and Iraq] the mujahideen developed their fighting methods and began camouflaging weapons, vehicles and tanks to some degree, while still deploying and employing them. This did not occur at the required level, but nonetheless decreased losses clearly, praise God. Soldiers also began training in new tactics to fight in the presence of Crusader aircraft. Some fighting groups mastered these techniques, while others did not train in them as required... the high-precision Crusader aircraft can be turned into a major vulnerability that will paralyze the enemy's own ability to fight or at least reveal the position of enemy fighters... losses occurred at the time mainly due to poor understanding of the functioning and capabilities of the Crusader aircraft... for surveillance aircraft and precision targeting, the first step for the enemy to know your position; the targeting comes after. Therefore, your main goal is to conceal your position. This is the starting point for contemporary fighting... The special forces deployed by the apostate PKK and the Crusaders are by no means a fighting force, but rather exclusively a force to direct airstrikes. Its goal is to call in airstrikes, informing them exactly where strikes should take place. Therefore, these forces carry only light arms; their true weapons are their communications equipment and laser guidance systems. The main function of their weapons is to provoke the mujahideen and draw them into battle. The apostate forces always make deceptive advances, and fire only to get the mujahideen to come out of their hiding place in order to fire back. This then allows aircraft to track and target the mujahideen, or the apostates can provide the necessary data for the airstrike. A member of these forces were recently captured and he only had two magazines worth of ammunition for his rifle. When asked about this he said that he did not fight, but rather advanced only in order to specify the location of mujahideen, a task which did not require much ammunition. This is not a strike force. Thus, the mujahideen's greatest mistake is to deal with them as if they were a strike force, when in fact they are a feeble force used by the Crusaders as fish food. Mujahideen must never eat this food. The best way is to not reveal your position to the enemy until the enemy is within confirmed fire range. Only then should the mujahideen fire and target them, and then quickly change location... The enemy fighting technique we described is called "reconnaissance by fire," which means firing before knowing the enemy's location in order to prompt a response that reveals his position. The mujahideen fighting in modern wars must understand this deception well, for understanding it is the key to modern fighting.... Knowing your enemy's position is the first and most important piece of military intelligence to have. There is no successful military operation without this step... The soldiers of the Islamic State sent small Styrofoam surveillance UAVs toward enemy positions. They were then lowered so that enemy soldiers could hear them. This was enough to know everything about enemy weapons in the area, and through the images we could see their weapons and positions and other intelligence to prepare for the subsequent raid or prepare to fend off the enemy force being surveilled. This type of reconnaissance does not require firing at the enemy, but rather making him feel threatened. The apostates will emerge from their burrows and fire toward the miniature UAV, which is recording them and all their weapons. The types of weapons can be determined by their sound and analysis of their fire. This plan will not fail even if the enemy knows it, since its soldiers are mostly not trained in concealment and do not know how much it harms them to give away their weaponry and position in the battlefield. If you, brother mujahid, are familiar with this type of battlefield deception, you should not repeatedly fall into this old trap and follow the golden rule when dealing with aircraft or any precision weapon: "The enemy's goal is to know your position, the mujahideen's goal is to strike the enemy without revealing his position" ... Remember this rule: 'They do all they can to know your position, so do all you can to hide from their view.'



Saudi Arabia's Tilt Toward Russia

OE Watch Commentary: Saudi Arabian King Salman's recent visit to Moscow was the first ever such visit by a Saudi monarch. It resulted in unprecedented agreements on weapons purchases and collaboration in the energy sector. Many local observers agree that the visit is a response to changing regional conditions, including Russian activism and American "retreat" and "indecision." The reactions of three prominent columnists writing in Saudi Arabia's two most widely circulated regional newspapers (*al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*) are excerpted alongside this commentary. The broad narrative shared by the pieces and other commentary from the region is that the meeting was made possible by a confluence of interests amidst changes in the regional order.

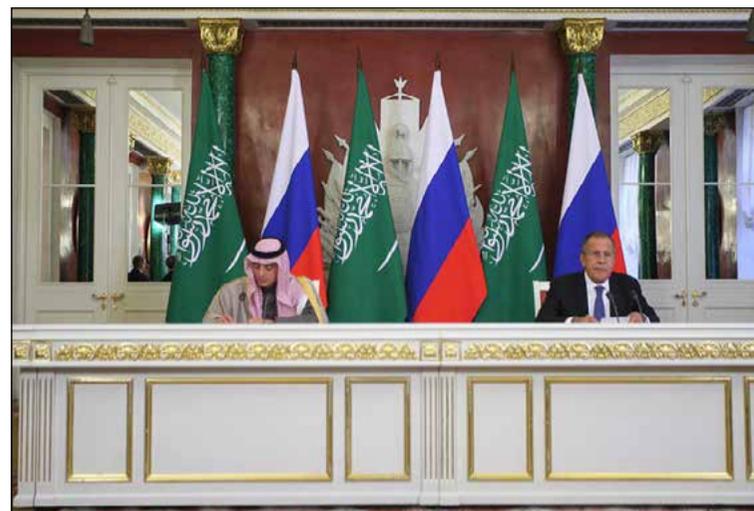
The author of the first accompanying passage concludes that the visit conveys an important message: "Saudi foreign policy is pragmatic and ultimately not held hostage by its partnerships and alliances, even with the United States." Russia seeks to end the Syrian conflict, which according to the author requires Saudi cooperation. Having obtained the cooperation of Iran and Turkey (via the Astana negotiations), Russia needed "the third power in the Syrian crisis and the region" to come on board. Despite being long beholden to the idea of toppling Bashar al-Assad and the regime that sustains him, the Saudi government appears to convey flexibility in this matter by meeting with the Russian president.

"...Saudi Arabia and Russia need one another under the current regional and global conditions..."

The second passage, written by the editor-in-chief of *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, highlights the meeting's economic angle. Prior Saudi-Russian negotiations to stabilize oil prices were "more than encouraging" and set the stage for this meeting. Saudi entreaties are natural, given that Russia is now "the sole and necessary entry point to a solution in Syria." Economics and geopolitics are intimately linked for both countries, the author argues, claiming that "Putin's Russia realizes that the economy will be the strongest general in the future wars."

Perhaps most notable in the meeting were the various purported military contracts signed, including a potential sale of S-400 missile defense systems to Saudi Arabia and agreements for Saudi indigenous production of Russian weapons. The author of the third accompanying article, a well-connected columnist and former editor of *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, emphasizes that Saudi diversification in its weapons procurement is meant to "avoid repeating the situation [Saudi Arabia] went through two years ago in Yemen," in reference to pressures against arming Saudi Arabia for its war in Yemen. Echoing the sentiments of the first passage, the author notes how turning toward Russian arms is in part a way to "free Saudi Arabia from American pressure." Saudi Arabia, he argues, is threatened by Iranian encirclement like never before, and American commitment to defending Saudi Arabia may have too many strings attached for the kingdom's comfort.

While Russia's priority may be obtaining a settlement to end the Syrian conflict, Saudi priority is to do the same in Yemen. One issue worth tracking in the near future is whether Russia will diplomatically wade into the Yemeni conflict on Saudi Arabia's behalf. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Russian and Saudi FMs Sergey Lavrov and Adel Al-Jubeir.
Source: Russian Foreign Ministry, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mfarussia/23664121838/>, CC 2.0.

Source: الرياض وموسكو ما الذي حصل؟
Khalid al-Dakhil. "Riyadh and Moscow: What Took Place?" *al-Hayat*, 8 October 2017. <https://goo.gl/X9JjXv>

What is new and proof of what the visit may represent is that for the first time they discussed bilateral military and technical cooperation... Saudi Arabia and Russia need one another under the current regional and global conditions. Russia needs Saudi Arabia to strengthen Moscow's new role in the region, via the Syrian door, and its attempts to fill the gap left by American retreat... Russia obtained the cooperation of Iran and Turkey. Cooperation from Saudi Arabia, the third power in the Syrian crisis and the region, was all that was missing... American retreat and the sharp Arab divisions regarding regional affairs, Syria included, meant that Riyadh could not afford to clash with Russia, as this would isolate it regionally and internationally. Under these circumstances it was necessary for Saudi Arabia to reach an understanding with Russia regarding Syria and other important topics... One might naturally say that Saudi Arabia delayed in taking steps toward Russia.... A continuation and deepening of the trend that began with the king's visit would reflect the extent of the qualitative change in bilateral relations, particularly in Saudi Arabia... The most prominent message conveyed by the king's visit to Russia was that Saudi foreign policy is pragmatic and ultimately not held hostage by its partnerships and alliances, even with the United States.

Source: ما بعد موعد الكرملين
Ghassan Charbel. "What Comes After the Kremlin Meeting," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 6 October 2017. <https://goo.gl/DjECsK>

Russia transformed two years ago by virtue of its military intervention in Syria, becoming a prominent daily player in the Middle East theater to the extent of emerging as the sole and necessary entry point to a solution in Syria. Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council and has the power to bring down resolutions by veto... Russia is also a nuclear power... Saudi-Russian cooperation to stabilize oil markets was more than encouraging... There needed to be a new proximity in bilateral relations despite disagreements regarding Syria... Putin's Russia realizes that the economy will be the strongest general in the future wars...

Source: السعودية سياسة التسلح
Abdul Rahman al-Rashed. "Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Arming," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 10 October 2017. <https://goo.gl/2rkdv6>

The situation reaches a never-before seen level of foreign threat against the kingdom, due to two factors: the Iranian threat increasing and American commitment to defend it decreasing... The military purchases from Russia are not to replace American weapons or distance itself from the US, as some wish to interpret this... buying Russian and Chinese weapons will free Saudi Arabia from American pressure. If ammunition is no longer provided or its weapons are forbidden from use in a future war, Riyadh will have other options... a diversity of sources will avoid repeating the situation it went through two years ago in Yemen.



The Syrian Conflict: A Syrian Kurdish Commander's Perspective

OE Watch Commentary: Amberin Zaman, a highly respected Turkish journalist, recently conducted the first-ever interview with Mazlum Kobane, the chief commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria. The interview was published in *Al Monitor*, a news site which features reporting and analysis by prominent journalists and experts from the Middle East and North Africa. The interview, parts of which are excerpted here, reveals the Syrian Kurdish commander's perspective on a number of important issues related to the Syrian conflict, the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Syrian Kurds' views on the future of Syria. The group has been fighting ISIS in Syria, and most recently captured Raqqa, the self-styled ISIS capital.

While the SDF is a multi-ethnic coalition of Arabs, Kurds and others, it is predominantly made up of fighters from the armed wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD). In November 2013 the PYD declared the establishment of an interim autonomous administration in Syria's Kurdish northeast. The move was the first step of a three-part plan announced earlier, which also foresaw an eventual constitution and elections. In January 2014 the PYD declared the 'Democratic Autonomous Government of Western Kurdistan,' made up of three autonomous 'cantons,' each with its own administration: Cizre in the east on the Iraqi border, Kobane in the center and Afrin in the westernmost part of Syria (collectively known as Rojava). The international community does not recognize these entities. However, with the example of the autonomous Iraqi Kurdish Region next door, the idea of the Syrian Kurdish cantons uniting and creating a new Kurdish entity in Syria, similar to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, is likely to be a hotly debated topic within the broader question of the future of Syria. In the long term, the PYD's primary focus is thought to be to unify the Kurdish cantons in northern Syria under its governance, in other words, an autonomous Rojava within a decentralized Syria.

It is in this context that the commander's comments are significant. As the excerpted passages point out, he sees the Syrian regime as a reality that is here to stay, pointing out that he sees "no sign that [Assad] is on his way out." As such, he notes that the group's essential objective is "to negotiate with the central government and get a certain status for the areas we liberated. If required, we are ready to engage in dialogue with the central government on this." When asked about his views on the independence referendum in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, he says that, "All the Kurds dream of uniting the four parts [in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria] and to establish an independent Kurdistan. That is the goal. But there are also realities. ... Let me be perfectly clear: Our aim is to establish a federal system in Syria, to remain part of Syria."

The commander also discusses the difficulties of fighting ISIS, such as their use of civilians as human shields, and their widespread use of planting landmines. Looking beyond Raqqa, he notes that the move for Deir ez-Zor has begun, upon a request of the people of Deir ez-Zor, whom he says are a fundamental component of the SDF as well. As for the future of ISIS, he points out that "once defeated militarily, [ISIS] will return to guerrilla warfare — its favorite form of war." **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

"Let me be perfectly clear: Our aim is to establish a federal system in Syria, to remain part of Syria."

Source: Amberin Zaman, "Syrian Kurdish commander: We're 'ready to engage' with Damascus," *Al Monitor*, 26 September 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/09/turkey-kurdish-commander-says-us-should-stay-in-syria.html#ixzz4v8bo4ehB>

Al-Monitor: ... You Kurds have been fighting IS alongside the coalition beyond your own areas, sacrificing your lives. Yet the United States and the international community refuse to recognize the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, which brings together all the ethnic and religious groups in the region, including the Kurds. So how far are you prepared to go in sacrificing your lives while they withhold political support from you and refuse to recognize a status for you or have diplomatic ties with you?

Kobane: We, the Kurds, liberated our areas from the regime first — without much loss of life. I'm talking about 2012. Our intention was to stay away from the war between the regime and the opposition and to develop, strengthen and defend our own areas. But the areas we liberated came under attack [by] the groups known as Jaish al-Hour, then [Jabhat Fattah al-] Nusra and now [ISIS]. And all those attackers were our neighbors. Most of the attacks came from Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. So, we were forced to fight to defend ourselves. That's the essential reason why we are currently fighting in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. How far this will go on is an important question. ... We know, however, that [ISIS] will be defeated militarily in Deir ez-Zor. Yet this doesn't mean that terrorism will be over in Syria, and this will require the war to continue. Once defeated militarily, [ISIS] will return to guerrilla warfare — its favorite form of war.

The regime is a threat to us at present. There are also the Shiite groups aligned with the regime, which are a threat to us as well. We don't want to fight with anyone, but we will defend ourselves. If the regime and its allies launch an operation against us, it will affect not only us, but ... will lead to a fresh wave of chaos and instability in the region. But yes, one has to come to terms with the current regime. The Syrian regime is a reality. Militarily, the regime has won a victory against the opposition — the opposition other than us, I mean — at least in the areas it is currently present. And looking at things objectively, the regime is here to stay...

I see no sign that he [Assad] is on his way out at present.

... Our essential objective is to negotiate with the central government and get a certain status for the areas we liberated. If required, we are ready to engage in dialogue with the central government on this...

Al-Monitor: When you consider what is happening in northern Iraq, what kind of conclusions do you draw with regard to your own position? The United States has put in a lot of effort to stop the referendum on independence from being held. How do you evaluate this?

Kobane: We support the independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan. All the Kurds dream of uniting the four parts [in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria] and to establish an independent Kurdistan. That is the goal. But there are also realities. ... Let me be perfectly clear: Our aim is to establish a federal system in Syria, to remain part of Syria.



The Turkey-Russia S-400 Deal: Not a Done Deal

OE Watch Commentary: In February 2017, Turkey's Defense Minister had announced that Turkey was searching for systems to protect itself against missile and air attacks and that Russian S-400s were a leading contender, adding that significant progress had been made in talks with Russia. In early July, he said that technical discussions with Russia were complete and that the sides were now discussing financing options. Things seemed to be moving forward when President Erdoğan declared in September that Turkey had sent a deposit to Moscow as part of the deal. Since then, however, there have been reports about disagreements on the issue of technology-sharing, which is non-negotiable for Turkey. The accompanying passages from Turkish sources discuss some uncertainties regarding the Turkey-Russia S-400 deal, raising questions as to whether it will go through. One thing is for sure: In contrast to much of the international reporting on the issue, the deal is not final.

The first passage points out the lack of information and lingering issues surrounding the deal, including the amount of the deposit that was paid, the total value of the deal, where the missiles would be deployed and whether technology-transfer is part of the agreement. The author, a veteran Turkish columnist and foreign policy expert, asks whether the S-400s, which "promise neither a technology transfer, co-production, nor national software codes" will be the answer to Turkey's needs. He goes on to answer the question by noting, "We don't know, we don't have enough information, we are not given this information." Other analysts have echoed similar confusion, particularly why a deposit was made before the issue of technology-sharing was ironed out.

The second passage indicates that the hurdles regarding the technology transfer issue have not been overcome, despite statements about the deal, and despite the fact that a deposit has been made. The passage references a Russian source saying that they have no plans to give any electronic codes or internal regulations regarding the systems. The source continues by saying that "We will not abide by the Turks' request to see the internal mechanisms of the S-400 system. Inside the systems, there will be a Russian-made radar system that indicates whether an item belongs to an enemy or to your own country. The Turks asked us to give them the passwords and control. But we refused." The third passage reports on the Turkish Foreign Minister saying that the deal may be cancelled if the technology-transfer hurdle is not overcome.

Turkey's search for a long-range air and missile defense system is not new. Previously, in late 2013, Turkey had announced its decision to start talks with a Chinese firm to co-produce such a defense system. The contract was awarded to the China Precision Machinery Export-Import Corporation (CPMEIC), a company that was under sanctions for violating the Iran, North Korea and Syria Nonproliferation Act. Furthermore, NATO members had expressed concern and warned of compatibility issues between the Chinese-made system and NATO systems. In November 2015, Turkey cancelled the deal with China and declared its goal to develop its own air defense systems with its own resources. It would not be surprising if the deal with Russia ends up cancelled as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

"[Turkish Foreign Minister] Çavuşoğlu said that if an agreement is not reached on the issue of joint production, a deal could be made with a different country..."

Source: Murat Yetkin, "Vergilerimizle alınacak S-400'ler bir depoda paslanmasın da (The S-400's which will be paid for with our taxes [should] not rust in a depot)," *Hurriyet.com*, 6 October 2017. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/murat-yetkin/vergilerimizle-alinacak-s-400ler-bir-depoda-paslanmasin-da-40601357>

"President Erdoğan recently announced that a deposit had been made for the [S-400] air defense missiles. But there is no clarification about how much this deposit is, or what the total amount to be paid is, or when the [missiles] will be delivered and where they will be deployed. There is only a guess by defense sources that it is around \$2,5 billion..."

[Regarding Turkey's need for missile defense], can the S-400's which may be delivered within two years, but promise neither a technology transfer, co-production, or national software codes, be the answer? We don't know, we don't have enough information, we are not given this information."

Source: "Gazeta.ru: Rusya S-400 sistemlerinin kodunu Türkiye'ye vermeyecek (Gazeta.ru: Russia will not give the S-400 system codes to Turkey)," *Sputniknews.com*, 2 October 2017. https://tr.sputniknews.com/rus_medyasi/201710021030395789-rusya-s400-kod-turkiye-vermeyecek/

A source reported as close to the S-400 talks between Russia and Turkey said in an interview with Gazeta.ru that, "We will not give the electronic codes and internal regulations regarding the S-400 systems to Turkey. According to the deal, only we will conduct technical maintenance. They will not open up the systems"....

The source continued as follows: "We will not abide by the Turks' request to see the internal mechanisms of the S-400 system. Inside the systems, there will be a Russian-made radar system that indicates whether an item belongs to an enemy or to your own country. The Turks asked us to give them the passwords and control. But we refused."

Source: "Çavuşoğlu S-400'ler hakkında konuştu (Çavuşoğlu spoke about the S-400s)," *Cumhuriyet.com.tr*, 10 October 2017. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/841615/Cavusoglu_S-400_ler_hakkinda_konustu.html

"[Turkish Foreign Minister] Çavuşoğlu said that if an agreement is not reached on the issue of joint production, a deal could be made with a different country."

"Can the S-400s which may be delivered within two years, but promise neither a technology transfer, co-production, or national software codes, be the answer [for Turkey's need for missile defense]? We don't know, we don't have enough information, we are not given this information."



Iran Questions the Nuclear Deal as North Korea Defies the West

OE Watch Commentary: Hossein Shariatmadari, the editor of the Islamic Republic's flagship *Kayhan* newspaper, is appointed directly by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei; both Iranians and outside analysts often read his comments to gain insight into the Supreme Leader's thinking. In the excerpted remarks—covered by various Iranian newspapers—Shariatmadari offers an analysis of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the so-called Iran nuclear deal. Always a critic of the JCPOA and any nuclear agreement, Shariatmadari has doubled down on his opposition as debate about the agreement's recertification, inspections, and Iran's other activities increases at the International Atomic Energy Agency and in Western capitals.

In the accompanying excerpts, Shariatmadari cites North Korea's increasing nuclear defiance and compares the power of North Korea unfavorably to Iran. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) was a formative period for the Islamic Republic and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Shariatmadari—embracing the widespread Iranian belief that the Iraqi invasion was an American-initiated plot from the start—argues that even when Iran was in such disarray, the “arrogant powers” were unable to make inroads against the Islamic Republic and, therefore, with Iran many times more powerful now, the United States would be hard-pressed to extract any penalty on Iran, even if Iran walked away from the deal. Therefore, he suggests, it is not in Iran's interest to agree to any renegotiation of the agreement, let alone abide by its commitments, given that Iran has gotten nothing from the nuclear deal (sanctions relief notwithstanding).

This does not mean that Iran is preparing to walk away from the JCPOA, but it does suggest that the North Korea example looms large over at least some quarters of Iranian thinking as it does with American policymakers, albeit to the opposite ends. While some non-proliferation experts see the JCPOA as a means to prevent “another North Korea,” some Iranian hardliners close to Khamenei ask themselves why Iran should be constrained by a nuclear agreement when North Korea, a country with a smaller population and weaker economy, managed to defy the West. The true resonance of this argument will likely emerge among a broader array of Iranian policymakers should more active debate turn toward constraining Iran's ballistic missile development. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Iran, which has far greater authority [than North Korea], can stand up against America.”



Kayhan editor Hossein Shariatmadari warns against the penetration of the enemy after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) for students.

Source: Tasnim News Agency via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AHossein_Shariatmadari_in_University_of_Tehran.jpg, CC BY SA 4.0.

Source: “Moshekel-e Asli Amrika ba Eqtedar Rozafzun Mellat-e Iran Ast (America's Basic Problem is the Growing Authority of the Iranian Nation),” *Fars News Agency*, 19 September 2017. <http://www.farsnews.com/13960628001718>

Shariatmadari added: “North Korea, which in comparison to Iran lacks the authority of popular support for the government, is acting contrary to America's demands [and gets away with it]. Therefore, Iran which has far greater authority, can stand up against America.” He stated further, “All the empty American threats show that today they have no military capability to deal with Iran. Trump knows that Iran is greater than North Korea, and that it is not possible to scare [our] people with the empty shadow of war.”

Source: “Shariatmadari: Amrika Aqabeh-e Estategik Khod ra dar Montaqeh az Dast Dadeh Ast (Shariatmadari: America's Strategic Blockade in the Region has lost),” *Islamic Student News Agency*, 19 September 2017. <https://goo.gl/Yr4Xys>

Shariatmadari, in reference to those who say the JCPOA was negotiated with Iran's authority, and that they had agreed to the JCPOA, reiterated, “What is the benefit of the JCPOA that today they talk about supplementing the JCPOA? It is true that it is beneficial for the United States but not for Iran. We have only given concessions in the JCPOA, but speaking about the abolition of sanctions, if the JCPOA does not lift sanctions, it does not heal the pain. I reviewed the text of the agreement, and there was, in fact, nothing special. We gave nuclear concessions to the enemy, but sanctions are still in place, and today it is heard that even if America leaves the JCPOA, we will not leave the JCPOA. Why should we not get out?”



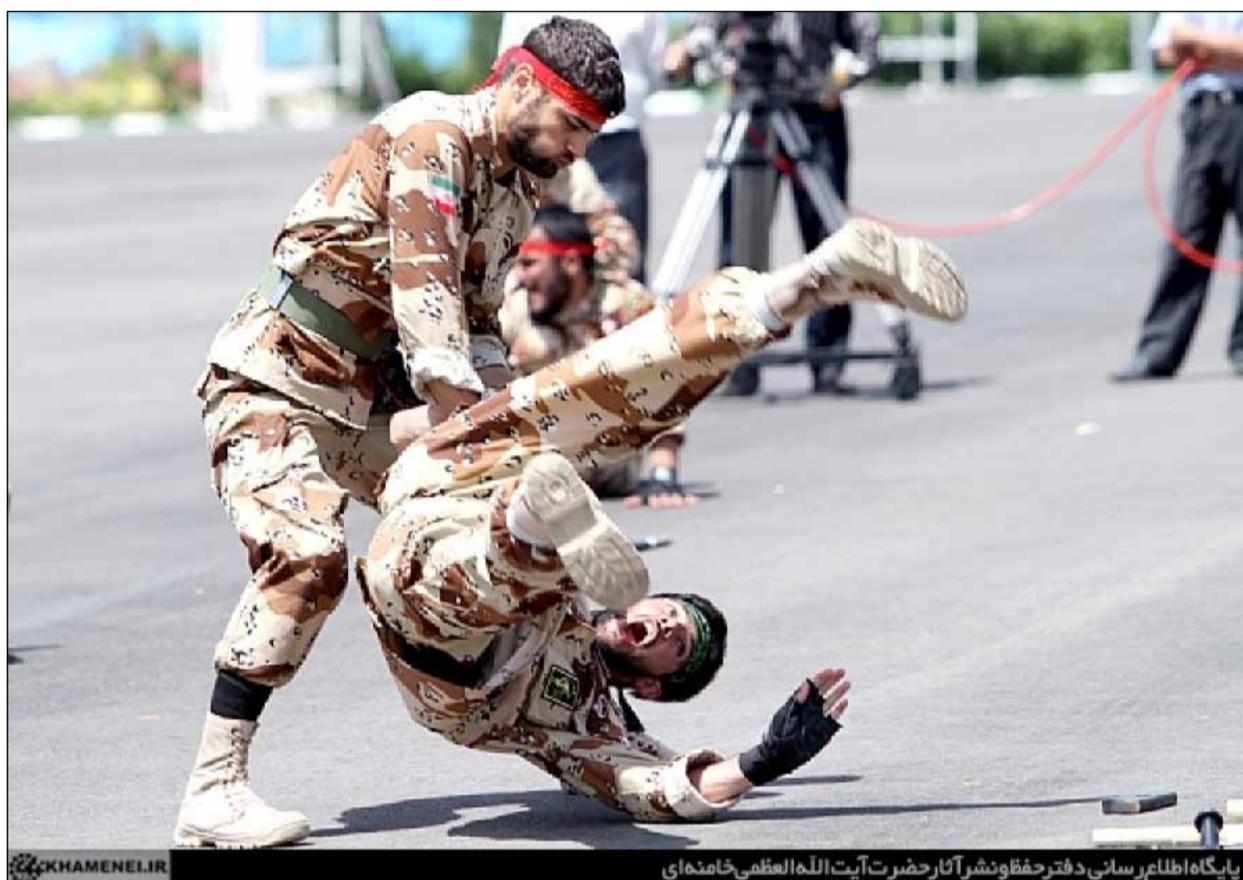
Iran Sends University Instructors to the ‘Resistance Front’

OE Watch Commentary: The Syrian civil war appears to be slowing if not winding down. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has suffered a number of defeats. Both Russia’s and Iran’s unwavering support for Bashar al-Assad’s regime coupled with the apparent Saudi and Turkish willingness to scale back support for the Syrian opposition bolsters Assad’s power relative to his opponents. Assad’s perseverance in the Syrian civil war means that the balance of power will not change—Syria will remain in the Arab ‘rejectionist’ camp as it was before the outbreak of the conflict, tied more to Tehran and Moscow and hostile both to the West and broader efforts to achieve Arab-Israeli peace.

Beyond the sheer flow of refugees the conflict generated, one of the most lasting legacies of the civil war will be the experience-hardened troops and militias have received on the battlefield. A generation after Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah fighters have received a trial by fire and trained a new generation in asymmetric warfare. Those who have survived the Syrian war and returned to Lebanon have gained experience that augments their lethality in any future conflict. Iran, too, has recognized the importance of battlefield experience for its elite units. In the excerpted article from a news site affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a brigadier general who heads training at the Imam Hossein University, the IRGC’s premier university, discusses sending commanders and teachers to the ‘resistance front,’ a reference not only to Syria and Iraq, but potentially also to Lebanon and Yemen. The aim is to enable them to gain frontline experience in the insurgencies and military campaigns Iran is running.

Presumably, those who survive front line deployments—as of May 2016, Iran has already lost 1,000 citizens fighting in Syria according to the same news portal—will return to the Imam Hossein University to teach lessons learned and new tactics to a generation of new officers. From a tactical standpoint, this might signal broader changes in the IRGC ground forces as they update training and tactics that had not significantly changed since Iran’s last protracted, active conflict in the 1980s. From a diplomatic standpoint, Brigadier General Abazari’s comments belie frequent Iranian statements downplaying their direct military involvement in many regional civil wars and insurgencies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“We deployed a number of commanders... to proxy battle fields.”



Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps cadets drill at Imam Hussein University, Tehran.

Source: Khamenei.ir, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/photo-album?id=12573#i/gallery/11/>, Public Domain.

Source: “Azam Marbiyan-e Daneshgah Afshari Sepah beh ‘Junbeh-e Moqavamat’ (Deployment of Trainers from IRGC University to ‘Resistance Front’),” *Tasnim News*, 12 September 2017. <https://goo.gl/VKehgd>

The Imam Hossein University Office Training Center was established in 1986 with the mission of training the forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps... and has from that time played a significant role in training forces for various IRGC units and missions.

Brigadier General Hamid Abazari...has been in command of the college for about 11 years and also the IRGC Marines’ training centers, and currently he serves both as the deputy commander of Imam Hossein University and commander of the Jihadi training for the university faculty, and is responsible for the training all officers receive when they enter the IRGC. We talked with General Abazari about different topics relating to this university.

Abazari: Imam Hossein University is the primary university for the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and is responsible upon the arrival of IRGC officers with their familiarization with the mission of guardianship... From the day the Revolutionary Guards participated in the Holy Defense [Iran-Iraq War] with a few thousand individuals, until today when it has given nearly 40,000 martyrs, it is clear that the Revolutionary Guards are willing to sacrifice to defend the revolution....

We deployed a number of commanders and teachers of Imam Hossein University to the resistance front to become familiar with proxy battlefields. Some of them were deployed to this mission once and others on several occasions. And this has had a great impact on the quality of their work and training.



Iranian General: Iraqi Kurdish Referendum is Part of US Plot

OE Watch Commentary: The Iranian government remains broadly antagonistic to the 25 September 2017 referendum in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (IKR) calling for independence. In the wake of the vote—in which Kurds overwhelmingly voiced their desire to break away from Iraq and form their own state—the Iranian government has redoubled its efforts to isolate the region and force the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to reverse its stance.

In the excerpted article, published by a news agency close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iran’s security services, Brigadier General Fathollah Jafari, a senior advisor to the commander of the IRGC, argued that the referendum was part of a plot by the United States and Israel to fracture not only Iraq but also to encourage separatism more broadly. While Jafari’s description of US policy runs contrary to statements by the White House, State Department, and Pentagon which had all publicly opposed the referendum and urged the Kurdish government not to push forward with it—it reflects the paranoia of the Iranian government toward ethnic nationalism more broadly and highlights the deep hostility within Iran’s military that will undercut any significant rapprochement with the United States or moderation toward Israel.

Iranian unease at Kurdish separatism rests upon Tehran’s fears that Iraqi Kurdish separatism could create a precedent for Iranian Kurds to demand a similar referendum or, even absent such a vote, work more generally toward a break with Iran. The fact that Iranian Kurds celebrated the vote inside major Iranian Kurdish cities after the Iraqi referendum only augmented the concern of Iranian security services. Indeed, the IRGC and Ministry of Intelligence cracked down publicly on those cheering on Iraqi Kurds. According to Iranian Kurds, this resulted in dozens of arrests.

The concern for the IRGC, however, reflected in the vociferousness of Jafari’s statement, is likely based on Tehran’s worry that ethnic separatism may not only be limited to Iranian Kurds. Ethnic Persians may be a slight majority in Iran, but the country remains incredibly ethnically diverse. The Iranian leadership fears that Iran could face a potential upsurge in separatism among the Azeris, Baluch, Iranian Arabs, and other groups. While not all ethnic minorities in Iran are separatist, political upheaval and weak central governance have often sparked resurgences of separatism. While the Iranian central government remains strong, Kurdish separatism combined with a looming transition at the top of the Islamic Republic as the aging Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei faces his own mortality, suggests that a perfect storm for Iran could be on the horizon.

Jafari did not only speak about Kurdish separatism but also suggested that the United States was more broadly embracing a strategy of fracturing regional states. This reflects a belief among Iranian hardliners that the United States and its allies seek to divide Iranian client states such as Syria (where the Kurds also have declared an autonomous region) and Yemen, where South Yemeni separatism is once again looming large. If they can depict themselves as fighting broader US and Israeli strategy in countries like Syria and Yemen, they can better justify their continued expensive investment in supporting pro-Iranian proxies in Syria and Yemen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“America benefits from crisis in the world.”



The oil-rich city of Kirkuk, disputed by both the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government
Source: Michael Rubin.

Source: “Amrika az Basij-e ‘Amumi Iraniyan Vahameh Darad (America is Afraid of the Popular Basij),” *Mehr News Agency*, 4 October 2017. <https://goo.gl/z47MPp>

“Referendum in the Kurdistan region is very dangerous and can have unpredictable consequences for the regional states and the Kurds themselves. Of course, if we look behind the scenes, we see the presence of the Zionist regime itself which has the goal of opening an embassy in the Kurdistan Region... America benefits from crisis in the world, especially in West Asia, and the more countries there are in the region, the less power those countries hold. Such separatism is in the interests of the United States and in line with its goals, and if these countries disintegrate, it will certainly help America achieve its goals.”



North Korea's African Ties

OE Watch Commentary: While much of the world looks to tighten sanctions on North Korea in order to get Kim Jung Un to freeze or abandon his nuclear weapons program, several African countries are under investigation by the UN for continuing to trade with the regime. As the accompanying article details, Tanzania, Uganda, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Mozambique, Botswana, Benin and Zimbabwe may have violated Security Council Sanctions. This trade, estimated at \$100 million per year, may sound relatively small, but is actually quite significant given North Korea's difficulties in obtaining foreign currency.

There is a long history of forged ties between the DPRK and Africa...literally forged. Enormous bronze statues of African leaders and events, manufactured by the North Korean factory Mansudae Overseas Projects, dot the continent; their artistic style often more Stalinesque than statuesque. The company has, however, constructed more than just monuments. In Namibia, it erected four large buildings, in return for which Namibia invested \$100 million in projects in North Korea (since 2002), including ammunition factories. Under fire for purportedly violating UN sanctions, Namibia vowed to uphold these measures in the future, but added that its warm diplomatic relationship with Pyongyang would continue.

The ties between North Korea and Africa go back even further than the continent's use of North Korean construction capabilities; all the way back to the Cold War when North Korea was looking for allies. The support it lent to African liberation movements that were seeking to overthrow their colonial rulers brought it those friends. Diplomatic and cultural links, as the article states, helped reinforce those ties in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Additional support such as selling military radio equipment to Eritrea and weapons to Mozambique, as well as reportedly organizing military training for Angola and Uganda, further strengthened the bonds. With Africa representing about a quarter of UN membership, North Korea's past and continuing efforts to foster positive relations on the continent could help it overcome difficulties in that world body.

North Korea's use of shell companies, including banking and financial services, coupled with African companies' willingness to deal with the rogue state, especially because North Korea asks fewer questions regarding business practices than Western trading partners, has enabled it to operate on the continent despite sanctions being in place. Measures to counter this bypass, including better training of customs officials to enable them to detect prohibited items at airports and seaports, have been recommended. Additionally, as the article details, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is calling for increasing pressure on Africa to implement the sanctions. However, at the present time it is unclear whether certain African countries, which have benefitted from previous relations with North Korea, are going to continue their friendship and surreptitious trading with the nation whose nuclear saber rattlings have so many concerned. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



North Korea's Mansudae Overseas Projects constructed Senegal's African Renaissance Monument.

Source: Jessykoffi/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Senegal-La_renaissance.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0

“Despite UN sanctions against North Korea, a number of African countries share a cozy trade relationship with the pariah state. Old alliances dating back to Cold War times have persisted - and remain important even today.”

Source: Martina Schwikowski, “Africa: North Korea's Loyal Partners in Africa,” *Deutsche Welle*, 9 September 2017. <http://www.dw.com/en/north-koreas-loyal-partners-in-africa/a-40625173>

Despite UN sanctions against North Korea, a number of African countries share a cozy trade relationship with the pariah state. Old alliances dating back to Cold War times have persisted - and remain important even today.

Pyongyang's presence in Africa is impossible to ignore. In many countries, bronze statues in the monumental style are reminiscent of the bonds of communism that once linked the continent to North Korea.

“We're seeing some countries around the world, not just in Africa - and whether knowingly or unknowingly - providing banking and financial services to North Korean companies and individuals that are known to be affiliated with the regime,” he [Daragh Neville of the British think tank Chatham House] said.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has called for pressure on African states to be stepped up to ensure the latest sanctions, imposed earlier this month, aren't flouted. The measures now include caps on oil supplies to North Korea and a ban on textile exports. African countries must abide by these measures, Abe said. Observers, however, warn these words may fall on deaf ears.



Somalia's Plea for Heavy Weapons

OE Watch Commentary: In a recent speech before the United Nations General Assembly, Somalia's Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire asked for several things: debt relief so his country, which was without a functioning central government for 25 years, could move forward in areas such as protecting human rights and providing education; continuous and predictable funding for AMISOM, the African Union Mission to Somalia, which has been battling al-Shabaab, the terrorist group that poses an existential threat to the nascent government; and support for needed reforms. But perhaps his most important request, best characterized as a plea in light of the planned withdrawal of AMISOM troops, was a lifting of the arms embargo so that the Somali national forces could obtain the heavy weapons necessary to defeat al-Shabaab. The accompanying article from a Somali source discusses this plea.

Recent news reports testify that al-Shabaab is still a powerful force capable not only of attacks on individual soft targets but also military bases, even though they are weaker and control less land than at their peak. This is despite the decade-long presence of AMISOM in Somalia. The fear is that, once AMISOM fully withdraws, the Somali military may not be able to continue the momentum; and al-Shabaab could actually re-conquer territory it had lost, perhaps including Mogadishu, Somalia's capital.

The arms embargo dates all the way back to 1992. The previous year, a coalition of clans ousted the country's increasingly unpopular president, Siad Barre. With the ensuing civil war, Security Council Resolution 733 established the embargo as an attempt to limit the amount of arms flowing to the rival warlords. Future resolutions partially lifted the embargo so that Somali government forces could receive weapons, but restrictions remain. For example, several categories of equipment require approval from the sanctions committee on a case-by-case basis.

The embargo was scheduled to run out in late 2016 but was extended for another 12 months to 15 November 2017. Thus, it will soon be known whether Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire's plea to end the embargo will be answered or if Somalia's quest for heavy weapons will have to wait for perhaps another year. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The Somali government has repeated its plea for world leaders to lift an international arms embargo, as the aid-dependent Horn of Africa nation continues to struggle with security threats from [the] al-Shabab terrorist group.”

Source: “Somalia Seeks Easing of Arms Embargo in Effort to Defeat al-Shabab,” *Shabelle News (Somalia)*, 23 September 2017. <http://radioshabelle.com/somalia-seeks-easing-arms-embargo-effort-defeat-al-shabab/>

The Somali government has repeated its plea for world leaders to lift an international arms embargo, as the aid-dependent Horn of Africa nation continues to struggle with security threats from al-Shabab terrorist group.

The Somali government appeal for the lifting of its arms embargo comes nearly two weeks after the head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in the country, known as UNSOM, called for practical support and political encouragement to the Somali leadership.

“To ensure the sustainability of such gains, we focused on strengthening the military capability of our national security forces, however, the arms embargo imposed against Somalia is a severe limitation towards this objective,” [Somali Prime Minister] Khaire told the U.N. assembly.



M47 Patton in Somali desert (2007).

Source: Carl Montgomery, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ruined_tank_in_Hargeisa,_Somaliland.jpg, CC BY-NC 2.0.



Somalia: Drought Benefits al-Shabaab

OE Watch Commentary: It is known that changing weather patterns may lead to conflict, as might happen when drought forces people from one tribe to leave the pastures they traditionally use for their animals and encroach on land with people from a different tribe. But sometimes the links between conflict and the change in climate – the weather over a long period of time - can be exaggerated. The accompanying article suggests that this may be the case with Somalia, where the noticeable links between drought and conflict are due to another factor: governance. Specifically, the overlooked factor is the lack of a strong central government to manage the food insecurity brought on by drought, which al-Shabaab uses to its advantage.

Following the collapse of the central government in 1991 when President Siad Barre was ousted, there have been at least seven periods when droughts and food insecurity coincided. Several of these were also times of famine, which the UN defines according to certain metrics such as the amount of malnutrition and hunger as well as the number who die. The other periods were food crises, not as severe a situation as famine but acute malnutrition can still be present.

The last food crisis began in 2016, extended into this year, and verged on famine. In a country where so many livelihoods revolve around rainfall, both years saw significantly less precipitation, and as a result harvests were significantly lower for those years. Pastures were also markedly impacted so large numbers of livestock died. Currently the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that over 3.1 million people require urgent humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile al-Shabaab has taken advantage of the situation to seek new recruits just as it did during the 2011/12 drought. With no money to purchase food, salaries offered by the terrorist organization are a strong incentive to join. Additionally, al-Shabaab generates good will among farmers by building irrigation canals, enabling them to grow food on the previously parched soil. Furthermore, by keeping humanitarian aid agencies out of areas they control, al-Shabaab can look like the only one taking care of the local people. Thus, while drought may be bad for the Somali people, it is good for al-Shabaab.

While climate change may have contributed to the most recent drought, the famine and conflict that have ensued could more rightly be blamed, as the article relates, on poor governance. To prove that point the author turns to history, specifically the 1973 – 1975 drought when 20,000 people died, approximately 1% of the population. However, the toll would have been much higher if not for the fact that back then there was a strong central government which was able to reduce the impact of the natural disaster.

With a new Somali President in office there is hope that a strong government can once again effectively deal with drought in order to avert the famine and conflict that often grows out of it. As the climate is expected to get hotter in the ensuing years, the President may have many opportunities to do so. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



A malnourished child in a Medicins Sans Frontieres treatment tent.

Source: DFID - UK Department for International Development/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_malnourished_child_in_an_MSF_treatment_tent_in_Dolo_Ado.jpg, CC BY 2.0

“In other words, al-Shabaab takes advantage of the hunger and desperation caused by drought. In this way, climate worsens the conflict by giving al-Shabaab more manpower.”

Source: Hakim Abdi, “Somalia conflict and famine: the causes are bad governance, not climate change,” *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 4 October 2017. <https://theconversation.com/somalia-conflict-and-famine-the-causes-are-bad-governance-not-climate-change-84166>

The link between climate change and violent conflict is a complex one. In specific circumstances changing weather patterns may lead to conflict... But the links are often exaggerated and oversimplified.

Somalia is a case of subtle connections between drought, food insecurity and conflict. Understanding these connections better – and identifying other relevant factors – could help prevent suffering in [the] future...

In southern Somalia, the militant group al-Shabaab controls large areas including key agricultural areas. The group relies on a variety of tactics to get new recruits and solidify its presence. For example, in one area it builds canals to make local farmers less dependent on rainfall, thus cultivating goodwill and getting recruits...

At the peak of the 2011/12 drought, al-Shabaab was reported to have sabotaged the relief effort by restricting access to humanitarian agencies. This made the situation worse for people affected by the drought. Bruno Geddo of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Somalia believes food insecurity plays into al-Shabaab’s hands...

In other words, al-Shabaab takes advantage of the hunger and desperation caused by drought. In this way, climate worsens the conflict by giving al-Shabaab more manpower.



The Paradox of Increasing Democracy and Decreasing Stability

OE Watch Commentary: There has been recent progress on the democracy front in several African countries. The Gambia's autocratic president Yahya Jammeh was forced to leave following an intervention by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a 15-member regional union of West African countries; Ghana's long-time president Mahama stepped down after losing an election; and in Kenya, for the first time ever, the judiciary overturned the election of a sitting president due to irregularities and allegations of fraud. Nevertheless, as the accompanying article notes, despite these positive developments, the presence of serious underlying problems raise questions about how extensive Africa's democratic gains really are.

While the optics in some countries may be one of increasing multiparty politics, the reality is sometimes quite different, as evidenced by the arrest of Ugandan opposition leader Kizza Besigye, the crackdown on Kenyan opposition protests, and other democracy-weakening interventions. As the article points out, "the expansion of multi-party politics [in Africa] has often gone hand-in-hand with political and economic exclusion," which ultimately "increases the risk that political grievances will develop into instability."

“Instrumentally, the combination of economic and political exclusion increases the risk that political grievances will develop into instability.”

In terms of economic exclusion, it seems that although the level of absolute poverty in Africa has declined, the gap between rich and poor, which is defined as relative poverty, has increased. The Human Development Index (HDI), which is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and per capita indicators, reveals that every country in Africa now has worse inequality than it did in 2010. A disproportionate share of the burden of this rift between the haves and have-nots has fallen on women.

Rising income inequality in Africa often is frequently found in conjunction with rising political exclusion and inequality, which is also noticeable with regards to gender. While some African countries have a significant number of female legislators, including Rwanda which actually leads the world in this metric, others such as Angola, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have very few. Additionally, in some countries certain minorities are politically marginalized. Because of these and other issues, one think tank has found the quality of civil liberties in Africa has declined every year for ten years.

Interestingly, the countries with authoritarian governments are doing better on the HDI than the democracies, with three of the continent's most secure democracies – Botswana, Namibia and South Africa – having some of the worst income inequality not just in Africa but in the world. Thus democracy is not helping the poor, or at least not as much as the wealthy. As the article notes, this economic inequality coupled with political exclusion could explain the paradox of increasing democracy and decreasing stability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Yahya Jammeh, Former President of the Gambia (2014).
Source: Amanda Lucidon/ White House, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yahya_Jammeh.png, Public Domain.

Source: Nic Cheeseman, "Democratic breakthroughs in Africa: time to celebrate but worries still linger," *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 14 September 2107. <https://theconversation.com/democratic-breakthroughs-in-africa-time-to-celebrate-but-worries-still-linger-84067>

It's true that more elections are now being held than at any time in human history. But recent highlights in Gambia, Ghana and Kenya mask a problematic reality, namely that the expansion of multi-party politics has often gone hand-in-hand with political and economic exclusion. Over the past five years, the level of political repression and economic inequality has increased in Africa.

The combination of political and economic exclusion in Africa is important for intrinsic and instrumental reasons. Intrinsically, democracy is failing to deliver if it is not helping the worst as much as the best off. Instrumentally, the combination of economic and political exclusion increases the risk that political grievances will develop into instability.

More worryingly, there is no evidence that democracies are performing better than authoritarian systems on this issue. If anything, the reverse is true. Indeed, one of the most intriguing paradoxes of African democracy is that it is those countries that are most democratic that are most unequal.



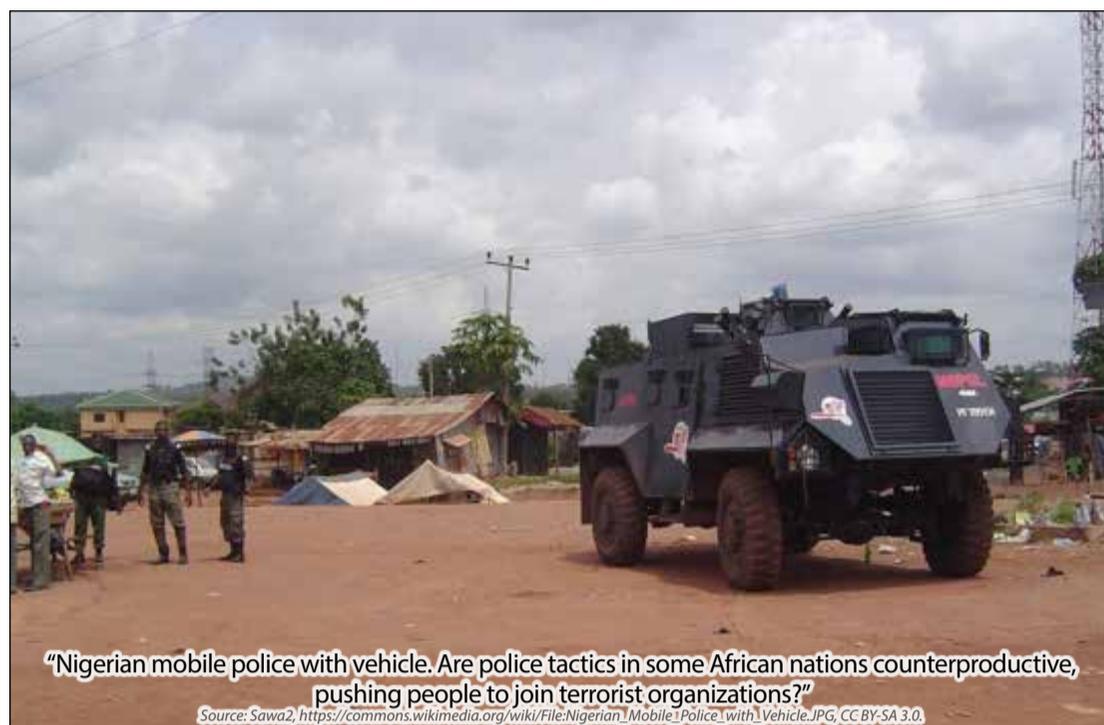
Counterproductive Police Practices in Africa

OE Watch Commentary: According to authors in a number of African countries, one of the very institutions expected to combat extremism may be making it worse. As the accompanying article describes, many African police forces are known for their brutality and arbitrary arrests. They are accused of generating more fear among the populace than terrorists do. These counterproductive tactics may be driving people into the very arms of the insurgents the police are trying to eliminate. As the article points out, one study of over 500 jihadists- mainly from Kenya, Nigeria and Somalia- “found that in over 70 percent of cases ‘government action,’ including the killing or arrest of a family member or friend, was the tipping point that prompted them to join.”

To understand why so many African police forces are accused of corruption and/or human rights abuses, one must look at their history. These forces were established by colonial powers to control the local population before their nations gained independence. However, once they did gain independence, the role of the police force did not greatly change and their numbers did not significantly increase, resulting in markedly low ratios of police to populace. The UN recommends 300 officers to every 100,000 people, but across Africa the ratio is far worse. In Kenya it is 203, in Nigeria it is 187, and in Mali, which is struggling with an Islamist insurgency, a paltry 38.

Many police forces are also notoriously underequipped. Even the most basic of necessities, such as pens and paper, let alone fuel, vehicles and forensic lab items, are frequently in short supply. This dearth of equipment along with problems in the criminal justice system contribute to some of the continent’s appalling conviction rates. In South Africa, murder cases end in a conviction only 10 percent of the time, which is still better than the rate for crimes of sexual violence, which is 4 to 8 percent. Police forces sometimes resort to torture in order to force confessions.

As for corruption, many of the police are poorly paid and looking for ways to supplement their meager salaries. It would be unfair to solely blame the police however, for corrupt governments breed corrupt cops. As the article relates, without reform at the top it is difficult to expect reform among the police. Unfortunately, repeated reform efforts have generally had little impact because without buy-in from higher government officials, any improvements are almost bound to be only transitory. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



“Undermanned, underfunded, underwhelming: African police forces struggle to contain regular crime, and they are even further out of their depth when it comes to tackling violent extremism.”

Source: Obi Anyadike, “Unfair cop – why African police forces make violent extremism worse,” *IRIN*, 28 September 2017. <http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/09/28/unfair-cop-why-african-police-forces-make-violent-extremism-worse>

Undermanned, underfunded, underwhelming: African police forces struggle to contain regular crime, and they are even further out of their depth when it comes to tackling violent extremism.

Traditional policing – far too often based on brutality and arbitrary arrest rather than proper detective work – can create more fear of the security services than the insurgents and is clearly counter-productive...

A new UNDP study based on interviews with more than 500 jihadists – drawn mainly from Kenya, Nigeria, and Somalia – found that in over 70 percent of cases “government action”, including the killing or arrest of a family member or friend, was the tipping point that prompted them to join...

In Nigeria, torture has become such an integral part of policing that many stations have an informal torture officer, according to a 2014 Amnesty International report.

Reform is admittedly difficult to tackle in the middle of an insurgency. The priority of governments and their international partners is for harder-hitting security services, not the soft power of [preventing violent extremism]. What that can mean in practice is squads of men who are simply more proficient at harming their fellow citizens and extracting rents.

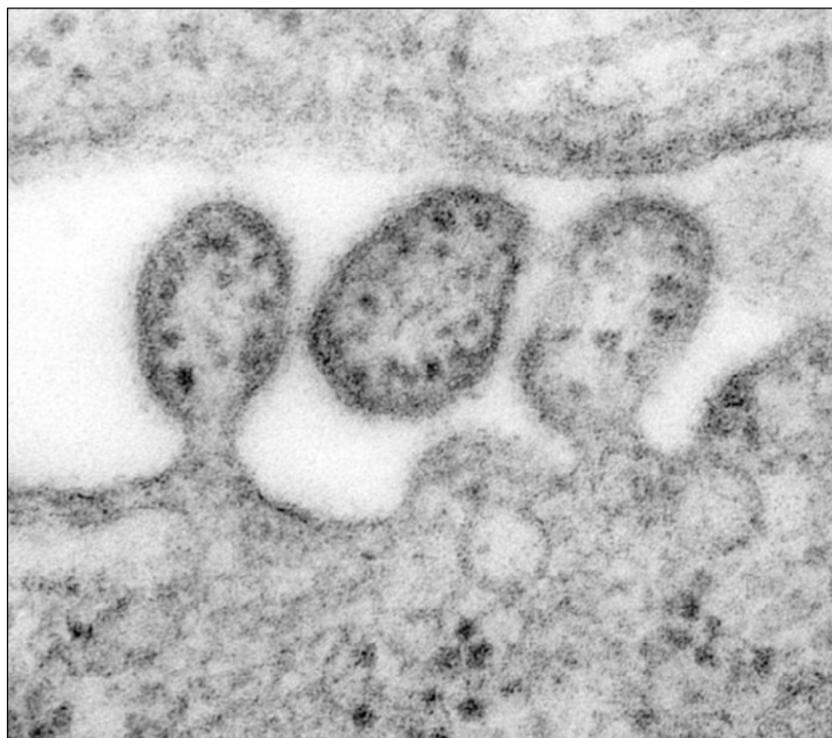


Lassa Fever: West Africa's Next Massive Epidemic?

OE Watch Commentary: Following the 2013 – 2016 West African Ebola epidemic, another viral hemorrhagic fever is now threatening the same region. Lassa fever has been reported in an increasing number of locations in Nigeria, sparking fears, as the accompanying article notes, the disease could so overwhelm the public health infrastructure that it becomes an international concern.

“A new outbreak in 19 Nigerian states and in Lagos city – the most populated city on the continent – has sparked fears that the disease will get out of control and result in a public health event of international concern.”

Initially Lassa fever is transmitted when people come in contact with the urine or feces from an infected rat. After that, direct person to person contact further spreads the virus. Of the approximately 100,000 to 300,000 West Africans infected annually, 80% remain asymptomatic. However, in the other 20%, after an incubation period ranging from six to 21 days, symptoms appear, often starting with fever, headache, and weakness, and then progressing to multi-organ failure. In severe cases there can be bleeding from the mouth, nose, and other orifices. According to the World Health Organization, in those cases which are fatal, death usually occurs within 14 days from the onset of symptoms. While infected women in their third trimester of pregnancy and/or their fetuses have a mortality rate of 80%, the overall death rate from Lassa fever is usually only 1%. During epidemics, however, the mortality rate can climb significantly, and as the article notes, the incidence of the disease is on the rise, including outbreaks throughout the year instead of their usual previous occurrences limited mostly to the dry season.



“The virus that causes Lassa fever along with some cellular debris. The disease has increased markedly in West Africa.”

Source: C.S. Goldsmith/CDC/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lassa_virus_virions_TEM_8699_lores.jpg, Public Domain.

Several possible reasons have been put forth to explain this disease's latest outbreak, including unplanned urbanization and problems with sanitation and garbage disposal which can lead to a proliferation of rats. Lagos, Africa's largest city, is perhaps unsurprisingly one of the locations of the recent outbreak. As a megacity it suffers from rapid, disjointed urbanization; waste disposal issues; and a problem it shares with the rest of the country: poor disease surveillance. Making matters even worse, Lassa fever can be difficult to differentiate, especially in its earliest stages, from many of the other diseases found in West Africa, including malaria, typhoid, and influenza. At times it can even resemble Ebola.

Lassa fever has not reached the point where a massive international response, as happened with the Ebola epidemic, is in the works. Though both can result in a gruesome death, Ebola has a much higher mortality rate, making its outbreaks especially fearsome. Additionally, while Lassa fever is on the rise, there have always been a significant number of symptomatic infected individuals in the region. With Ebola, on the other hand, the numbers are usually quite small, so any increase above that baseline is more noticeable. Still, with the number of Lassa fever infections continuing to climb, the fear expressed in the accompanying article that the disease may get out of control - thus requiring international assistance once again to tame an epidemic caused by a hemorrhagic virus - is quite understandable. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

Source: Oyewale Tomori, “Lassa fever will keep ravaging Nigeria unless better surveillance is put in place,” *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 21 September 2017. <https://theconversation.com/lassa-fever-will-keep-ravaging-nigeria-unless-better-surveillance-is-put-in-place-83847>

Lassa fever was first discovered nearly 50 years ago in Nigeria. Since then, it has been reported in other West African countries including Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. There is also evidence of Lassa fever presence in southern Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, all of which share a similar tropical wooded savanna ecological zone. But there is still no vaccine against the disease. A new outbreak in 19 Nigerian states and in Lagos city – the most populated city on the continent – has sparked fears that the disease will get out of control and result in a public health event of international concern.

It is clear that outbreaks are becoming more widespread in Nigeria. Between 1969 and 2008, Lassa fever cases were reported in only six to seven of Nigeria's 36 states. But between 2009 and 2015 this doubled to between 10 and 14 states reporting outbreaks. In 2016 at least 26 states reported cases and at least 18 states have reported outbreaks so far this year.

The biggest issue is that Nigeria has failed to sustain any reliable disease surveillance system.



An ISIS Faction in Africa... Low-Profile Propaganda

OE Watch Commentary: On 4 October, four US servicemen were killed in a militant ambush in Niger. The next day, a faction of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), under the leadership of Abu Walid al-Sahrawi claimed the attack through a French-language article on *alakhbar.com*. The accompanying passages from African sources provide insight into this faction, which appears to operate in the border axis between Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali.

The French-language article from Senegal's *dakaractu.com* discusses that the faction had previously claimed two attacks through *alakhbar.com* and one through *al-Jazeera*, so it would not be out of the ordinary for the faction to claim the attack on US special forces through *alakhbar.com* again. The group is described as small and having a limited operational capacity, with only two small armed attacks and one suicide bombing to its credit. The faction is also an outcast among al-Qaeda militants in the Sahel because Sahrawi was formerly with al-Qaeda and his decision to defect and join ISIS was rejected by his former al-Qaeda comrades-in-arms. However, the faction's one niche is operating in the border axis between Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali, which is where al-Qaeda is less active and may be why Sahrawi has greater mobility and operational capacity there.

One of the inconsistencies between the attack and the analysis in the article is that the article argues that ISIS was using Sahrawi's faction to portray that it had a global caliphate. However, the claim of the attack through *alakhbar.com* was a very low-profile form of propagating news of the attack. One might expect ISIS to advertise the attack on its various social media accounts but this did not happen in the days after the attack. The article nonetheless recalls that ISIS hesitated to grant recognition to al-Sahrawi after he pledged loyalty to ISIS in 2015. Therefore, even despite what appears to be a landmark attack for al-Sahrawi's faction, ISIS may still have reservations about claiming an attack on his faction's behalf. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Daesh can be considered to be using the recognition of this group as a media operation intended to make believe that its dislocated Caliphate ([in] Syria / Iraq) is global and flourishes on other lands, notably on the borders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.”



Armed Islamist fighters race near the Mauritania-Mali border on May 21st.

Source: Jemal Ould Mohamed Oumar via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armed_Islamist_fighters_race_near_the_Mauritania-Mali_border_on_May_21st.jpg, (CC BY 2.0).

Source: “l’Etat islamique serait dernier l’attaque sur la frontière Niger- Mali (The Islamic state did the last attack on the Niger-Mali border),” *alakhbar.com*, 5 October 2017. <http://www.fr.alakhbar.info/12900-0--lEtat-islamique-serait-dernier-lattaque-sur-la-frontiere-Niger--Mali.html>

The branch of the Islamic State in the Sahel would have been behind the attack on the Niger-Mali border, which cost the lives of... U.S special forces soldiers and five other Nigeriens, local sources confirmed to alakhbar.

The command of U.S forces in the zone confirmed that his troops were victims in the ambush.

Source: “Un Califat Islamique au Sahel à l’horizon 2025: surenchère ou réalité sur le terrain?” (An Islamic Caliphate in the Sahel by 2025: Bidding or reality on the ground?), *dakaractu.com*, 6 September 2017. http://www.dakaractu.com/Un-Califat-Islamique-au-Sahel-a-l-horizon-2025-surenchere-ou-realite-sur-le-terrain_a138080.html

To add to the jihadist factionalism in the Sahel, a group was set up in May 2015 but this time under the banner of Daesh under the name of Islamic State in the Grand Sahara (EIGS). The organization was recognized a year later after much hesitation by the central leadership of Daesh in October 2016. This group which is responsible for several attacks against the Burkinabe and Niger security and defense forces is a dissident wing of al-Mourabitoune under the leadership of a certain Abu Walid al-Sahrawi.

The group has a small size and limited operational capacity (two small arms attacks and one suicide bomb attack) and could not topple the entire al-Mourabitoune group. Moreover, the entire Salafist and jihadist leadership of the subregion condemned the position of this group and rejected any jihadist concept based on the Daesh model. For the moment Daesh can be considered to be using the recognition of this group as a media operation intended to make believe that its dislocated Caliphate (Syria / Iraq) is global and flourishes on other lands, notably on the borders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.



A Spanish Perspective on Catalan Separatism

OE Watch Commentary: The opinions expressed in the accompanying references are representative of a slice of Spanish intellectual perspective that bemoans the Catalan separatist movement. However, this perspective is also critical of the response to the movement from the Spanish federal government led by Mariano Rajoy.

According to this perspective, as the first passage demonstrates, recent referendum attempts were designed and led by the Spanish far left, especially including the Podemos party, other Marxist parties and elements self-identifying as anti-fascist. According to the author, the left and their journalists define fascist as anybody who adheres to Spanish nationalism or unity.

The recently attempted vote or referendum on Catalan separation was on its face illegal according to Spanish law, although many voices internationally are calling it an expression worthy of protection as free speech. It should not surprise if much of the intention of Spanish leftist leaders was to provoke an overreaction on the part of the current Spanish administration. They perhaps succeeded in that most early reportage seems to be about Spanish police and military suppressing voters and arresting people, rather than about the nature and purpose of the separatist actions or the actions' organizers. The authors of the second and third accompanying references apparently feel that the government of Spain, while clumsy in its repression of the vote itself, has not been assertive enough regarding the attributed leftist leadership, or clear enough regarding the leaders' goals.

The European Parliament, meanwhile, has been supportive of the Spanish government in its attitude toward Catalan independence. Podemos and the Spanish left generally favor permissive migration to Spain (or to Catalonia), so some of this political conundrum might be illuminated by issues like the storming by sub-Saharan migrants of the border fences in Ceuta and Melilla. Designated 'autonomous cities,' (but of long Spanish pertinence) Ceuta and Melilla lie within the European Union, but on the North African coast. (See separate article, "Spain and the Border Wall of Europe," in this issue of *OE Watch*). The question of migration and of Islamic presence in Spain may be a columnar part of the issue of Spanish unity and disunity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Map of Spain with Catalonia highlighted.

Source: Mutxamel, subido por Rastrojo via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Localizaci%C3%B3n_de_Catalu%C3%B1a.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0-3.0-2.5-2.0-1.0.

“To discredit adherence to Spain as fascist is a well-worn foulness.... The harmful intention seeks to discredit all adherence to the Spanish Nation...”

Source: “Hermann Tertsch, “Confundirse de enemigo (Confusing oneself as to the enemy; getting the enemy wrong),” *ABC and Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 1 October 2017. <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/independencia-de-cataluna-confundirse-de-enemigo.html>

“To discredit adherence to Spain as fascist is a well-worn foulness. Now, a century since the Bolshevik Revolution, the Spanish communists, in the Podemos [(Together) We Can] Party and the UI [United Left] are celebrating the hundred years...Their journalists know what they are doing. Looking among the thousands of demonstrators for the dozen or so kids who give them what they want with the flag of the eagle [of the Falangists] and falangist songs.... In order to again make very clear that Spanish patriotism is fascist, francoist...The harmful intention seeks to discredit all adherence to the Spanish Nation. By way of nationalist agitation of nineteenth-century invention, done precisely in order to destroy the common secular nation.”

Source: Marisa Cruz y Luis Ángel Sanz, “Rajoy continúa indeciso mientras Puigdemont impulsa la rebelión (Rajoy remains indecisive while Puigdemont launches the rebellion),” *El Mundo*, 2 October 2017. <http://www.elmundo.es/espana/2017/10/02/59d27a82e5fdea6c498b45b9.html>

“...In Monclava [White House equivalent] all possibilities are being studied, but so far no decision taken as to the advantages of one or another...The PSOE [largest left opposition party] contemplate the hypothesis that Puigdemont [Carles Puigdemont, President of the Catalonia Administration and face of the independence push] make a ‘testimonial declaration of independence’ without juridical effect, and immediately afterwards convoke some autonomous elections, although he might want to call them an ‘constituent expression’, but according to law. Socialist sources assure that that scenario [in which the Spanish President meets with all parties including separatists to negotiate a way to allow for an independence referendum] would be the ‘least bad.’”

Source: Rosa Cuervas-Mons, “Cataluña revolucionada por una minoría radical y exaltada (Catalonia revolutionized by a radical impassioned minority),” *La Gaceta*, 3 October 2017. <https://gaceta.es/espana/>

“And, speaking of the State...Where is the State? Why is the Interior Minister, who regaled such fine words this Monday during Police Day, not in Barcelona supporting his officers? Why did [Spanish Prime Minister] Mariano Rajoy -- with more than sufficient evidence of the disloyalty and disobedience of the Catalanian government and its autonomous police, not apply Article 155 [article of the Spanish constitution that allows the central government to intervene in order to make an Autonomous Community follow the law when other means of control are exhausted] and take control of an Autonomous [Community] that has moved onto the dangerous path of revolution?”



Spain and the Border Wall of Europe

OE Watch Commentary: The Spaniards have faced migration challenges, including violent problems, on and off for two millennia, give or take a century or two. It is hard for Spaniards and other historians not to want to set some of today's current events in historical context. The accompanying passages provide insight into unconsidered aspects of Spain's internal debate on migration, the Spanish left and Islamic presence in Spain.

The first accompanying reference outlines a connection between the organized Spanish political far left (the Spanish seem quite familiar with left-right identifications) and Islam (and perhaps with Islamists). It personifies the phenomenon through the intellectual and activist journey of a Spaniard named Raul Gonzalez, who "formed part of Podemos [far left Spanish political party] and ... integrate[d] himself into its Muslim circle."

The second reference is a long article examining the phenomenon of immigration into Europe through Spain, especially via penetration into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on the African continent. The article goes into some depth about the paradoxes and ambivalences of the Spanish regarding immigration. Part of the puzzle: The European Union is generally in favor of permissive migration, Spain benefits from membership in the Union, but the majority of Spaniards do not want open borders, fearing the loss of Spanish cultural identity, not to mention violent terrorism.

The third reference alludes to some recent events in which the European Parliament human rights office called on Spain to stop its restrictive immigration practices in Ceuta and Melilla. It is a call from a Spanish leftist spokesperson to the European Union to pressure Spain to allow easier entrance. Therein lies a connection of Islamic interests with the Spanish left. (See separate article, "A Spanish Perspective on Catalan Separatism," in this issue of *OE Watch*.) While migration is a knotted problem for the Spanish government, it is not for the Spanish far left parties. They favor permissive flow of peoples into Spain. As a nation, Spain spent some time forcibly migrating Caliphate-oriented peoples out of Spain. Spaniards are not unified on the question of keeping them out, a disunity that is now being tested. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

"...regarding refugees ... everything possible is done so they do not come."



"Mapa_del_sur_de_España (Map of the south of Spain)" circa 2007.
Source: Anarkangel via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ceuta-melilla.png>, CC BY SA 3.0.

Source: Daniel Verdú, "El círculo islámico de Podemos (The Islamic Circle of Podemos)," *El País*, 22 January 2015. https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2015/01/22/actualidad/1421956567_088774.html

"A group of Spanish converts created a Muslim branch in the party ... The Transition on track and the dictator on his death bed, it seemed to Madridite Raúl González that what he would see next would be no more than a color version of Francoism. A Communist and social actionist, he did not care to integrate himself into that system and began to ask himself about the meaning of life. He read all about spirituality and ended up finding the answers he sought in the Koran. He got a scholarship in 1989 and went off to study Islamic theology in Qom (Iran). He became a Rouhani (religious person), returned, became a translator and was still able to spend another period of time in Iran. Raul, also known as Yafar Abdellah, today directs the NGO Muslims for Peace.... But that chronic dissatisfaction injected during the time of Franco also brought him to form part of Podemos [far left Spanish political party] and to integrate himself into its Muslim circle, consisting today of some 70 members (the majority Spanish converts to Islam) who communicate with each other through a closed Group on Facebook...."

Source: Iñigo Domínguez, "España no es país para refugiados (ni quiere serlo) (Spain is not a country for refugees (and does not want to be one))," *El País*, 30 April 2016. https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2016/04/28/actualidad/1461845259_323652.html

"It is a day of travel for a select group finally allowed to travel to the peninsula, in a ferry that sets off at midnight and arrives at Malaga the next morning. In the line everyone is contented, dressed in their best clothing and taking photos. It is a Group of 66, but probably many of them will not stay in Spain. Because they are not attracted by the minimum minimum. It does not stop being curious that few want to come ask for asylum to live in one of the premier tourist destinations in the world. But it is that regarding refugees the idea is reversed: everything possible is done so they do not come."

Source: "Albiol pide a la UE que obligue a España a "acabar con las devoluciones en caliente" en Ceuta y Melilla (Albiol asks the EU to require Spain to 'stop the immediate returns' in Ceuta and Melilla)," *Ceutaldia.com*, 3 October 2017. <http://www.ceutaldia.com/articulo/politica/albiol-pide-ue-obligue-espana-acabar-devoluciones-caliente-ceuta-melilla/20171003200508167147.html>

"The spokesperson for United Left [Spanish far left political party] to the European Parliament, Mariana Albiol, urged the chargé of the European Immigration Commission, Dimitris Avramopoulos, to require Spain to end... returns at the fences of Ceuta and Melilla' in order to comply with the decision of the Human Rights Tribunal (TEDH) of the European Union, which just found the Administration in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights....

... 'in any case, it also should not be forgotten that the EU has permitted them because they are nothing but another tool in the service of Fortress Europe."



LATAM, Catalanian Separatism and Organized Religion

OE Watch Commentary: Not everyone in Catalonia is in favor of separation and independence. If reports about the relative size of demonstrations is a valid clue, a majority of Catalonians favor remaining within the Kingdom of Spain. The first of the accompanying references notes that the massive pro-unity demonstration gave the president of Catalonia, who is pro-independence, cause to balk about openly declaring Catalanian independence from Spain. Indeed, as of this writing he had not taken that step. It seems, according to the reportage, that pro-Spain leaders are not keen on a dialogue between the Spanish administration and the more radical elements of the separatist movement, these latter being associated with far-left parties, including and especially Podemos.

*“A human tide...
in defense of the
Constitution and
Spanish unity...”*

The second reference is from a Costa Rican branch of a major Latin American news conglomerate, and it reflects a widespread Latin American take on an event in Poland that occurred at about the same time as the Barcelona demonstrations. A huge number of Poles went to their national borders to pray the rosary. Celebrating an ancient battle won by Christians over the Ottomans, which the passage notes ‘saved Europe from Islamization,’ the message could not be mistaken. The Poles, strengthened in part by religious identity as Roman Catholics, reject Islamic incursion into Poland. The mass prayer was organized by a private foundation, but the report indicates that 22 dioceses of the Catholic Church in Poland supported it, the congregants assembling in the churches. A cleric representing the Polish Catholic Conference reportedly asserted that the prayer was not anti-Islam, but inclusive and for world peace. The article makes clear that claim is incongruous at best. The conciliatory statement by the senior Polish Episcopate is understandable, however, given the third accompanying reference, which leads us back to the Barcelona question.

Written by a well-known Spanish radio talk show host, the essay has been widely republished in Latin America-oriented media. Among other things, it notes the extreme insecurity felt by the Jewish community in Barcelona. The head Rabbi there is advising Jews to emigrate, the specter of Catalanian independence promising an influx of Muslims, many of which will be violently anti-Jewish. The essay also notes that the Roman Catholic Conference in Spain has been highly conciliatory and accommodating to Podemos and other far left Spanish parties fomenting Catalanian separatism. Given the reportage, it may very well be that Latin American Roman Catholics (of which there are still quite a few) look with admiration at the attitude of Polish Catholic church, and not so much at the Spanish. Besides the obvious difference between the Polish and Spanish bishoprics, there may be a widening difference of opinion between Spanish church leaders and the flock. According to the referenced opinions, many Spaniards are looking to senior leaders of the administration to take a harder stance toward the radical left, to assert Spanish identity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

*“...the Rabbi of the Jewish community in
Barcelona recommended to his coreligionaries that
they abandon Catalonia...”*

Source: Àngels Piñol, “Masiva manifestación en Barcelona a favor de la Constitución y la unidad de España (Massive demonstration in Barcelona in favor of the Constitution and Spanish unity),” *El País*, 9 October 2017. https://elpais.com/ccaa/2017/10/08/catalunya/1507444172_851999.html

*“A human tide flooded the center of Barcelona yesterday in defense of the Constitution and Spanish unity. Under the slogan *Recuperem el seny* (recover the sense ‘of unity’), the massive protest adds an enormous dose of pressure on the Catalanian president, Carles Puigdemont, who contemplates making a declaration of Independence in Parliament tomorrow. The demonstrators expressed their rejection of a possible dialog if the law was not first re-established in Catalonia.....the march ended with the Spanish national anthem. ... The pro-independence movement people conformed strictly to the notion of non-confrontation, and disappeared from Barcelona. Not even a glint was seen of them.”*

Source: “Polonia rezó el rosario en las fronteras para pedir por la ‘salvación’ del país (Poland prays the rosary on the border to ask for the country’s ‘salvation’),” *Nación*, 7 October 2017. http://www.nacion.com/mundo/europa/Polonia-rosario-fronteras-pedir-salvacion_0_1662833753.html

“...Hundreds of thousands of Polish Catholics went to the borders of their country Saturday where they prayed the rosary ‘for the salvation of Poland and the world’, a petition of the Polish non-governmental foundation Dios Solo Basta...The date, 7 October, was not chosen at random. It is the date of the rosary of Mary the Virgin that celebrates the victory in 1571 of Christians over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto, a victory that the church attributed at the time to the recitation of the rosary, ‘which saved Europe from Islamization’...

Source: César Vidal, “Chávez Llega a Cataluña (Chávez arrives in Catalonia),” *paraescatarelporvenir* (blog of Alfredo Coronil Hartmann), 6 October 2017. <https://paraescatarelporvenir.com/2017/10/06/chavez-llega-a-cataluna-por-cesar-vidal/>

*“Currently, the *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Catalonian Republican Left, ERC), is characterized by an open antisemitism, and accentuated sympathy toward Islam, an express alliance with the Basque separatist organization ETA, and immovable support to dictatorships such as the chavist in Venezuela....it should come as no surprise that a few weeks ago the Rabbi of the Jewish community in Barcelona recommended to his coreligionaries that they abandon Catalonia in order to avoid the fate of Venezuela. The Rabbi did not exaggerate in the least. To tell the truth, Catalonia could become the Venezuela of the Mediterranean and in such circumstances has a role for Podemos, the subsidiary of chavism in the European Union.... the only president on the planet who has expressly announced his support for the Catalanian nationalists would be Nicolás Maduro. Chávez’s heir knows full well that what he would derive from it is that beachhead in the European Union....it is more than documented that Podemos received huge sums [of money] from chavism as they also have from the Islamic dictatorship of Iran. It is not that Podemos is pro-independence. It is that its leaders have grasped that Catalanian nationalism can be the battering ram that can end up finishing off a more than eroded Spanish system.”*



Demonstrations in Bolivia

OE Watch Commentary: At least two other articles in this month's *OE Watch* report on public political demonstrations ("LATAM, Catalonian Separatism and Organized Religion" and "A Spanish Perspective on Catalonian Separatism"). Those reports had to do with demonstrations in Europe. Few probably noticed the large political convocations in the cities of Bolivia. The good news is that there is still enough freedom of speech and mobility in that country that such demonstrating can occur, and the accompanying reference seems to have that upbeat take on the potential for democracy. Pessimists have a lot to work with, however. According to the article, the demonstrators were heard using the slogan 'No is No' alluding to the public referendum held last year in which the Bolivian voters soundly rejected presidential continuance, disallowing Evo Morales from running for a fourth term. The regime, however, can look to recent history in both Colombia and Venezuelan for confidence. The Colombian president flatly ignored a public referendum that had rejected the power-sharing agreement with the FARC, and the Maduro regime in Venezuela has watched massive street demonstration after massive street demonstration without losing a bit of its grip on power there. Additionally, the totalitarian parties of the region stick together. Evo Morales' party is a central member of the region's Bolivarian bloc, so if it designs to keep Morales in power irrespective of public opinion, the Bolivian government will continue to have plenty of international support. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



President Evo Morales (2008, two years into his presidency).
Source: Joel Alvarez, Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Evo_morales_2_year_bolivia_Joel_Alvarez.jpg
CC BY SA 3.0.

Source: Karina Martín, "Grandes manifestaciones en Bolivia contra Evo Morales por intento de perpetuarse en el poder (Large demonstrations in Bolivia against Evo Morales for attempting to keep himself in power)," *Panam Post*, 11 October 2017. <https://es.panampost.com/karina-martin/2017/10/11/manifestaciones-en-bolivia/>

"This past Tuesday 10 October, thousands of Bolivians were out in the streets to protest against President Evo Morales' illegal intention to reelect himself in the post. The mobilizations that were carried out in the nine [departmental] capitals of the country warned the executive that they would not permit new participation in the elections. 'No is No' was one of the slogans that was heard in the streets of Bolivia, in reference to the victory of the opposition (of the 'no') in the constitutional referendum that had [in 2016] rejected reelection of the current president."



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The 'Dark Web': An Emerging Problem

OE Watch Commentary: Gangs and large-scale criminal organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean are now using what is being described as the “dark web” run by cyber-criminals, to coordinate various illegal activities. The accompanying passages discuss the cyber/criminal nexus that is proliferating within organized crime circles in these regions through the dark web.

As the first passage discusses, the dark web is “a collection of thousands of websites that can only be accessed with special browser software, which has become the nexus for global crime as a service market.” This phenomenon is enabling “criminals, hackers, rogue nation-state actors, terrorists and child pornographers to form interconnected networks, leading to what some have called “deviant globalization.” In Latin America and the Caribbean, cartels are exploring the dark web to locate buyers for large-scale cocaine shipments, while Central American gangs have used these sites to advertise their willingness to help with cross-border trafficking. Other regional drug traffickers reportedly use underground web forums to source synthetic opioids from Asia.

The second passage discusses how the advancement of social media platforms have advanced recruitment, extortion and intimidation techniques for gangs and drug cartels. The open web has also been used by cartels that use cyber-criminals to hack into government websites and telecommunications systems in order to steal or propagate information.

The dark web is much more complex than just these uses because it enables criminals to connect for virtually any illegal activity imaginable. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) asserts that the criminal/cyber nexus in Latin America is an emerging and evolving problem. The UNODC is urging authorities to address the issue through prevention, partnerships, protection, and investigations. While these suggestions are indeed relevant, Latin America and the Caribbean cannot tackle the nexus before all countries in the region develop policy regarding cyber-crime. Currently, four out of every five countries in the region do not even have basic cyber-security strategies or plans in place to protect critical infrastructure.

As the final accompanying passage discusses, many countries in this region lack the government policies and the legal frameworks required to prosecute these types of crimes, making them attractive to cyber-criminals. Thus, these countries remain highly vulnerable to potentially devastating cyber-attacks including data breaches, banking Trojan viruses (malicious computer programs), and mobile malware. Furthermore, cyber-crime is now a sought-after skillset desired by local and transnational criminal groups who utilize individuals to help them navigate the dark web. Given that Latin America and the Caribbean have one of the fastest growing internet populations in the world, this is likely to become an increasingly urgent problem that requires international cooperation and coordination. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“The dark web is a collection of thousands of websites ... which has become the nexus for global crime as a service market. Using Amazon-like sites on the dark web... criminals, hackers, rogue nation-state actors, terrorists and child pornographers are forming increasingly interconnected networks and furthering what some have called ‘deviant globalization’...”

Source: “ONU: pandillas utilizan para el crimen la “Internet oscura (United Nations: How Gangs Utilized the “Dark Web” for Criminal Activity),” *Abriendo Brecha*, 20 June 2017. <http://www.abriendobrecha.tv/onu-pandillas-utilizan-la-red-oscura/>

The dark web is a collection of thousands of websites that can only be accessed with special browser software, which has become the nexus for global crime as a service market. Using Amazon-like sites on the dark web like the now-shuttered Silk Road, AlphaBay and Playpen, criminals, hackers, rogue nation-state actors, terrorists and child pornographers are forming increasingly interconnected networks and furthering what some have called “deviant globalization.” In Latin America and the Caribbean, cartels are exploring the dark web to locate buyers for large-scale cocaine shipments, while Central American gangs have used these sites to advertise their willingness to help with cross-border trafficking. Other regional drug traffickers reportedly use underground web forums to source synthetic opioids from Asia.

Source: “Cuando las pandillas se vuelven virales: así usan las redes sociales para reclutar, atacar y delinquir (When Gangs go Viral: The Use of Social Networks to Recruit, Threaten, and Carry Out Criminal Activities),” *Univision*, 27 June 2017. <http://www.univision.com/los-angeles/kmex/noticias/actividad-de-pandillas/cuando-las-pandillas-se-vuelven-virales-asi-usan-las-redes-sociales-para-reclutar-atacar-y-delinquir>

For billions of individuals around the world, social networks such as Facebook, Whatsapp and Snapchat play an important role in day to day activities as they facilitate real time communication with anyone who has access to Internet no matter where they are in the world. At the same time, social media platforms are useful tools for gangs and drug cartels because they are utilized for criminal activities to include recruitment, extortion, and intimidation. In this sense, social networks have taken foot soldiers off the streets onto the worldwide web.

Source: “Latin America and Caribbean Highly Vulnerable to Cyber-Attacks,” *Caribbean 360*, 17 October 2016. <http://www.caribbean360.com/business/latin-america-caribbean-highly-vulnerable-cyber-attacks>

Deloitte’s Global Chief Information Officer, Larry Quinlan says that despite increased improvements in technology in the Caribbean and Latin America, the regions remain highly vulnerable to cyber-attacks from data breaches, banking Trojans, and mobile malware. He further stated that cyber-security is a concern that will continue to grow worldwide and one that threatens to engulf developing countries in Latin American and the Caribbean if the region is not careful....Four out of every five countries in Latin American and the Caribbean do not have cyber-security strategy or plans for protecting critical infrastructure. Furthermore, two out of every three countries in the region do not have a command and control center for cyber-security and lack the capacity to protect critical infrastructure.



Guatemala and Honduras Increase Cooperation against Criminal Groups

OE Watch Commentary: In August 2017, Guatemala's President Jimmy Morales and his Honduran counterpart Juan Orlando Hernandez agreed to improve intelligence coordination regarding criminal groups operating in the two countries. They also agreed to accelerate extradition of criminals back to their respective nations. Hernandez further asserted that the goal of enhanced coordination was to fight for the most fundamental of human rights: the right to life, liberty and the right to enjoy the fruits of one's honest labors, all of which are threatened by rampant criminal activity in the region.

These efforts follow a series of other initiatives by Guatemala and Honduras in recent years to enhance security in the region. One example is monthly joint missions conducted by the countries' respective naval forces and frequent communication between commanders which have been ongoing for the last three years. As the first and second accompanying passages note, many of these joint missions entail maritime patrols. These patrols involve large vessels suitable for the open sea, as well as smaller fast boats capable of entering sandbars, lakes, rivers and lagoons, and which are better suited to chasing. As the third passage discusses, Guatemala and Honduras have also included El Salvador in enhancing regional security cooperation by creating the "Elite Security Group" in 2016. According to the passage, the new regional task force is assigned to combat organized crime with a special focus on gangs. The initiatives stem from the idea that cooperation and interoperability are key components necessary to combat transnational threat networks. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: "Patrullajes marítimos conjuntos en sector fronterizo entre Honduras y Guatemala (Joint Maritime Patrols in Border Area between Honduras and Guatemala)," *Honduran Secretary of National Defense*, 27 March 2017. <http://sedena.gob.hn/2017/03/27/patrullajes-maritimos-conjuntos-en-sector-fronterizo-entre-honduras-y-guatemala/>

Joint actions to include maritime patrols are carried out in compliance with agreements made during the Conference of Central American Armed Forces (CFAC, for its Spanish acronym) in order to counteract the effects of emerging regional threats, especially transnational organized crime and related incidents. Recent maritime ops were conducted by the Honduran National Force and the Guatemalan "BITOL" Coast Guard Naval Force with "Caimán" type boats.

Source: "Patrullajes marítimos entre Honduras y Guatemala continúan con éxito (Maritime Patrols between Honduras and Guatemala Continue Successfully)," *Diálogo Digital Military Magazine*, 31 August 2017. <https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articles/maritime-patrols-between-honduras-and-guatemala-continue-successfully>

In accordance with established plans that are updated twice a year, the Honduran and Guatemalan Armed Forces are meeting the stipulated timelines for their joint maritime patrol program goals in the Caribbean, and along the Motagua River sandbar that runs into the Gulf of Honduras. The border and its problems, regardless of their origin, must be a shared responsibility, both nations affirm. For the last three years, the naval forces of the two nations have conducted monthly joint missions, with their regional commanders in constant communication.

Source: "Northern Triangle Countries to Launch Elite Security Task Force," *Telesur*, 16 June 2016. <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Northern-Triangle-Countries-to-Launch-Elite-Security-Task-Force-20160813-0009.html>

Meanwhile, the head of security in the country, Julian Pacheco Tinoco, said that the new proposal regarding an Elite Security Task Force is to "create new public policies to be implemented in the region and ultimately exert influence for better results in the fight against crime and in combatting gang activity." In addition, the project will target structures of organized crime engaged in drug trafficking, illegal arms trafficking, trafficking in persons, extortion and kidnapping.

"The border and its problems, regardless of their origin, must be a shared responsibility, both nations affirm."



Border Guatemala-Honduras.

Source: JVC3ETA via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Frontera_Guate-Hond_11_1_Copy.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0.



Expanded Canal Provides Boost to Panama's Economy

OE Watch Commentary: On 26 June, the Panama Canal Authority (ACP, per its Spanish acronym) celebrated the first anniversary of the opening of the expanded waterway. Prior to the \$5.4 billion upgrade and widening of its locks, the almost 48-mile long canal that links the Pacific Ocean with the Atlantic Ocean was restricted to vessels of about 5,100 teu (twenty-foot equivalent unit container). With the expansion, it is capable of supporting ships that exceed 1,180 feet and that carry an excess of 13,000 teu. As the first excerpt discusses, this is triple the capacity of ships that transited the Canal before its renovation.

Since its inauguration in 2016, over 1,500 ships have sailed through the canal, exceeding all expectations for the first 12 months of activity, and profits are soaring. The Fitch Ratings agency asserts that the increase in traffic and revenue of the Panama Canal should have a sustained positive effect on the country's growth profile, fiscal position, and external accounts. As the second accompanying passage discusses, Fitch claims that the volume of traffic through the Canal in the first full year of operations (from July 2016 to June 2017) rose 17.6% compared to the previous 12-month period. Meanwhile, toll revenues are on the rise and the Panama Canal currently represents approximately 8% of worldwide maritime commerce; an increase of 3% from just one year ago. As the final passage points out, even though the canal's expansion cost more than originally forecasted, the investment is proving worthwhile and should continue to benefit the country for decades to come. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: "Panamá inauguró la ampliación del Canal: costó 5.450 millones de dólares (Panama Inaugurated the Expansion of the Canal at a 5.4 Billion Cost)," *La Nación*, 26 June 2016. <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1912822-panama-inauguro-la-ampliacion-del-canal-costo-5450-millones-de-dolares>

The Panama Canal expansion involved installation of a third rail in order to allow larger ships such as the "neopanamax," with up to 13,000 containers to pass through. This expansion tripled previous capacity of the Canal which can currently accommodate ships measuring more than 1,180 feet. In regards to the new locks, they are 427 meters long, 55 meters wide, and 18.3 meters deep. Installation required 4.4 million cubic meters of concrete, 16 gates that together weigh 50,000 tons, and the labor of 30,000 individuals over nine years.

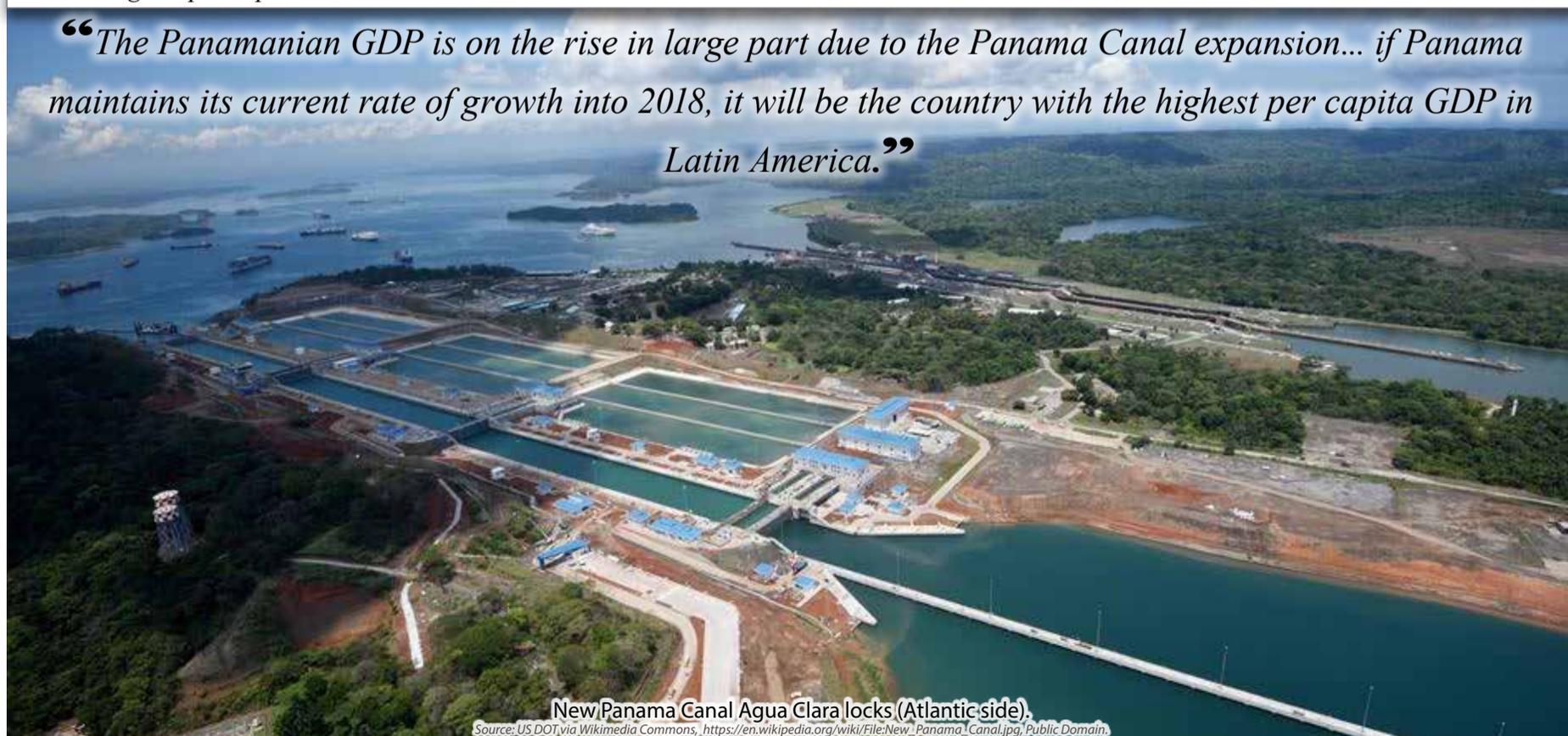
Source: "Fitch Ratings reafirma por segundo año consecutivo calificación "A" del Canal de Panamá (Fitch Ratings Reaffirms for Second Consecutive Year Panama Canal's "A" Rating)," *Telemetro*, 31 August 2017. http://www.telemetro.com/nacionales/Fitch-Ratings-calificacion-Canal-Panama_0_1058895073.html

International ratings agency Fitch Ratings affirmed the Panama Canal Authority's (ACP) A investment grade rating with a stable outlook, for its long-term issues default and senior unsecured notes, for the second year. The ratings reflect an underlying asset that is critical not only for Panama, but for international commerce, as demonstrated by its stable volume which actually increased by 17.5 percent in 2017. The same ratings also encompass increased revenue generated through higher tolls which puts the Canal in a more competitive position that has proven to be largely resilient to economic downturns," the rating agency said in a report.

Source: "El sector logístico impulsa la economía (Logistics Sector Boosts the Economy)," *La Prensa*, 13 September 2017. http://impresa.prensa.com/economia/sector-logistico-impulsa-economia_0_4847515304.html

The Panamanian GDP is on the rise in large part due to the Panama Canal expansion because it has resulted in increased volume which in turn, generates more toll earnings. Additionally, port activity is up with a reported 13.4 percent increase in container movement. The director of the National Statistics and Census Institute, David Saied, said that "if Panama maintains its current rate of growth into 2018, it will be the country with the highest per capita GDP in Latin America."

"The Panamanian GDP is on the rise in large part due to the Panama Canal expansion... if Panama maintains its current rate of growth into 2018, it will be the country with the highest per capita GDP in Latin America."



New Panama Canal Agua Clara locks (Atlantic side).

Source: US DOT via Wikimedia Commons, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:New_Panama_Canal.jpg, Public Domain.



China's Economic and Strategic Moves in Latin America

OE Watch Commentary: China's ventures in Latin America are booming. Since 2000, China's trade with Latin American countries has increased by a factor of 22. To put this in context, trade between the United States and the region has only doubled in that time period. China is now the largest trading partner for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala; due especially to its huge demand for food, oil and other raw materials. The accompanying passages from Latin American sources discuss some trends regarding China's activities in Latin America.

As the first accompanying excerpt discusses, recently there are signs that China's interest in the region may be switching from food, oil and raw materials to infrastructure and services. For example, as the second passage discusses, China is backing a planned waterway in Nicaragua that aims to compete with the Panama Canal. The new 170-mile facility aims to be twice as deep as its famous rival and form an important new trade route.

China also lends a significant amount of cash to countries in the region -- around \$30 billion in 2015, up from \$231 million in 2005. Thus far, the funds come with mostly no strings attached. As the third passage points out, these investments created at least 1.8 million new jobs between 1990 and 2016. Simply put, Chinese presence in Latin America is growing by leaps and bounds, and deserves close analysis. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Something seems to be changing in China's approach to Latin America. Although the country's appetite for raw materials — mostly oil and mining — is still significant, it has given way gradually to a growing interest in other sectors, such as infrastructure and services...”

Source: “China profundiza su apuesta por América Latina (China Deepens Its Bet in Latin America),” *El País*, 17 June 2017. https://economia.elpais.com/economia/2017/06/15/actualidad/1497560655_900574.html

Something seems to be changing in China's approach to Latin America. Although the country's appetite for raw materials — mostly oil and mining — is still significant, it has given way gradually to a growing interest in other sectors, such as infrastructure and services, according to data from the latest study of the Academic Network of Latin America and the Caribbean on China, recently presented in Mexico City.

Source: “El canal fantasma de Nicaragua (The Ghost canal of Nicaragua),” *El País*, 22 February 2017. https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/02/10/planeta_futuro/1486758466_852892.html

In 2013, the Nicaraguan government granted the concession for the construction of an inter-oceanic canal to the private Chinese company HKND, directed by entrepreneur Wang Jing, through the adoption of Law 840, also known as the Canal Act: a concession granted with no bidding process, exempt from all taxation, exclusive for 50 years, and one that can be extended by another 50 for the development of the canal, with other seven sub-projects such as ports, trade regions, an oil pipeline and an airport, among others.



Official Photograph, China and Latin American/Caribbean Leaders' Summit, 2014.

Source: Chilean Government via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Foro_China-Celac_2014_\(1466131616\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Foro_China-Celac_2014_(1466131616).jpg), CC BY SA 2.0.

Source: “Comercio, inversiones y proyectos de China generan 1,8 millones de empleos (China's Investments, Projects and Trade Helped Create 1.8 Million Jobs),” *El Nacional*, 11 September 2017. http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/economia/comercio-inversiones-proyectos-china-generan-millones-empleos_202991

The International Labor Organization presented the first report on the effects of the economic relations between China, Latin America, and the Caribbean, related to jobs in the region. Between 1990 and 2016, at least 1.8 million new jobs were created as a result of activities such as trade, investment and infrastructure projects, the study says. This number represents almost 4 percent of the jobs created in the region during that period, but potentially understates the actual amount.



Mexican and Cuban Responses to North Korea's Nuclear Tests

OE Watch Commentary: The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea (DPRK) has maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba since 1960 and Mexico since 1980. The accompanying passages contrast North Korea's relations with Cuba and Mexico following the country's nuclear tests. While relations with Mexico took a turn for the worse, relations with Cuba appear to be going strong.

As the first excerpt from a Mexican source notes, the North Korean ambassador to Mexico was expelled "as a reprisal for the nuclear tests conducted by North Korea." While Mexico and the DPRK have not officially broken diplomatic relations, the decision followed a call from the US government for Latin American countries to "break off diplomatic and commercial relations with the Asian nation." Kim Hyong-gill, DPRK's ambassador to Mexico was declared unwelcome in Mexico on 8 September and he departed for Havana, Cuba on 14 September.

In contrast, the DPRK and Cuba celebrated their 69th year of mutual support at a reception at the DPRK embassy on 19 September. As the second excerpt from a North Korean source explains, during the reception, Kim Yong Dae, vice-president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, declared that "the peoples of the two countries have supported and cooperated with each other in the common struggle for socialism against imperialism and the US and created the sincerest and durable history of friendship." The article suggests that DPRK-Cuban relations continue to be strong, pointing out that the DPRK intends to "extend full support and solidarity to the struggle of the fraternal Cuban people" and to continue working towards socialist objectives. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kelsay)**

Source: "North Korea Envoy Expelled From Mexico Relocates to Cuba," *Milenio.com*, 14 September 2017. http://www.milenio.com/politica/corea_del_norte-persona_no_grata-mexico_expulsa_a_ambador_corea-milenio-noticias_0_1030097316.html

North Korea's ambassador to Mexico Kim Hyong-gil, who was expelled by the Mexican government last week in protest against a 3 September North Korean nuclear test, flew to the Cuban capital Havana where he would remain exercising his functions as concurrent ambassador in the countries of the Central American region...

Mexico's government declared Kim "persona non-grata" on 8 September and gave him 72 hours to leave the country, but his departure to Cuba was delayed until 14 September because Havana's Jose Marti International Airport was closed due to the impact of Hurricane Irma...

It noted the expulsion took place as a reprisal for the nuclear tests conducted by North Korea and after the United States government called on the countries of Latin America to break off diplomatic and commercial relations with the Asian nation.

"... the Korean people would ... extend full support and solidarity to the struggle of the fraternal Cuban people to frustrate the US vicious moves against Cuba..."

Source: Cuban Ambassador Gives Reception," *Pyongyang KCNA*, 19 September 2017. <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2017/201709/news19/20170919-23ee.html>

Cuban Ambassador to the DPRK Jesus De Los Angeles Aise Sotolongo gave a reception at the embassy on Tuesday to celebrate the 69th anniversary of the DPRK....

...Jesus De Los Angeles Aise Sotolongo said at the reception that the DPRK is demonstrating its dignity as a prosperous and powerful socialist country under the dynamic and seasoned guidance of respected Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un. The Korean people's life is improving day by day despite the unreasonable UNSC's sanctions, he noted, adding that Cuba will always stand by the DPRK despite difficulties and trials and support the Korean people in their cause of justice.

Kim Yong Dae in his speech noted that the peoples of the two countries have supported and cooperated with each other in the common struggle for socialism against imperialism and the US and created the sincerest and durable history of friendship. He said that the Korean people would as ever extend full support and solidarity to the struggle of the fraternal Cuban people to frustrate the US vicious moves against Cuba, reliably defend the gains of socialism and carry through the decision of the 7th Party Congress.



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The Hulunhu: Another Step Forward for China's Global Military Expansion

OE Watch Commentary: The Chinese Navy recently took another step toward becoming a global, blue-water force by commissioning a new supply ship. The Hulunhu (965), Type 901, will be joining the Chinese aircraft carrier fleet around the end of 2018. The ship is now the largest supply ship in Asia, and is expected to more than double the combat radius of China's aircraft carrier, reaching as far as Hawaii. The Hulunhu is said to have a greater load capacity for oil, water, and ammunition. It is also faster than previous Chinese supply ships. The accompanying passages from the Chinese press discuss the ship and China's needs for more overseas ports and replenishment bases.

According to Ni Lexiong, a Shanghai-based military expert, the supply ship could be deployed to support warships on missions around the world. Lexiong also notes that China needs more overseas ports to strengthen the navy's long-range capabilities. Xu Guangyu, a retired rear admiral and senior advisor to China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, also says that China needs more overseas replenishment bases and at least 10 more support ships to sustain its missions and combat capacity. Guangyu notes that China may build logistics bases in West Africa and Pakistan. When this will happen is not known. For now, as the third article explains, China is beefing up its current overseas military base in Djibouti by building a multi-purpose wharf there. The wharf will allow a four-ship flotilla, which would include China's new generation Type 901 supply ship, destroyers, frigates, and amphibious assault ships "for combat and humanitarian missions" to dock there. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The combat radius of China's aircraft carrier could at least be doubled with the Hulunhu, and it would be capable of reaching Hawaii.”

Source: Viola Zhou and Sarah Zheng, “China Commissions New Naval Supply Ship,” *South China Morning Post*, 1 August 2017. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2105010/china-commissions-new-naval-supply-ship>

The new supply ship has almost double the displacement tonnage of the Type 903 supply ships currently being used for escort and anti-piracy missions off Somalia.

Ni Lexiong, a Shanghai-based military expert, said the supply ship could be deployed to support warships on missions around the world.

But he said China still needed more overseas ports to strengthen the navy's long-range capabilities.

Source: Minnie Chan, “China Plans to Build Djibouti Facility to Allow Naval Flotilla to Dock at First Overseas Base,” *South China Morning Post*, 27 September 2017. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2112926/china-plans-build-djibouti-facility-allow-naval>

China is planning to build a multi-purpose wharf that would allow a naval flotilla to dock at its first overseas military base in Djibouti, according to military sources.

“Projects such as the multi-purpose naval wharf are complicated. The Chinese navy needs a large-scale pier to offer logistical support for its flotillas conducting anti-piracy operations in Somali waters,” the source said.

“The scale of the wharf should allow for the docking of a four-ship flotilla at least, including China's new generation Type-901 supply ship with a displacement of more than 40,000 tonnes, destroyers and frigates, as well as amphibious assault ships for combat and humanitarian missions.”



Aircraft Carrier Liaoning CV-16 at Hong Kong Waters.

Source: Baycrest - Wikipedia user - 維基百科用戶, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aircraft_Carrier_Liaoning_CV-16.jpg, CC BY SA 2.5.

Source: Liu Caiyu, “Chinese Navy Gets New Comprehensive Supply Ship, Asia's Largest,” *Global Times*, 6 September 2017. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1065090.shtml>

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy's new supply ship is Asia's largest and will allow China's aircraft carrier fleet to fight further afield.

The first Type 901 combat support ship, the Hulunhu (965), will form part of the Chinese aircraft carrier fleet.

*“The combat radius of China's aircraft carrier could at least be doubled with the Hulunhu, and it would be capable of reaching Hawaii,” Xu Guangyu, a retired rear admiral and senior advisor to the China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, told the *Global Times*.*

The Hulunhu has a greater load capacity for oil, water and ammunition, and is also faster, to compensate for the shortcomings of the aircraft carrier. Previous supply ships were smaller and slower, Xu said.

Xu said China's future aircraft carrier fleets will sail to wherever Chinese interests are located, including the Indian and Atlantic oceans.

“China's navy might need at least 10 more such ships to support aircraft carriers as well other naval fleets,” Xu said.

More support ships and replenishment bases overseas are needed to sustain the Chinese navy's oceanic missions and combat capacity, Xu said.

Logistics bases may also be built in West Africa and Pakistan, Xu added.



China Casts a Heavy Hand in Exploration of Oil and Gas

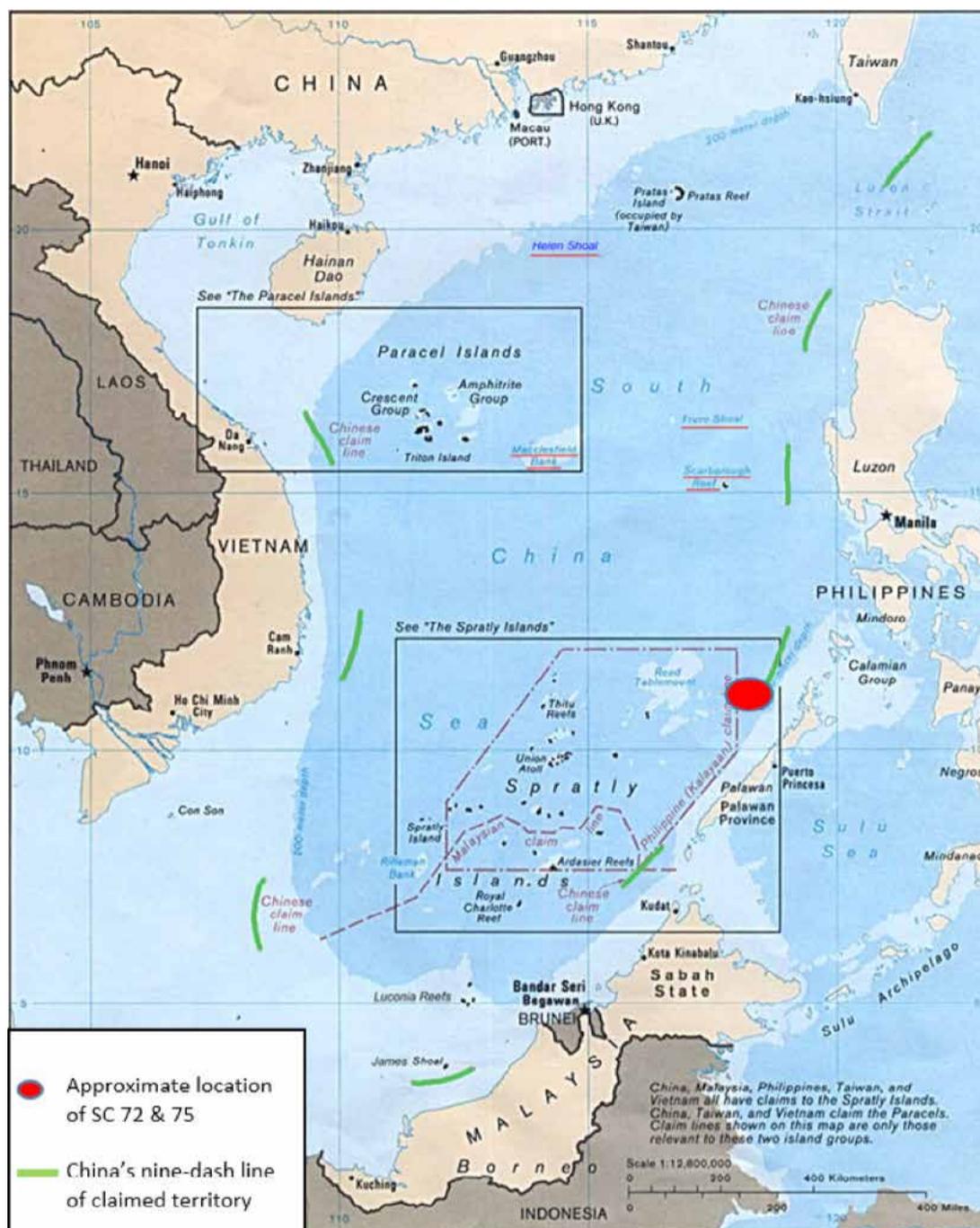
OE Watch Commentary: In 2011, a representative from the Philippine Department of Energy (DOE) announced that the Philippines hoped to become 60% energy self-sufficient by 2024. Two potential petroleum blocks within the South China Sea looked promising to contributing to this goal. However, due to tensions with China over territorial claims in the area, the DOE issued a moratorium on all exploration and drilling in what is known as Service Contracts (SC) 72 and 75 in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

The two Service Contracts fall within the Philippine’s exclusive economic zone. According to Article 56 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, “In the exclusive economic zone, the coastal State has sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring and exploiting, conserving and managing the natural resources... such as the production of energy from the water, currents and winds.” Despite the law, China lays claim to the territory, even ignoring a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, which gave the Philippines sovereign rights to access the petroleum fields.

Now, according to the accompanying article, the Chinese government will allow exploration of oil and gas resources, but only “if joint commercial development of the petroleum blocks would be agreed upon by both governments.” The article quotes Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua as saying, “We are in favor of joint development and we are not in favor of unilateral development of oil and gas in disputed areas.” Agreements have already reportedly been signed between state-run Philippine National Oil Company-Exploration Corporation and the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation for some development initiatives in the area. It will be interesting to see how big of a stake China ends up taking in what seemed to have belonged to the Philippines. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“We are in favor of joint development and we are not in favor of unilateral development of oil and gas in disputed areas.”

- Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua



Map of the South China Sea, with 9-dotted line highlighted in green.
Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3A9_dotted_line.png, Public Domain

Source: Myrna M. Velasco, “China Sets Condition on Lifting of Moratorium on Oil/Gas Exploration,” *Manila Bulletin*, 1 October 2017. <https://business.mb.com.ph/2017/09/30/china-sets-condition-on-lifting-of-moratorium-on-oilgas-exploration/>

The Chinese government will concur to the lifting of the moratorium on exploration of oil and gas resources within the so-called “disputed areas” if joint commercial development of the petroleum blocks would be agreed upon by both governments.

Nevertheless, he [Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua] forthrightly stated that “our position is quite clear: We are in favor of joint development and we are not in favor of unilateral development of oil and gas in disputed areas.”

Talks on the lifting of moratorium on exploration and development at petroleum blocks on what have been classified “disputed territories,” according to [Philippine Energy Secretary] Cusi, are only confined on bilateral discussions between the two governments – with the Philippines led by the Department of Foreign Affairs



PLA Attempts to Attract Higher-Quality Recruits

by Peter Wood

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OE Watch Commentary: China's annual conscription period ended in late August. This year's newest group of PLA recruits was reportedly among the worst in recent memory, with widespread reportage across Chinese and international media about the recruits' health issues. As the first passage from the Chinese military's official newspaper notes, "One [unnamed] city's physical exam washout rate for conscripts was 56.9 percent—enough to leave one speechless." Recruits were overweight, inactive or psychologically unfit.

Conscription, which began in early May, accepts young men and women between the ages of 18–22 and forms the bulk of the PLA. Conscripts serve for two years, before leaving the PLA or advancing to become Non-Commissioned Officers. Recruits for the PLA's officer track are brought in at the same time. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, over 1,070,000 college students signed up for PLA in 2017, an increase of 5.6 percent over last year. Only a fraction of these will make it into the PLA.

Those that do join will increasingly be representative of how China's changing demographics and transitioning economy are having an impact on its ability to attract high-quality recruits. Although China's One Child Policy was ended in 2015, it will continue to have a lingering effect on the PLA—most recruits for the next 15 years will likely not have siblings. The policy also contributed to China's dramatic population aging, which according to some estimates will lead to there being two retired people for every working-class person by 2050. Population aging could have a chilling effect on recruitment, as more young people are needed in the workforce, with higher paying jobs, to support their parents.

As the PLA modernizes and adopts more sophisticated equipment, higher levels of education among recruits are necessary. To attract more highly educated students the PLA has created a number of incentives. One of the pathways for college students, "National Defense Students"—somewhat similar to Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in the United States—are an increasingly important proportion of PLA recruits.

In addition to financial incentives, the PLA has borrowed from the Pentagon's Hollywood playbook and invested in TV series and movies targeted directly at encouraging young people to sign up. In late July CCTV premiered the PLA Navy-focused *Sharp Sword of the Deep*, a 34-episode series following a group of young college students from their recruitment into the Submarine Force through training and eventually to performing missions escorting PLAN surface ships on anti-piracy missions. The series, which received direct support from China's South Sea Fleet and the Submarine Academy in Qingdao, directly addresses issues such as China's changing class structure and attempts to make the navy life appealing to a broad audience. The series is indicative of the PLA's willingness to spend significant amounts to reach young Chinese through popular television.

Not to be left out, the Chinese Air Force is involved in the production of the big-budget *Sky Hunter*, a blockbuster film to be released this fall. As the second accompanying passage notes, one of the film's producers, a former PLAAF officer says, "The original intention of the PLA Air Force to produce this movie is simple. We don't intend to make money; we want to use it to tell the people, especially the youth, what the PLA Air Force is like and what it can do to protect the country in this era and the future."

These TV series and movies, as with earlier productions such as *Soldiers' Sortie*, appear to be having an effect and are widely cited as helping inspire young Chinese to join the PLA. China's economic situation is also helping incentivize more young people to join the PLA. Since hitting a five-year low in 2014, Chinese youth unemployment is again rising—it has stood at over 10 percent since 2010. With financial incentives and the chance for specialized training, the PLA remains a decent option for many Chinese youths.

To achieve China's "strong military dream" the PLA is going to have to continue to invest heavily in its people: providing more financial incentives, job training, and better living standards. For the majority of people in China, life has improved dramatically in the past 20 years, but prosperity is bringing its own challenges, with associated health problems from richer foods, and demographic problems due to the One Child Policy. These longer-term trends have the potential to undercut the PLA's strength just as it makes major strides in improving training, equipment, and technological development. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

"...to tell the people, especially the youth, what the PLA Air Force is like and what it can do to protect the country in this era and the future."

Source: Liu Dong "保家卫国,多想'我们是谁'" (To 'Defend the Home, Guard the Country', Think About "Who Are We?"), *解放军报 PLA Daily*, 28 October 2017. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmapp/content/2017-08/28/content_186595.htm

"One [unnamed] cities' physical exam washout rate for conscripts was 56.9 percent—enough to leave one speechless."

Source: Yang Sheng, "PLA aims to inspire youth with use of advanced aircraft, weapons in *Sky Hunter*," *Global Times*, 10 September 2017. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1065693.shtml>

*Lieutenant Colonel Zhang Li, a producer of *Sky Hunter* as well as an officer of the PLA Air Force, told the *Global Times* that "the original intention of the PLA Air Force to produce this movie is simple. We don't intend to make money; we want to use it to tell the people, especially the youth, what the PLA Air Force is like and what it can do to protect the country in this era and the future."*

*"Unfortunately, in the past, we didn't treat the publicity seriously, and we didn't produce successful films to shape the air force's image among the people. Interestingly, many young people who applied to become PLA fighter jet pilots were inspired by US-made Hollywood movies like *Top Gun*. Therefore, we have to produce a movie about the PLA Air Force that can touch the heart of our own people," Zhang said.*

According to the trailer of the film, the PLA Air Force has used its advanced aircraft and main combat weapons to support the filming. The fighter jets including J-20, J-10C, J-11, J-11B and J-16 can be seen in the trailer. Some foreign fighter jets like US-made F-15 and France-made Mirage are also displayed in the air combat with the PLA fighter jets.



China: The J-20 Enters Official Military Service

OE Watch Commentary: In late 2010, photos that circulated in domestic Chinese blogs, and then international news outlets prompted the question of whether the Chinese had produced a stealth aircraft. Later, it was determined that the photos were of a prototype of a stealth aircraft, the Chengdu J-20, which was undergoing flight testing. This has been the subject of a major international debate concerning air superiority and stability in East Asia. The question of the new Chinese fighter jet's combat-readiness was finally answered on 28 September, when the J-20 officially entered military service.

According to the accompanying passage from an official Chinese military news source, Wu Qian, spokesman for the Ministry of Defense, was asked by a reporter about when the J-20 fighter would enter service. Wu responded to the reporter that the aircraft had entered service on that day, with test flights going well and “on schedule” making “smooth progress.” The same reporter, in the initial question, also brought-up rumors surrounding China's plans to build a domestic fighter engine, known as the “Taihang,” but no specific comment was offered by Wu.

Both developments offer significant insight into how China is viewing its relative position globally, especially in the area of airpower. The J-20 demonstrates China's successful advances in developing a fifth-generation stealth aircraft. China's technological gap with the US is narrowing, with regional and global implications for defense and conflict readiness. Further, China is moving away from its principle engine supplier, Russia, toward the development of domestically-built engines on its military aircraft, which will give China greater independence in military manufacturing. What remains unclear is the number of deployable stealth aircraft that China has at its disposal. The second excerpt indicates that as of mid-June this year, China had produced at least 20 of these aircraft. More are likely on the way. **End OE Watch Commentary (Shanks)**

“Wu Qian: Presently, the J-20 has entered into military service, with test flight work on schedule and making smooth progress.”

Source: “9月28日一分钟阅尽天下军情 (28 September One-Minute to Review World Military Intelligence),” *XinhuaNet—Military News*, 29 September 2017. http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2017-09/29/c_129714234.htm

Reporter Asks Wu Qian about the J-20 and “Taihang” Engine

Reporter: The fourth generation (sic) stealth fighter J-20 has received frequent exposure since its Zhuhai Airshow debut, I would like to ask when the J-20 will enter service? In the past few days, the first photographs of the 2021 J-20 began to circulate extensively online, some reports claim that the machine has already had the domestic “Taihang” engine installed. Can you please comment and introduce the relevant information?

“Wu Qian: Presently, the J-20 has entered into military service, with test flight work on schedule and making smooth progress.”

Source: “中国已启动第三条歼20战机生产线 总产量已超20架 (China has Started the Third Production Line of the J-20 Fighter, with Total Production Exceeding 20),” *Sina—Military News*, 14 June 2017. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/jssd/2017-06-14/doc-ifyfzfy3941865.shtml>

Now as for China's J-20, this new achievement is entirely attributable to China's independent technological creation, there is no price problem, nor subject to human error, which is why as of now, only 15 production models have appeared. In addition to this, moving forward (in testing) are at least 7 other planes. So, there is no doubt that China now has more than 22 J-20s. Now, reportedly the third J-20 production line has already been launched, and the fourth production line will also soon begin trial production. By next year, China will have four production lines at full speed producing the J-20 model.



China's J-20 stealth fighter.
Source: Times by Asi, <https://goo.gl/W4rdUt>, CC BY 2.0.



China and Russia Donating Arms to the Philippine Military

OE Watch Commentary: The Philippine media is reporting that both China and Russia are donating weapons to the Armed Forces of the Philippines. According to the first article, China recently donated 3,000 assault rifles. Some time prior to the donation from China, the Philippines had tried to purchase 26,000 firearms from a US dealer, but the article states that this delivery was taking too long. Meanwhile, according to the second article, Russia is donating 5,000 Kalashnikov Rifles and 20 large Army trucks.

Both articles describe China's and Russia's motivation to donating the arms as a desire to help the smaller Asian country fight the terrorism that is plaguing it. According to the first article, Chinese Ambassador Zhao Jianhua explained that, "efforts to combat terrorism in the country would result in peace and stability in the Asian region." According to the second article, Russia wants to help fight terrorism in the world because it suffers from terror too.



Duterte and Russian President Vladimir Putin meeting in Moscow, May 23, 2017.

Source: Kremlin.ru, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_international_presidential_trips_made_by_Rodrigo_Duterte#/media/File:Meeting_of_Vladimir_Putin_with_the_President_of_the_Philippines_Rodrigo_Duterte.jpg, CC BY SA 4.0.

While China's and Russia's intentions are under the guise of serving a greater cause, it is hard to ignore the facts. Since Rodrigo Duterte took office in the Philippines in 2016, he has been striving to distance his country from US influence and aid. This offers a prime opportunity for China and Russia to step in to try to further cut the cord between the US and the Philippines, thereby increasing their own influence in Southeast Asia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“...the turnover of the rifles is ‘another demonstration of the commitment we [China] have to friendly and cooperative relations with the Philippines.’”

Source: Jaime Laude, “PNP to Get Second Batch of Rifles from China,” *Philippine Star*, 5 October 2017. <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/10/06/1745995/pnp-get-second-batch-rifles-china>

The 3,000 assault rifles, donated by China to the Philippine military yesterday will be handed over to the Philippine National Police (PNP) as ordered by President (Rodrigo) Duterte, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said.

“If you remember, the PNP tried to buy 26,000 firearms from a dealer in the US but it has taken them too long to deliver,” Lorenzana said, pointing out that China is also there to meet this urgent requirement.

The first batch of assault weapons are currently being used by the PNP's elite Special Action Force (SAF) fighting alongside the military in Marawi City against the Maute-Islamic State terrorists. It is also being used in counter-insurgency, maritime protection, and all police anti-drug operations.

China's ambassador Zhao Jianhua said the turnover of the rifles is “another demonstration of the commitment we have to friendly and cooperative relations with the Philippines.”

He hopes that the efforts to combat terrorism in the country would result in peace and stability in the Asian region.

Source: Trisha Macas, “Russia to Give 5K Kalashnikov Rifles, 20 Army Trucks for PHL's Anti-Terror Efforts – Dut,” *GMA News*, 11 October 2017. <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/629161/russia-to-give-5k-kalashnikov-rifles-20-army-trucks-for-phl-s-anti-terror-efforts-duterte/story>

President Rodrigo Duterte on Wednesday said weapons from Russia would be arriving in the Philippines soon.

“Five thousand sa inyo baril, Kalashnikov...It's useless keeping it a secret...” (said Duterte).

(Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana) could not say how much all the equipment was worth, but it would come with no strings attached.

“They want to help us fight terrorism. They also fight terrorism in their own country and want to help the world to fight against terrorism. That is their reason,” Lorenzana said.



China Supports Duterte's Drug War

OE Watch Commentary: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has been very vocal about launching a war on illegal drugs in the country. Although the drug war has received criticism from various countries for its excesses, China has been a donor of firearms and ammunition to the Philippine National Police (PNP) to support Duterte's efforts.

According to the accompanying passage from *manilatimes.com* on 5 October, the Philippine Defense Secretary said that the PNP initially tried to buy arms from dealers in the US but the delivery was taking too long. The Defense Secretary considers the PNP lucky to have then received such arms from the Chinese government. According to the article, the US halted arms to the PNP due to concerns about how the war on illegal drugs was being prosecuted. The arms from China were reportedly worth \$3.3 million. The Defense Secretary also said that a small portion of the arms from China, such as sniper scopes, would be retained by the military for counter-terrorism purposes, including prosecuting the battle against militants supporting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Marawi.

The article also quotes the Chinese ambassador to the Philippines, who claims that the transfer was a demonstration of the two countries' commitments to fighting terrorism and securing regional peace and stability together. Specifically, the ambassador cited good relations between Duterte and Chinese President Xi Jinping and the two countries' militaries as a reason for the transfer of arms. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: "PNP share of China arms, ammo to beef up drug war," *manilatimes.net*, 5 October 2017. <http://www.manilatimes.net/pnp-share-china-arms-ammo-beef-drug-war/354789/>

Some of the donated firearms and ammunition turned over by Beijing to Manila will be used by the Philippine National Police (PNP) in the Duterte administration's war on illegal drugs, according to Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana. Lorenzana said, "If you remember, the PNP tried to buy 26,000 firearms from dealers in the United States but it has taken them too long to deliver, so we are lucky that the Chinese government provided firearms." In November 2016, the US government halted delivery of firearms to the PNP, arguing that it would only be used in the war on illegal drugs that the US has been criticizing.

The assault rifles and the ammunition will be distributed to the PNP and they may also be used by the police for counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and maritime security. The sniper scopes will be used in sniper rifles that are being used by government troops against the terrorist Maute Group in Marawi City, Lanao del Sur. Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Zhao Jianhua, in the news conference said that the handover of the guns and ammunition signifies that China is committed to friendship and cooperation with the Philippines.

“Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines, Zhao Jianhua... said the handover of the guns and ammunition signifies that China is committed to friendship and cooperation with the Philippines.”



President Duterte meets Chinese ambassador Zhao Jianhua.

Source: Presidential Communications Operations Office via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Duterte_meets_Chinese_ambassador_Zhao_Jianhua.jpg, Public Domain.



ISIS Exploiting Crisis in Myanmar

OE Watch Commentary: According to the Malaysian Assistant Director of Counter-Terrorism, the crisis in Rakhine State, Myanmar, is serving as a recruitment tool for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As the accompanying article from a Malaysian source discusses, ISIS has been sharing photos of the violence in Myanmar on the Internet to generate sympathy for the Muslim Rohingya people as a way of targeting potential new recruits. The Assistant Director also says that Malaysia's proximity to Myanmar provides an opportunity for ISIS to recruit Malaysians and spread its influence to Rakhine, adding that Rakhine has become the newest destination for jihad in Southeast Asia.

Nonetheless, so far only one Malaysian, according to the article, has been reported arrested for traveling to Myanmar to fight. That fighter, however, also had plans to fight for ISIS in the Philippines, which shows the diversified threat in the Southeast Asia region. Although Syria is a much more active theater than either Myanmar or the Philippines, the article says there are only four Malaysians in Syria believed to be recruiting Malaysians at home. This is why the situation in Myanmar is concerning. At a time when the foreign fighter threat of Malaysians in Syria has begun to decrease, the fighting in Myanmar and the Philippines has the potential to reinvigorate recruitment to jihadi groups in Malaysia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: "ISIS Manfaatkan Krisis Rohingya untuk Jaring Anggota Baru (ISIS Exploits the Rohingya Crisis for Recruiting New Members)," *Today.line.me*, 20 September 2017. <https://today.line.me/id/pc/article/ISIS+Manfaatkan+Krisis+Rohingya+untuk+Jaring+Anggota+Baru-Xjl1v9>

The ISIS terrorist group is increasingly being cornered in Iraq and Syria. International intelligence has revealed the possibility that ISIS militants will return to their hometown and continue their terror activities. It also appears that the suffering of the Rohingyas in Rakhine, Myanmar, which is the focus of the world's attention, will be exploited by ISIS. Admittedly, according to the Malaysian security forces, a number of ISIS sympathizers have called for 'holy war' in defending Rohingya Muslims. Assistant Director of Counter-Terrorism Division Datuk Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay said that ISIS militant groups have used the Rohingya crisis as a tool for recruiting new members.

The proximity of Myanmar's location to Malaysia is an opportunity for ISIS to spread its influence to Rakhine. Malaysia is closer to Myanmar and the Southern Philippines than Syria. Now Rakhine has become the newest destination for the 'jihad'.

"...Rakhine has become the newest destination for the 'jihad'."



Burnt down house in northern Rakhine State.

Source: Moe Zaw, via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burnt_down_house_in_northern_Rakhine_State_\(Moe_Zaw-VOA\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burnt_down_house_in_northern_Rakhine_State_(Moe_Zaw-VOA).jpg), Public Domain



The Maute Group in Mindanao: Who They Are and How They Operate

OE Watch Commentary: Since May 2017, there has been an ongoing battle over Marawi, the capital and largest city of Lanao del Sur province on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao. The battle is being waged between Philippine government security forces and militants who include the Maute group. The following articles offer some insight on the terror group, its origins and strategies.

According to the first article, the Maute group first emerged in the town of Butig in the district of Lanao del Sur over two years ago. Originally named Dawlah Islamiya, it was founded by brothers Omar and Abdulla Maute, after they had worked as contractors in the Middle East, where they spent their free time studying Islamic theology. The Maute group would go on to form links with the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Maguindanao and, earlier this year, Abu Sayyaf. All three groups use the flag of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as their revolutionary banners, according to the article.

The second article describes the tactics and strategies used by the Maute group as being similar to those used by ISIS. For example, under the assumption that it will be difficult to dislodge a fighting force, “prepared for urban warfare and occupying the built up portions of a city,” the Maute group occupied the center of Marawi, in an area in which hundreds of medium-rise concrete buildings, a church, and several mosques could be used as sniper nests. This type of urban warfare has also helped them to hold on to the area more tightly, with the only way to dislodge them being to turn the area into rubble. They have also used hostages, civilian shields and religious buildings to help protect them from the military’s assault.

As of 22 October, reports have emerged saying that both the Maute brothers have been killed and that the Marawi City siege was over. It is hard to tell whether or not there are other members of the group still at large. However, earlier articles, such as the third article, have warned that the group is planning to infiltrate other areas, replicating the attack in Marawi. Whether or not the group will be able to rise up again, only time will tell. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The occupation of Marawi resembles the strategy and tactics used by ISIS when they decided to overrun about a dozen Syrian and Iraqi cities including Raqqa and Mosul.”



Co-Founders of the Maute group
TOP: Omar Maute, BOTTOM: Abdullah Maute.
Source: Philippine National Police, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_and_Abdullah_Maute#/media/File:Omar_Maute.jpg and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_and_Abdullah_Maute#/media/File:Abdullah_Maute.jpg, Public Domain.

Source: John Unson, “How Maute Group Came to be,” *Philippine Star*, 25 May 2017. <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/05/25/1703502/how-maute-group-came-be>

The Maute terror group first emerged in Butig town in Lanao del Sur more than two years ago, just as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in the Middle East started to hit the news.

Founded by siblings Omar and Abdulla Maute, the group was originally named Dawlah Islamiya, but eventually became more known as the Maute terror group, now feared for its impunity.

Omar and Abdullah are descendants of a big Maranaw warrior clan in Butig, a hinterland town in the first district of Lanao del Sur.

Omar and Abdullah were former contract workers in the Middle East, who both studied Islamic theology in between works in secular schools in Syria and in the United Arab Emirates.

Relatives said even before Omar and Abdullah organized the Dawlah Islamiya, they already have links with the founder of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Maguindanao, the late Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato.

Kato started as a commander in the MILF, but got booted in 2010 for insubordination and differences with members of their central committee.

The Maute group and the Abu Sayyaf fused ranks early this year, according to local officials in Lanao del Sur and sources in the Army’s intelligence community.

The BIFF, the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute group have a common denominator - that of using the black ISIS flag as their revolutionary banners.

Source: Alex Magno, “Philippines: Frontline,” *Philstar*, 2 October 2017. <http://www.philstar.com/opinion/2017/10/03/1744994/frontline>

By all indications, the battle to retake Marawi is winding down dramatically. The threat posed by terrorism, however, will linger for a while.

The occupation of Marawi resembles the strategy and tactics used by ISIS when they decided to overrun about a dozen Syrian and Iraqi cities including Raqqa and Mosul. The strategy is based on the sound assumption that a fighting force, prepared for urban warfare and occupying the built up portions of a city, will be very difficult to dislodge. Mosul required over half a year of intense urban warfare to recover, notwithstanding the uncontested air superiority and clear advantage in weaponry enjoyed by Iraqi government forces.

The Maute fighters smartly occupied the built-up center of Marawi City. They deployed a much larger force and had hundreds of medium-rise concrete buildings, a church and several mosques to serve as sniper nests. They have been holding fort for over four months now against an intense military assault. Dislodging the Maute fighters required damaging their concrete urban cover. The core of Marawi is now rubble. ... the Maute fighters also used hostages and religious buildings as protection against the assault...”

Source: Victor Reyes, “Maute Planning Attacks in Other Areas: Army Chief,” *Malaya Business Insight Online*, 5 October 2017. <http://www.malaya.com.ph/business-news/news/maute-planning-attacks-other-areas-army-chief>

Army chief Maj. Gen. Rolando Bautista yesterday said the Maute Group is planning to “infiltrate” some areas and replicate its attack in Marawi City.



New Group Presents Twist in Marawi Violence

OE Watch Commentary: For several months, the Philippine military has been battling a faction of militants loyal to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Marawi, Lanao del Sur. Despite a much longer and bloodier battle than originally anticipated, the fighting is coming to an end with the defeat of the pro-ISIS faction. However, according to the excerpted article from a Philippine source, a new group has emerged which opposes both the Philippine military and the pro-ISIS faction, adding a new element to peace and reconciliation efforts.

According to the article, this new group, which calls itself the Meranaw Victims Movement (MVM), is demanding that the pro-ISIS faction release its hostages in Marawi and leave the city. The group claims that the pro-ISIS faction has abandoned the welfare of the people and misinterpreted the concept of jihad in Islam. The group also demanded the government stop ordering airstrikes in Marawi in order to spare the remaining buildings in the city and to allow civilians to return to their homes. The group also called on the government to provide relief to civilians and repair destroyed religious and cultural buildings.

The group has already posted a video and statement on Facebook. The military, however, does not confirm the group's strength or existence beyond its social media proclamations. What is most important about this group is that its demands reflect some level of local sentiment after weeks of the military battling the pro-ISIS faction and much of Marawi being destroyed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Marawi peace corridor.
Source: Hariboneagle927, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marawi_peace_corridor.svg, CC BY 2.0.

“MVM [Meranaw Victims Movement] also urged the government to provide support to wounded civilians and pay compensation for the damaged houses and buildings and other property.”



A building in Marawi is set ablaze by airstrikes carried out by the Philippine Air Force.
Source: Mark Jhome1, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bombing_on_Marawi1City.jpg, CC 4.0.

Source: “New armed group after IS-inspired terrorists in Marawi,” *Newsinfo.inquirer.net*, 20 September 2017. <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/931907/new-armed-group-after-is-inspired-terrorists-in-marawi>

Provincial officials and the military have declined to comment until they have ascertained who are behind the new group that calls itself Meranaw Victims Movement (MVM). MVM posted a statement on Facebook demanding that the Maute group and Abu Sayyaf terrorists holed up in Marawi free their hostages and leave the city “at once”. Col. Romeo Brawnier, Joint Task Force Group Marawi commander, said top military officials in the region were trying to determine the identities of the people behind the group, as well as the source of the video that was posted on Facebook.

MVM demanded that President Duterte stop airstrikes on Marawi to save “the houses or buildings that may not have been destroyed yet” and to allow the return of residents to areas of the city that had already been cleared by the military. MVM also said the government should ease access to southern Lanao del Sur towns and “stop the abuses of some military and police personnel at checkpoints, and accord respect to civilians, especially the women.” MVM also urged the government to provide support to wounded civilians and pay compensation for the damaged houses and buildings and other property.



Indonesian Foreign Fighters Return Home for Assassination Missions

OE Watch Commentary: On 19 September, the excerpted Indonesian-language source reported a foiled assassination attempt of Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi). According to the article, the alleged assassin was an Indonesian who had returned from fighting in Syria and Iraq. The article reports that the suspect was arrested in Cirebon at a festival that Jokowi was planning to attend, carrying weapons and a letter from a jihadi group. Investigations were ongoing as to whether the alleged assassin was part of a broader terrorist network.

The police also reported that there are as many as 1,494 total Indonesian foreign fighters, with as many as 310 men and 224 women having been deported back to Indonesia from Syria and Iraq presumably after surrendering or being captured. 84 Indonesians have voluntarily returned from Syria and Iraq. The relatively even proportion of men and women is a reflection of Indonesian families traveling together to Syria and Iraq. Indonesian women, who have not been allowed by ISIS to be fighters, have often been found by coalition forces in Syria when ISIS strongholds have been cleared.



Pemerintah Provinsi DKI Jakarta (Provincial Government of Jakarta), "Jokowi blusukan."

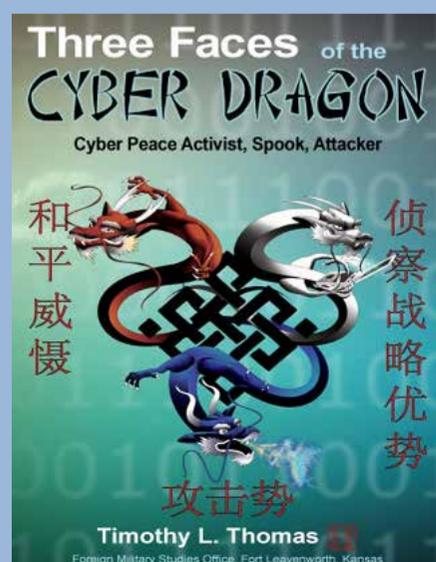
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jokowi_blusukan.jpg, Public Domain.

In addition to Syria and Iraq, the police also now report on the presence of Indonesians in the Philippines as foreign fighters. According to the article, the police count 32 Indonesian foreign fighters there and only two women. This may suggest that although the Philippines is nearer to Indonesia than Syria and Iraq, it does not captivate the attention of aspiring Indonesian jihadists like Syria and Iraq does. However, the lower numbers of Indonesians in the Philippines could also be because the Philippine military's battles with pro-ISIS forces there only began in mid-2017, whereas ISIS announced its caliphate from Syria and Iraq three years earlier, in 2014. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Indonesian police are increasing vigilance for potential terrorist attacks coming from Indonesian citizens who have joined the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS)...”

Source: “Polisi Selidiki Terduga Teroris yang Incar Jokowi di Cirebon (Police are investigating the suspicious man who was arrested when Jokowi arrived in Cirebon),” *Katadata.co.id*, 19 September 2017. <http://katadata.co.id/berita/2017/09/19/polisi-selidiki-terduga-teroris-yang-incar-jokowi-di-cirebon>

Police are investigating the suspicious man who was arrested when Jokowi arrived at Cirebon airport. Police said the suspect was carrying a black backpack with a gun, knife, Molotov cocktail from a gasoline bottle, and a jihad invitation letter. Currently the Indonesian police are increasing vigilance for potential terrorist attacks coming from Indonesian citizens who have joined the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria. Police Headquarters recorded as many as 1,494 Indonesian citizens suspected of being a foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) in acts of terrorism in Syria, Iraq and the Philippines.



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>



What's in a Name?

OE Watch Commentary: This summer's China-India standoff in Doklam was international news for weeks. Meanwhile, both China and India continue to spar using soft power in India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. The Chinese refer to the area in question as South Tibet and consider it sovereign Chinese territory. The current de-facto border or Line of Actual Control (LAC) is part of the British Imperial legacy and a line of demarcation that China does not recognize. China claims all the territory south as far as the plains of Assam at the foot of the Himalayan Mountains that constitute much of Arunachal Pradesh.

The controversy became more pronounced in the spring when the Dalai Lama made a pilgrimage to the famous Tawang Monastery. As the accompanying passage from a Chinese source discusses, this was perceived as an insult by the Chinese, who consider the Dalai Lama an agitator at best and a secessionist who wants to free all of Chinese-held Tibet. A majority of the inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh are Monpa, considered cousins to the Tibetans. In fact, the sixth Dalai Lama was born in Tawang and his home is now a shrine. The people of Tawang take their commitment and connection to the Dalai Lama seriously. The town abides by a citywide ordinance that no meat and alcohol is to be served on Wednesdays-- because the current Dalai Lama was born on a Wednesday. The Chinese responded to the Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang by publically changing the names of six cities and towns in Arunachal Pradesh, standardizing them with Chinese pronunciations of Tibetan names.



Locator map of the Seven Sister States and Sikkim in India.
Source: by Jeroen, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SevenSisterStates.png>, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Arunachal Pradesh is significant territory to both the Indians and Chinese. In the 1962 Sino-India War, Chinese forces drove across the LAC in locations and advanced deep into Indian controlled Arunachal Pradesh. Indian forces were routed and suffered nearly 3,000 KIA. A month later the Chinese pulled back across the LAC and there has not been any significant confrontation since then, but both sides continue to eye each other with mistrust. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“China... will take further measures to safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and national security.”



Anti-aircraft Gun at 1962 India-China War Memorial ,Tawang.
Source: Dodge Billingsley. Author's private collection. By Permission of Author.

Source: “中国增补藏南6地名 专家：印度反应强烈再公布两批 (China to add six names in southern Tibet; Experts: India reacted strongly to the two batches),” *News.ifeng.com*, 20 April 2017. http://news.ifeng.com/a/20170420/50970144_0.shtml

Recently, India, despite the concern of the Chinese, arranged for the 14th Dalai Lama to visit the disputed area and engage in activities in the eastern sector of the Sino-Indian border. Political remarks by the 14th Dalai Lama and Indian officials provoked the Chinese side. The 14th Dalai Lama's trip has long surpassed the so-called “religious activities” of the Indian side, which India has done to violate the Indian government's solemn promise on the issue of Tibet and to properly resolve the territorial dispute between China and India through negotiations. This will have an adverse effect. China has made solemn representations to India and will take further measures to safeguard China's territorial sovereignty and national security.



India Discussing Defense Reforms after Doklam Standoff

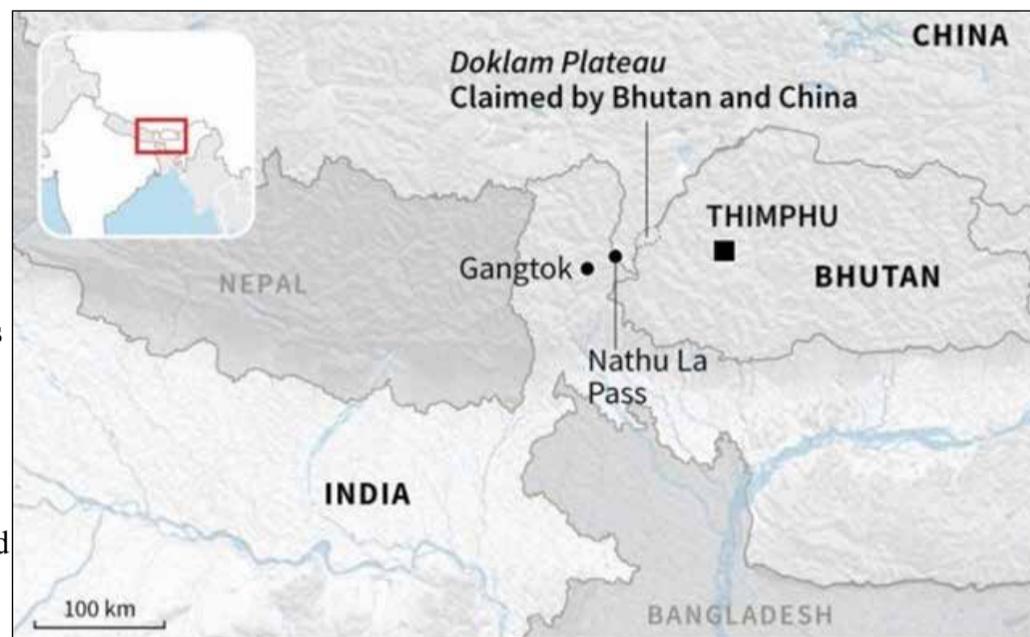
OE Watch Commentary: The Doklam border standoff between India and China that took place from 16 June to 28 August resulted in both sides pulling back their forces and avoiding a war. While India points to the resolution of the standoff as a diplomatic success, the accompanying excerpted articles demonstrate how the incident is prompting more discussions about ongoing defense reforms.

The first article from the independent English language news website *The Quint*, looks at the recent history of reforms. The author references the Shekatkar Committee, which former Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar established in 2016. Led by retired Lt Gen DB Shekatkar, the committee made several recommendations, focused on improving combat capability and rebalancing defense spending.

The author notes that “while 65 of the 99 recommendations have been approved, the ones that really matter have not, and if the past is any guide, they will be simply shelved.” He points to “the Arun Singh Committee in 1990,” “the Group of Ministers in 2001 and the Naresh Chandra Committee in 2012,” and how “all of them were successfully subverted by the IAS (India Administrative Service)-dominated Ministry of Defence bureaucracy.” It is worth noting that the article compares the reforms to those of China, not Pakistan. This does not mean that India views Pakistan as any less of a threat, but the recent border dispute with China appears to be having an impact on ongoing defense reforms.

Lastly, the author proposes that India needs “a high-tech and mobile force which can be rapidly built up to counter local challenges along its borders.” He notes that the Indian Army now has “two divisions which are being raised for the so-called Mountain Strike Corps,” but that it would have been better to increase the “combat capability of the existing mountain divisions by adding attack and heavy-lift helicopters and enhancing their mobile artillery capabilities.” The Shekatkar Committee put forth its recommendations before the Doklam standoff, but it will be important to watch what impact the incident has on the reforms of the Indian Armed Forces.

The article from the *Daily Excelsior*, an English language newspaper in the city of Jammu, reports on a recent speech by General Bipin Rawat at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, a think tank which looks at defense and security issues with a focus on the Indian Army. General Rawat, India’s Chief of Army Staff, believes that India “should be prepared for a two-front war” and warns that “these conflicts could be limited in space and time or can expand into an all out war along the entire frontier, with Pakistan taking advantage of the situation.” General Rawat notes that “the Army’s supremacy among the three services must be maintained to successfully combat external security threats.” India viewing China as a threat is nothing new, but the speech demonstrates how the Doklam standoff has prompted discussion on how India should be prepared to deal with it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Tensions-between-India-and-China Doklam.
Source: Nilesch Shukla, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ATensions-between-india-and-china.jpg>, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: Joshi, Manoj. “Post Doklam, Army Needs Reforms That Have Been Stalled For Decades,” *The Quint*, 1 September 2017. <https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/reform-in-indian-army-after-doklam>

The Indian Army has come out well in the Doklam crisis. But we should not exaggerate its actions...All the Army personnel had to do was to walk down 100 metres or so from their dominant position in Doka La and confront a PLA road construction crew...This pithy version of events is being deliberately exaggerated to make the point that we did not triumph in any military confrontation and that we should not draw the wrong lessons from it. The Indian military has in the past decade strengthened its deterrent posture vis-à-vis China, but it needs to do even more to confront the Chinese challenge which will only grow in the coming decade.

... While 65 of the 99 recommendations have been approved, the ones that really matter have not, and if the past is any guide, they will be simply shelved, as has been done in the case of recommendations of two previous commissions...Ironically, India began its reform process well before the Chinese. The idea of a tri-service chief was first mooted by the Arun Singh Committee in 1990. It was repeated by the Group of Ministers in 2001 and the Naresh Chandra Committee in 2012. All of them were successfully subverted by the IAS-dominated Ministry of Defence bureaucracy...

...What (India) needs is a high-tech and mobile force which can be rapidly built up to counter local challenges along its borders and deal with contingencies beyond our borders. Unfortunately, the Indian military remains structured in the same way that it was thirty or even forty years ago...So, it has simply added numbers, two divisions in 2009 and further two divisions which are being raised for the so-called Mountain Strike Corps. It would have made much more sense to contain and indeed reduce the growth of personnel and, instead, begin raising the combat capability of the existing mountain divisions by adding attack and heavy-lift helicopters and enhancing their mobile artillery capabilities...

(continued)



Continued: India Discussing Defense Reforms after Doklam Standoff

“It would have made much more sense to contain and indeed reduce the growth of personnel and, instead, begin raising the combat capability of the existing mountain divisions by adding attack and heavy-lift helicopters and enhancing their mobile artillery capabilities.”

Source: “India must be prepared for 2-front war: Rawat,” *Daily Excelsior*, 6 September 2017. <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/india-must-prepared-2-front-war-rawat/>

Army chief Gen Bipin Rawat today said the country should be prepared for a two-front war, insisting China has started “flexing its muscles”, while there seems to be no scope for reconciliation with Pakistan...Referring to the 73-day long Doklam standoff, the Army chief warned that the situation could gradually snowball into a larger conflict on the northern border. He said there is a possibility that these conflicts could be limited in space and time or can expand into an all out war along the entire frontier, with Pakistan taking advantage of the situation...(he added) “...the Army’s supremacy among the three services must be maintained to successfully combat external security threats. As far as northern adversary is concerned, the flexing of muscle has started. The salami slicing, taking over territory in a very gradual manner, testing our limits of threshold is something we have to be wary about...”...He was speaking at a seminar organised by the Centre for Land Warfare Studies.

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/fms0/m/fms0-monographs/194880>



Behind the Joint Exercises of the Collective Security Treaty Organization

OE Watch Commentary: A number of changes have taken place within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) over the past several years, including amendments to the charter that allow for the organization to more easily deploy its Collective Operational Reaction Force (CORF) to a conflict in a member state and to take part in UN peacekeeping missions. The accompanying excerpted articles look at ongoing activities of the CSTO and offer contrasting viewpoints of the organization from member states at a time when tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains high, fighting continues in Syria and Iraq, and Central Asian governments monitor the situation in Afghanistan.

The first article from *lin.am*, a Russian-language website in Armenia, looks at the joint CSTO exercise “Interaction-2017.” The author does not believe the cooperation in the exercise reflects the relationships member states have with each other, claiming that “there are no unifying goals, ideas or visions of CSTO members” and that the CSTO is “an instrument of Moscow politics.” The points that the author brings up are worth noting, particularly as the CSTO continues to conduct a series of joint military exercises in the latter half of the year.

The author questions relations between fellow CSTO members and asks for example, how Armenia and Kazakhstan can act harmoniously if Kazakhstan “is ready to provide assistance to Azerbaijan over the issue of Karabakh.” He also points out the contradiction in Armenian and Belarusian soldiers taking part in joint military exercises in Armenia, while “the Defense Minister of Azerbaijan discusses the need to strengthen Azerbaijani-Belarusian military cooperation in Minsk.” Armenian government officials have criticized other CSTO members for their security cooperation with Azerbaijan and not coming to the country’s defense against Azerbaijan, particularly following the April 2016 clash.

The article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, the Russian daily newspaper, discusses CSTO exercises and how a series of them in October and November will work through scenarios of “various armed conflicts and the organization of peacekeeping missions.” In past years, the annual CSTO exercises noted in the article had common aspects, but this is the first year that they are “made up of several stages, each of which will be carried out in the framework of a single plan.” The author notes how the exercise “Unbreakable Brotherhood – 2017” is being carried out as “preparations for a peacekeeping operation by CSTO forces” in a non-member state and that it “could be Syria, Ukraine or other places where CSTO members have common interests.” This shows how Russian media continues to promote a Russian-led peacekeeping mission in Syria with CSTO members contributing forces. However, this does not appear likely, given that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan declined to get involved in Syria earlier this year. Ultimately, the articles show that the CSTO continues to prepare for various scenarios with the CORF, but members of the organization appear to have become less inclined to provide support for fellow members. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“On the same day when Armenian and Belarusian soldiers take part in joint military exercises in Armenia, the Defense Minister of Azerbaijan discusses the need to strengthen Azerbaijani-Belarusian military cooperation in Minsk...”

Source: Artsruni, Sargis. “Шантаж: кто в Армении мишень военных учений ОДКБ? (Blackmail: who in Armenia is the target of the CSTO’s military exercise?),” *lin.am*, 10 October 2017. <http://ru.lin.am/1201734.html>

The CSTO joint military exercise “Interaction-2017,” of the Collective Operational Reaction Forces and part of the Joint Group of Forces of Russia and Armenia, started in Armenia...these military exercises are geared toward the forces of member states acting jointly and harmoniously... how is it possible to ensure harmonious action of CSTO members if the organization is one of the instruments of Moscow politics?...An informed answer to this question cannot be given by anyone, and not because it is a secret, but because there are no unifying goals, ideas or visions of CSTO members...

Members of the organization are brought (in) and held exclusively by Russian blackmail. How can the Armed Forces of Armenia and Kazakhstan act harmoniously if Astana is ready to provide assistance to Azerbaijan over the issue of Karabakh? On the same day when Armenian and Belarusian soldiers take part in joint military exercises in Armenia, the Defense Minister of Azerbaijan discusses the need to strengthen Azerbaijani-Belarusian military cooperation in Minsk...In issues of defense and security, cooperation of governments is practically impossible if they have diametrically opposed interests...

Source: Mukhin, Vladimir. “ОДКБ готовится к миротворческим миссиям (The CSTO is preparing for peacekeeping missions),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 3 October 2017. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2017-10-03/2_7087_odkb.html

The CSTO operational-strategic exercise “Combat Brotherhood – 2017” began yesterday in the Rostov region...Over three weeks in October and ten days in November, CSTO forces will work out tasks in the south of Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Almost all of the maneuvers are planned for operations in mountainous-desert terrain. Outside of offensive and defensive tasks, the issues of various armed conflicts and the organization of peacekeeping missions will be worked out...

The exercise is made up of several stages, each of which will be carried out in the framework of a single plan. One of the tactical exercises, “Search-2017,” started yesterday in the Southern Military District...all military leadership must (then) move on to the Bagramyan base in Armenia. There, the large-scale exercise “Interaction-2017” will take place...From October 16 to 20 the peacekeeping exercise “Unbreakable Brotherhood – 2017” is planned to take place in Kazakhstan. And the last stage of the exercises, “Combat Brotherhood – 2017” will be carried out in Tajikistan from November 10 to 20 and involve the Collective Operational Reaction Force...

...according to the official version, the intent of “Unbreakable Brotherhood – 2017” is related to “preparations for a peacekeeping operation by CSTO forces in a state that is not a member of the organization.” Therefore, it is possible to assume that this could be Syria, Ukraine or other places where CSTO members have common interests...



Jamaat ul Ansar al-Sharia: The New al-Qaeda Threat in Pakistan

by Farhan Zahid

Republished in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor, Vol. 15, Issue 18, dated 22 September 2017, Edited for OE Watch. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/jamaat-ul-ansar-al-sharia-the-new-al-qaeda-threat-in-pakistan/>

OE Watch Commentary: Recent months have seen the sudden emergence in Pakistan of an organization calling itself Jamaat ul Ansar al-Sharia Pakistan. Information about the group is only now beginning to surface, with indications that it is associated to al-Qaeda. The accompanying passages from Pakistani sources provide insight into the group, whose recent activities herald a possible resurgence for al-Qaeda in Pakistan, where the group had been struggling to make a comeback after years of drone strikes and military operations.

As the first passage demonstrates, the new entity is thought to be behind a series of five terror attacks in Karachi and Baluchistan provinces. A statement by Abdullah Hashmi, the group's spokesperson who was arrested in early September, makes it clear that the group is associated with al-Qaeda. In addition, a leaflet announcing the establishment of the group indicates that militants are taking on the ideology and philosophy of Osama bin Laden, while praising al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. As the second accompanying passage notes, Pakistani authorities also believe that the group is comprised of highly trained and battle-hardened Pakistani returnees from the conflict in Syria, where many fought for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Nusrah Front or Ahrar al-Sham.

Jamaat ul Ansar al-Sharia appears set to revive al-Qaeda in Pakistan after three years in limbo, a result of drone strikes and Pakistani military operations which targeted al-Qaeda affiliated Islamist groups in the tribal and settled areas of Pakistan. With the establishment of Jamaat ul Ansar al-Sharia, al-Qaeda appears to be aiming to lure ISIS-Khorasan cells in Pakistan into its embrace, as well as taking back those who defected to ISIS between 2014 and 2017. With ISIS weakened, having lost more than 60 percent of its territories in Iraq and Syria, the al-Qaeda move to re-establish itself in Pakistan appears calculated and timely.

A boost in numbers gained from embracing the well-trained ISIS returnees arriving from Syria would likely allow al-Qaeda, which was in desperate need of a new cadre in Pakistan, to resume its activities. Al-Qaeda has always presented a threat to a varying degree, but the appearance of Ansar in the jihadist landscape of Pakistan shows its resilience to counter-terrorism operations and its resolve to stay put in Pakistan. Pakistan will need to devise a strategy to tackle this new group before the possibility of an al-Qaeda resurgence becomes a reality. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zahid)**

Source: "Terror outfit Ansar-ul-Sharia behind recent attacks in Karachi: sources," *Geo TV News*, 22 July 2017. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/150528-terror-outfit-ansar-ul-sharia-behind-recent-attacks-in-karachi-sources>

"A new terrorist group has been involved in recent wave of terror attacks in Karachi, security sources told Geo News Friday, which is inspired by Al Qaeda brand of terror activities.

Ansar-ul-Sharia has been involved in five terrorism incidents in Karachi and Mastung, security sources said, and has so far been outside the reach of law. The incidents include killing of a retired colonel, six policemen and a private security guard in Karachi, and an IED blast targeting security forces in Mastung.

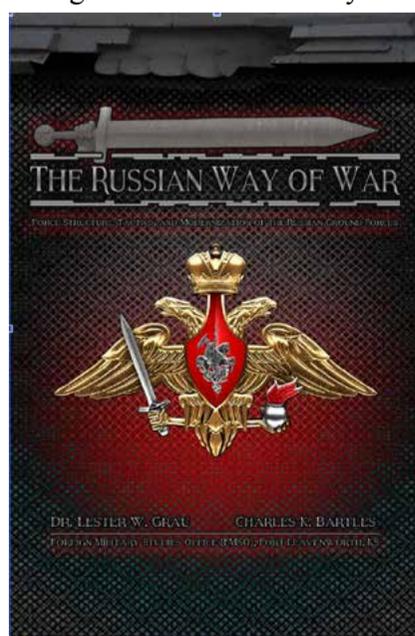
The outfit ... was influenced by Al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri."

Source: "Militants who returned from Syria are involved in Karachi police killings," *Samaa News*, 4 July 2017. <https://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2017/07/militants-who-returned-from-syria-are-involved-in-karachi-police-killings/>

The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) has linked a new terror group Ansar-al-Shariah Pakistan (ASP) in connection with recent attacks on policemen in Karachi... ASP claimed responsibility for the attacks on policemen in Karachi in May that took place in the city's Dhoraji Colony area and June in SITE area. The group had also claimed credit for the killing of ex-army officer Tahir Nagi in April.... According to an assessment by the CTD, the fighters who recently returned from Syria are members of ASP and are involved in attacks on police in Karachi...

Ansar al-Shariah... militants... joined hands with Al-Qaeda's Syrian branch Al Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham and fought with... ISIS militants in Syria."

"A new terrorist group... which is inspired by Al Qaeda... has been involved in five terrorism incidents in Karachi and Mastung..."



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>



An Indian Perspective on the Rohingya Crisis

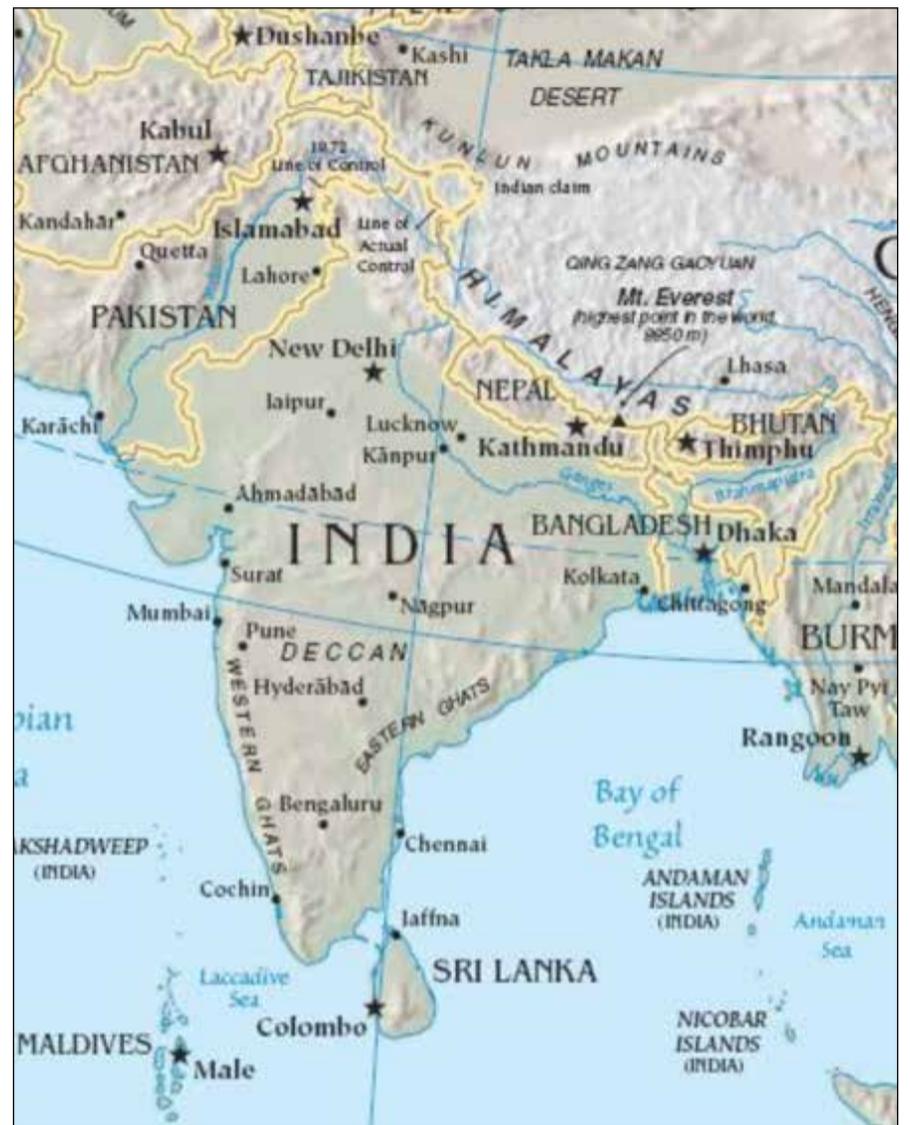
OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article in India's *The Hindu*, written by India's former High Commissioner to Pakistan, provides insight into some of the challenges that India is facing in dealing with the fighting and refugee crisis along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border. On the one hand, there is a desire to ensure the Muslim Rohingya fleeing Myanmar's Rakhine State find security and on the other there is a need to prevent radical Islamists from infiltrating the Rohingya population in Rakhine State. The author claims that, like "the western and Islamic world," India is outraged by the plight of the Rohingya. He argues that the recent crisis was provoked by attacks across the Bangladesh-Myanmar border by radical Islamic groups who were trained in Pakistan.

The author acknowledges that the Myanmar army is engaging in a scorched earth policy of Rohingya communities in Rakhine State. He notes that the Rohingya have not been granted citizenship in Myanmar since 1962 and have suffered discrimination, but that the current military actions are unprecedented. Driving support for the military's actions are statements from the country's Buddhist clergy, which reacted strongly after attacks by Rohingya Islamist groups on the military.

The article also discusses the impact of the refugee crisis on India, which is now hosting 45,000 Rohingya refugees. However, geopolitics require India take sides and support Myanmar. According to the article, Myanmar plays a crucial role for India in supporting it to deal with insurgencies that are allegedly backed by Pakistan and China in the country's landlocked northeastern states, where important development projects are underway. If India places too much pressure on Myanmar's government, it could risk China gaining a greater foothold in Myanmar through its defense of Myanmar on the Rohingya issue in international forums, such as the UN.

A solution for India is to operate trilaterally between India, Bangladesh and Myanmar in the name of India's "Act East" policy, which would keep China's influence at bay while also boosting cooperation between India and two of its neighbors. This, according to the article, would hopefully leading to a repatriation of the Rohingya to Myanmar. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

"...a number of questions remain on how we are going to deal with an estimated 45,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who have entered India since 2012."



South Asia.

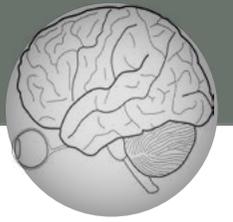
Source: CIA via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_asia.jpg, Public Domain.

Source: "The Rohingyas pose a regional challenge," *Thehindu.com*, 4 October 2017. <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/the-rohingyas-pose-a-regional-challenge/article9887201.ece>

The outrage that accompanied the plight of the Rohingyas was not only seen in sections of people in India, but also across the western and Islamic world. India has stood its ground, maintaining that recent events were triggered by attacks across the Bangladesh-Myanmar border by radical Islamic groups. But a number of questions remain on how we are going to deal with an estimated 45,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar who have entered India since 2012.

The animosity of the army, which dominates national life in Myanmar towards the Rohingyas, has increased ever since sections of Rohingyas formed armed groups to wage an ill-advised struggle after indoctrination in Pakistan. But seldom, if ever, has the army undertaken the sort of scorched earth policy it has adopted against the Rohingya Muslims. And never has the Buddhist clergy reacted so strongly, as in what transpired in Rakhine, after recent coordinated cross-border attacks on police posts and the army by the Rohingya Solidarity Army.

Making India relevant in India-Myanmar relations has been looking up in recent years, even though much improvement is needed to implement Indian-aided projects there if we are to make any impression of our relevance in the face of some aggressive Chinese involvement. Myanmar has a crucial role in supplementing our efforts to deal with insurgencies backed by Pakistan and China in our landlocked northeastern states. Most importantly, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh share a common interest in combating radical Islamic groups, whose primary aim is to destabilize all three.



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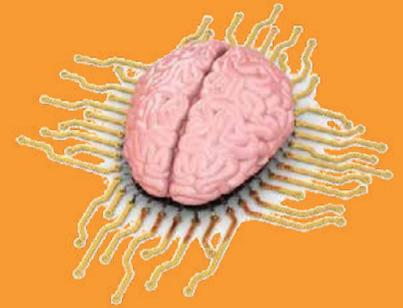
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