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OEWATCH

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

FALLOUTS FROM THE “CALIPHATE”

SOME FOREIGN PERSPECTIVES

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Malaysian to Become New ISIS Leader in Southeast Asia

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article from Malaysia's *bharian.com* reports that the new leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Southeast Asia is Amin Baco, a Malaysian national and former member of Jemaa Islamiya-- a jihadist group in Southeast Asia that seeks to establish a "Caliphate" in the region. Baco takes over the leadership of ISIS in this region from Isnon Hapilon, the former leader of the Abu Sayyaf Group who died in the clashes in recent months in Marawi. Baco's main base is believed to be in the southern Philippines.

A separate Malaysian-language publication, *harianmetro.com*, on 23 October offered a profile of Amin Baco and how he came to be the leading ISIS member in the region. Before taking over from Hapilon, Baco had fought under Malaysian Jemaa Islamiya bomb-maker Zulkifli bin Hir and then replaced Dr. Mahmud Ahmad, as a leading expert in bomb-making. According to the article, Dr. Mahmud Adam is believed to have joined ISIS in

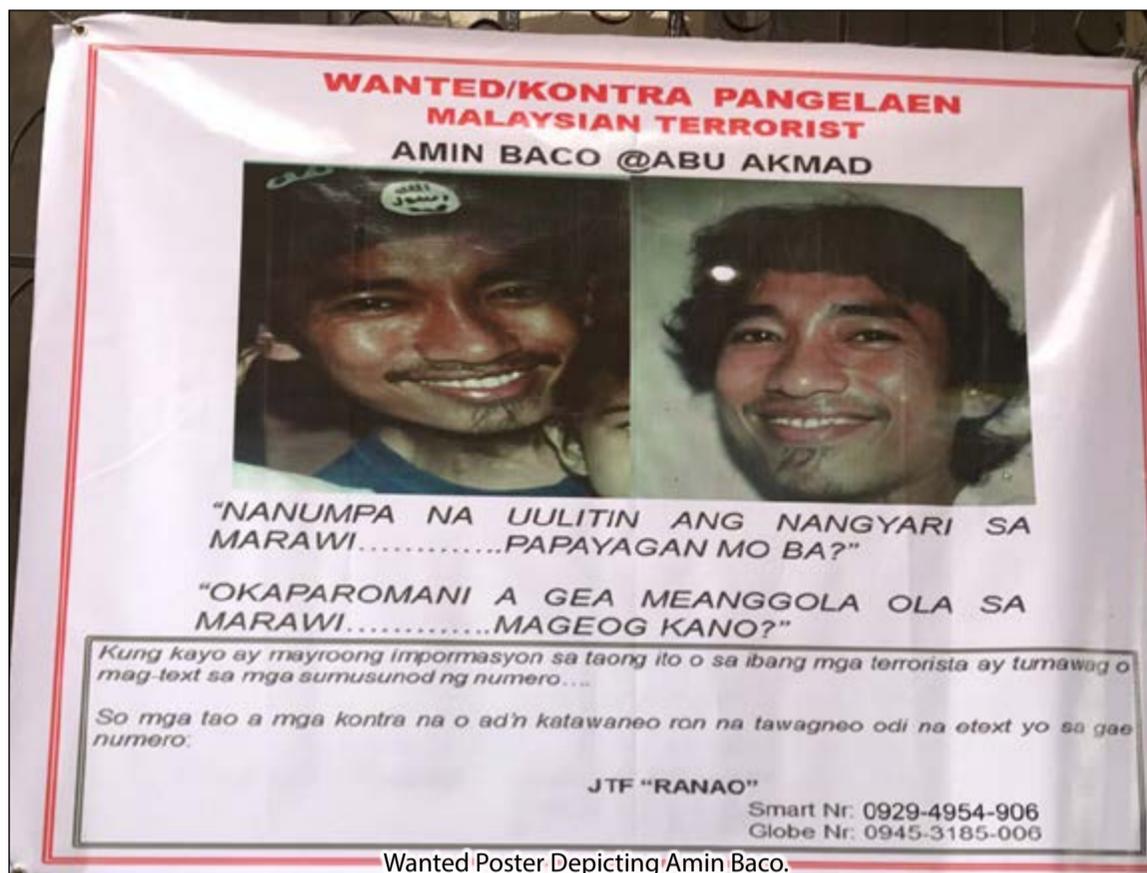
the Philippines before being killed, although security forces are unsure whether he is still alive or not pending DNA testing. Before that, Baco was responsible for smuggling Indonesian militants to the southern Philippines to undergo training in bomb-making and led a group called Dar ul Islam Sabah, which was comprised of militants from Baco's native Sabah region of Malaysia. Amin Baco is now leading the remaining pro-ISIS militants in the Philippines. He reportedly considered negotiations with the government to end the fighting in Marawi but such negotiations have not taken place.

The article concludes by discussing Malaysia's security concerns about its nationals, such as Amin Baco, fighting in the Philippines. Like Baco, Malaysians are believed to be gaining expertise in bomb-making that they can use when they return to Malaysia. The security forces have arrested some Malaysian students who were planning bomb attacks and reportedly intended to target a drinking festival in Klang in the state of Selangor. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“There are concerns about the existence of Malaysian militants since the arrest of several individuals including students in several locations in Kelantan, who have been bomb-making specialists.”

Source: “Rakyat Malaysia ‘emir’ baharu Daesh diburu (New Malaysian national emir of Daesh is hunted),” *bharian.com*, 6 November 2017. <https://www.bharian.com.my/dunia/asean/2017/11/347351/rakyat-malaysia-emir-baharu-daesh-diburu>

The Philippine authorities are hunting a Malaysian who may be the new leader of the pro-DAESH group in Southeast Asia following the death of several recent high-profile militants. Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said they were hunting Amin Baco, who is likely to be the new leader of the militants. Amin was reportedly killed in Marawi but intelligence sources say he escaped. He said Amin has been in the Philippines for a long time and has links with the regional militant group Jemaah Islamiyah.



Wanted Poster Depicting Amin Baco.

Source: Philippine National Police via Rea Mamogay Twitter Feed, https://twitter.com/dzxl558_rea/status/927387926454976512; Public Domain.

Source: “Amin Baco ganti (Amin Baco Changed),” *harianmetro.com*, 23 October 2017. <https://www.hmetro.com.my/setempat/2017/10/275717/amin-baco-ganti>

There has been a new threat since another Malaysian militant, Amin Baco, 31, who has the skills to produce homemade bombs, allegedly took over leadership from Dr Mahmud Ahmad who was killed in recent attacks. The man is able to produce Improvised Explosive Device (IED) bombs and is allegedly from Tawau, Sabah and is now believed to be hiding in Basilan or Jolo Island, South Philippines, which is a militant headquarters in Southeast Asia. Intelligence information also confirmed that Amin Baco, also a former member of the Darul Islam militant Sabah (DIS), was hiding around Marawi. Amin Baco is believed to have played a major role in smuggling Indonesian militants to the south of the Philippines to undergo training. The Philippine Army believes Amin is now leading the militants remaining in Marawi after taking over the leadership from Dr Mahmud. There are concerns about the existence of Malaysian militants since the arrest of several individuals including students in several locations in Kelantan, who have been bomb-making specialists. The individuals also had explosive devices and are believed to have been planning to strike at particular locations in the country including a drinking festival that will take place in Klang, Selangor.



ISIS's "Reverse Migration"

OE Watch Commentary: At the height of its popularity, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its so-called "Caliphate" had attracted thousands of people from around the world to join the fight. Some experts estimated that around 40,000 foreign fighters joined the group from over 100 countries between 2014 and 2016. Now that the group has lost much of its territory in Iraq and Syria, particularly its two main strongholds (Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq), the "Caliphate" appears to be over, or close to being so. This raises the question of what happens to all those foreign fighters who had flocked to the region. Neighboring Turkey is expected to be a common first stop or transit point for many of them. The first accompanying passage from an informative article on the issue discusses the future of ISIS's foreign fighters. The passage, from Turkish mainstream daily *Milliyet* also provides insight into possible future ISIS activities.

The article starts out by discussing the successive losses that ISIS has faced in Iraq and Syria. It notes that most Turkish fighters will return to Turkey while some will head to Afghanistan, claiming that "the new fighting area for foreign fighters... will be Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya, the Philippines and Myanmar." As for those from other countries, the article claims that the majority of these "are citizens of countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, described as the Fergana Valley, and Chechens who have a Russian passport." In addition, there are "Uyghurs, who carry a Chinese passport" along with "North Africans, Saudis, Jordanians, and Yemenis who carry European passports."

The article points out that ISIS members who head to Europe and the US will focus on 'lone wolf' attacks, given the group's guidance that people should conduct attacks on their own initiative. It also asserts that those who join the group are given basic improvised explosive device training, making the ominous claim that this "is an important clue as to what the future holds..."

Turkish security forces have recently conducted operations in 30 cities around the country and apprehended 330 ISIS suspects, in an effort to tackle the ISIS threat in the country. In addition, as the second accompanying passage (also from *Milliyet*) discusses, on 28 October, a major ISIS attack on a big shopping mall in Istanbul was averted. As the first passage notes, this incident is taken as an indication that the ISIS presence in Turkey is significant enough that the group may conduct an operation in Turkey at any moment. Turkey shares long borders with both Iraq and Syria, making it an important country for ISIS's "reverse migration," as the articles point out.

End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)

"It is expected that the DAESH members who go to Europe and the US will focus on 'Lone Wolf' attacks."

Source: "DAEŞ tersine göç başlattı (ISIS has started a reverse migration)," *Milliyet.com*, 6 November 2017. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/daes-tersine-goc-baslatti-gundem-2550050/>

The terror organization DAESH [the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)], which has lost the territory it controlled in Syria, has started a "reverse migration." Thousands of DAESH members are leaving Syria... Turkey is undoubtedly the most important region that the migrating terrorists are expected to head to, some by themselves, some with their children and families...

DAESH, which had declared "jihad" on Turkey following its loss in the Azez-El Bab-Jarabulus region as a result of the Euphrates Shield [Operation], has started losing its most important bases, one after another...

Furthermore; it had to leave Raqqa, where it had its Syrian base, following the US-supported YPG [People's Protection Units] operation. After that, Syrian regime forces took Deir Ezzor. DAESH, who has lost the territory it controls, is preparing for a new maneuver. The jihad regions that DAESH controlled, which had peaked with the group's activities in 2015-2016 in Syria's jihad regions, was like the United Nations. Participation from Europe, Africa, Russia and the former Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was at its highest level. The group even had participants from Canada and South Korea. Foreign DAESH sympathizers flocked to the war zones in Syria and joined the group's ranks. During this period, the group had achieved a human resource [level], as important as financial strength...

[ISIS's] New Strategy

DAESH's plans for the near future cannot be ignored. According to instructions by the organization's leadership, women and children who have been waiting to return to Turkey will be returned soon. In the past, passages from Syria to Turkey were obtained for 2,000 liras [~\$500], but it is being reported that these illegal crossings now cost up to 20,000 liras [~\$5000]. Turkish male fighters' first destination is Turkey. But, some of these male fighters are also expected to return to Afghanistan. The new fighting area for foreign fighters, characterized as Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) will be Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya, the Philippines and Myanmar. FTF's will manage DAESH's activities in these regions.

Another analysis regarding DAESH and Turkey is as follows: The group is in a position to conduct an operation in Turkey at any time. The latest operation in Istanbul is shown as an example of this...

Watch the Foreign Terrorist Fighters

The issue of FTFs is perhaps even worse.

Aimless FTFs are returning to their countries, particularly to Europe.

The majority of these FTFs are citizens of countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, described as the Fergana Valley, and Chechens who have a Russian passport. Similarly, there are some FTFs who are Uyghurs, who carry a Chinese passport. FTFs who joined DAESH from Europe, along with North Africans, Saudis, Jordanians, and Yemenis who carry European passports can conduct an operation at any time.

It is expected that the DAESH members who go to Europe and the US will focus on 'Lone Wolf' attacks. There is guidance from the organization's management that people should "conduct attacks on their own initiative." These types of DAESH attacks have been taking place in Europe and the US for a while. Those who join DAESH are initially given training on how to produce simple improvised explosive devices and this is an important clue as to what the future holds....

(continued)



Continued: ISIS's "Reverse Migration"

Source: "Şüpheli araç fünye ile patlatıldı! (The suspicious vehicle was destroyed via detonator!)," *Milliyet.com*, 28 October 2017. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/istanbul-da-supheli-arac-alarmi--gundem-2545447/>

Regional Anti-Terror units went into alarm mode when they received intelligence that an ISIS cell was planning an attack. The units, which were activated based on intelligence received during the week, determined that a four-person cell with two women were planning an attack on the Istanbul Forum shopping mall in Bayrampasa, with a significant amount of explosives loaded onto a white car.

"The new fighting area for foreign fighters... will be Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya, the Philippines and Myanmar. Foreign Terrorist Fighters will manage DAESH's activities in these regions."



A destroyed part of Raqqa, August 2017.

Source: By Mahmoud Bali (VOA), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Destroyed_neighborhood_in_Raqqa.png, Public Domain.

Fallouts from the "Caliphate"

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has lost most of its territory in Iraq and Syria. Many of the thousands of fighters who had come to the region to fight on behalf of the so-called "Caliphate" are returning home or going other places. What will happen to the children and wives who were brought to Iraq and Syria by the militants who came to join ISIS? Many of them have no paperwork, do not speak the language, and some are injured. There are no laws to deal with this unprecedented situation. The accompanying passages from three articles on the issue discuss the fate of some of these families, in addition to an effort to deal with some of the radicals who are local to the region.

The first article from a Kurdish source discusses that 52 Russian citizens known as 'ISIS families' were returned to the Russian government by the Kurdish authorities in the Kurdish parts of Syria. The 52 Russians includes nine women and 43 children. The families were put on buses and taken under Russian government responsibility. The article notes that they "have not taken part in combat and have no blood of Syrians on their hands."

The second passage from *Al Monitor*, a website which features articles on the Middle East by local authors, discusses a Russian report regarding 48 Russian children being held in different Iraqi shelters. It points out that "some of them speak Russian, while others know only Chechen." These children were brought to Iraq by parents who came to join ISIS, or were born in Iraq. The article notes that "most of these children know very little about their origins. Some of them have broken legs or hands or other injuries because they were abandoned by their parents and had no medical attention for a long time." Bringing them back to Russia is problematic as "the minors lack documents proving their identity and can hardly tell the authorities anything about themselves or their families, aside from a name."

The third article, also from *Al Monitor*, discusses an effort to deal with ISIS members who may be local or are staying in the region. The effort involves a 'terrorist rehab' center in Syria, which will take in people who have been indoctrinated in the ideology of ISIS, "putting them through courses on moderate interpretations of Islamic law, and intellectual and cultural lectures." According to the article, the center will also offer counseling and psychological support. The aim is to rid the participants of extremist ideology, with various recreational and sports programs, all offering daily classes over a period of three months. Regardless of these efforts, the fate of ISIS families and remaining militants looks dire. The "Caliphate" may be over, but the region will no doubt face a number of social challenges from the fallout for decades. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

(continued)



Continued: Fallout from the “Caliphate”

“...the minors lack documents proving their identity and can hardly tell the authorities anything about themselves or their families, aside from a name”

Source: “Syrian Kurdish forces handover 52 ISIS women, children to Russia,” *Rudaw.net*, 13 November 2017. <http://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/13112017>

Kurdish military and civilian authorities in Syrian Rojava handed over to the Russian government 52 Russian citizens known as ISIS families on Sunday. According to Abdulkarim Omar, Head of Jazira Foreign Relations Commission, the families numbered nine women and 43 children.

Omar said that the Kurds of Syria appreciated Russia’s support for their efforts for self-rule and Kurdish participation in Syria’s political process, adding that the handover of the ISIS families was a gesture of reciprocity between Kurds and Russia.

“From our commitment to human rights and international treaties and agreements, today a number of Russian citizens will be handed over on their own accord and without any force as long as they have not taken part in combat and have no blood of Syrians on their hands, they’ll be handed over to the Russian government.” Omar said.

At a ceremony attended by Kurdish and Russian military and civilian envoy the families were put on buses and under Russian government responsibility.

“We’re handing over ISIS families to the Russian state. I’d like to say that as YPG, YPJ and the SDF we treated those women humanely.” Nuri Mahmoud, official YPG spokesman told reporters.

Source: Yekaterina Chulkovskaya, “Hundreds of Russian children found in Mideast orphanages,” *Al Monitor*, 5 September 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/09/russia-children-found-orphanages-mideast-iraq-syria-isis.html#ixzz4yWx7I93G>

In early August, Russian state TV network RT published a report that at least 48 Russian children are being held in different Iraqi shelters. Some of them speak Russian, while others know only Chechen. Some children were brought to Iraq by parents who came to join IS radicals. Others were born in Iraq. Most of these children know very little about their origins. Some of them have broken legs or hands or other injuries because they were abandoned by their parents and had no medical attention for a long time...

“To bring the children back, it must be confirmed they are all Russian citizens, which is not easy, as the minors lack documents proving their identity and can hardly tell the authorities anything about themselves or their families, aside from a name.”

Source: “Khaled al-Khateb, “Terrorist rehab’ opens its doors in northern Syria,” *Al Monitor*, 6 November 2017. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/11/anti-extremism-center-opened-in-northern-aleppo-countryside.html>

“The Syrian Center for Anti-Extremist Ideology opened its doors October 28 in the city of Marea in the northern Aleppo countryside. The inauguration was attended by Free Syrian Army (FSA) commanders, local activists, administrators and lecturers at the center, which received its first batch of students the next day.

The center will take in people who have been indoctrinated in the ideology of the Islamic State (IS), putting them through courses on moderate interpretations of Islamic law, and intellectual and cultural lectures. It will also offer counseling and psychological support. The aim is to rid the participants of extremist ideology, with various recreational and sports programs, all offering daily classes over a period of three months.”

“Some of them have broken legs or hands or other injuries because they were abandoned by their parents and had no medical attention for a long time.”



Syrian refugee children outside their temporary home, in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, 2013.
Source: By DFID - UK Department for International Development, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30786534>, CC BY 2.0.



Insights from an ISIS Detainee

OE Watch Commentary: Last August, a Moroccan member of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) named Essam al-Din Adnan surrendered to advancing Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Raqqa Province. In October, two well-known Arabic-language newspapers (Egypt’s *al-Masry al-Yaum* and Saudi Arabia’s *al-Sharq al-Awsat*) published interviews with the detainee, who claims to have been in charge of ISIS’s border with Turkey in 2014. The accompanying excerpts highlight key points in his confession.

Adnan’s trajectory resembles that of other foreign ISIS recruits: religious but not politically active, he was touched by images coming from Syria in 2011 and encouraged to move there by a man he met online and who was already in Syria. His virtual friend, an Egyptian national, insisted that “the Syrian regime would soon be wiped out and it was important to be a participant.” Arriving in the fall of 2013 via Turkey, Adnan joined the Nusra Front and subsequently ISIS, which was more accommodating to foreign fighters.

Adnan was put in charge of the border with Turkey in part because of his language skills (Arabic, English, French and Spanish). By his estimation, the number of ISIS recruits entering Syria via Turkey jumped from around 150 per month in the fall of 2013 to 300 per day in 2014. The greatest number came from the former Soviet Republics, followed by the Arab Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia). Adnan also confirms the rise in tensions between local ISIS fighters and foreigners in the second half of 2014.

It is still unclear how the SDF will handle captured militants from the crumbling “Caliphate.” With the regional balance of power increasingly unsettled, these confessions are also tools of statecraft. Adnan’s account, published in Egyptian and Saudi media sources, implicates Turkey. In the detainee’s own words: “Turkish authorities did not interfere with us [ISIS] in the least, and sometimes fighters entered with an official Turkish stamp.” Turkey is allied with Qatar, which both Saudi Arabia and Egypt consider a destabilizing force in the region. Turkish officials deny allegations of turning a blind eye to ISIS fighters passing through Turkey.

Adnan does not regret having gone to Syria, but he regrets joining ISIS. Rather than a dutiful Muslim helping build a modern-day jihadist utopia, he soon felt he was “part of a game, a dirty game.” Yet he also conveys an important fact: ISIS’s “Islamic State” may be over, but the dream of a modern-day “Caliphate” lives on. In Adnan’s view, the ISIS’s recipe was missing a key ingredient: “... a caliphate without a capital is meaningless, and without controlling Damascus or Baghdad it is incomplete. Controlling all this territory is useless without controlling capitals.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...a caliphate without a capital is meaningless, and without controlling Damascus or Baghdad it is incomplete.”

Source:

أول حوار مع قيادي في داعش بعد القبض عليه في سوريا
 “First Interview with ISIS Leader After his Detention in Syria,” *al-Masry al-Yaum*, 23 October 2017. <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1209199>

“The first convincing reason was the oppression and violence suffered by the Syrian people and the bloody scenes we saw on the TV screens... alongside the influence of Islamic movements... The man I had met [online]... began encouraging me to come [to Syria] and said that the Syrian regime would soon be wiped out and it was important to be a participant. He told me how to enter via Turkey, and he facilitated my entry via smugglers. He was waiting for me in Syria... After a month and a half in Tel Abyad we went to work in Aleppo and then Idlib, always working along the border with Turkey to facilitate the entry of fighters and to welcome them... Turkish authorities did not interfere with us in the least, and sometimes fighters entered with an official Turkish stamp specifically for the Azaz border crossing as well as Bab al-Hawa... Our ideas were initially not affected by anything other than religious fervor and uprisings against injustice and oppression, which then turned into Islamic thinking, then into jihadist thought, and from there to a state governed by Shari’a... After a year and half the problems began with local ISIS members who controlled the organization... I was detained for two months for investigation, since the border issue was very delicate and secretive, making them worried about my presence there for so long given all the information I had... I don’t regret coming to Syria but I regret joining this group as I now know it is part of a game, a dirty game.”

Source:

داعشي مغربي: التنظيم كيان هش وفارغ من الداخل
 Kamal Shaykhu. “Moroccan ISIS Member: The Organization is Brittle and Empty from Within,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 31 October 2017. <https://goo.gl/2QgUqj>

The next day he traveled with a group of new arrivals to Idlib, in northeast Syria, where he stayed for around two months of [jihadist] education and weapons and tactical training... when the disagreements between al-Qaeda and the Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi wings intensified... he and many foreign fighters chose to join Baghdadi’s organization because “[Nusra Front leader] al-Jolani was severe with foreign fighters, forcing them to stay outside of cities. The direct reasons was the absence of a clear plan with Nusra, while ISIS announced as its goal establishing an alleged ‘Caliphate.’” In early January, following ISIS full takeover of Raqqa city, [Adnan] was appointed commander along the northern border, becoming in charge of the border strip linking Ras al-Ayn in north Hassakeh Province and Tel Abyad in northern Raqqa Province, as well as this area’s borders with Turkey. “This was because I speak English, French and Spanish as well as my native Arabic”... Until the end of 2013 the number of foreign fighters entering Syria was no more than 150 per month, he claims, “But after I took over this post in early 2014 there were an average of 300 foreigners coming in every day wanting to fight with [ISIS]”... “Most [foreign fighters] were Chechens, Georgians and Russians. As far as Arabs, most were Tunisians, then Moroccans, Algerians, Egyptians, and Libyans”... According to [Adnan], “a caliphate without a capital is meaningless, and without controlling Damascus or Baghdad it is incomplete. Controlling all this territory is useless without controlling capitals.”



ISIS Propaganda in Congo Backfires

OE Watch Commentary: In early October, Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) social media channels featured a video showing an ISIS fighter claiming to be in Congo with around 10 armed and uniformed Congolese beside him, including what appear to be several children. The main message of the video, which circulated on Congolese social media networks, was to call upon Muslims in Congo to fight for a “Caliphate.” This marked the first time that an ISIS video featured alleged Congolese jihadists.

According to the excerpted French language article from *digitalcongo.net*, the video has attracted the attention of the ‘Islamic Community in the Democratic Republic of Congo’ (COMICO). COMICO responded to the video with a statement distancing itself from the idea of a “Caliphate” or any other actions that could be destabilizing to Congo. According to the article, the Secretary General of COMICO also urged the Congolese government to reestablish state authority in parts of the country where state presence is lacking and various militants are active. According to the Secretary General, those are the areas where ISIS could operate and recruit youths. The Secretary General also urged the imams at mosques and madrassas in Congo to preach what he called ‘authentic Islam,’ as opposed to what ISIS preaches. Finally, the Secretary General urged greater coordination between the government and COMICO on matters of extremism.

This video is likely not an indication of any substantive ISIS presence in Congo (beyond the fighters in the video); it also does not suggest that there is an imminent security threat in Congo. On the contrary, COMICO’s reaction to the video showed it would not respond lightly to the potential for ISIS to become another source of instability in the country. From the perspective of countering extremist ideology, this can be considered a positive and important development for Congo. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “La Comico rejette toute idée d’un Etat islamique en Rdc (Comico rejects any idea of an Islamic State in the DRC),” *digitalcongo.net*, 20 October 2017. <https://www.digitalcongo.net/article/59e9fec76e466c000497ed6f>

A statement was made during a press briefing held at the headquarters of Comico following the circulation in recent days on social networks of a video attributed to Islamist jihadists addressing a fanatical crowd and calling for the creation of a caliphate in the DRC. The Islamic Community in the Democratic Republic of Congo (COMICO) seriously declared its distance from the idea of an Islamic state or caliphate in the DRC and warned anyone against calling for conducting terrorism as a way to destabilize the country. On this occasion, the Secretary General of Comico, Idriss Katanga, called on Congolese Muslims and especially imams in charge of mosques and madrasas to preach and teach authentic Islam. He has also urged the public authorities to act urgently in restoring the authority of the state in the troubled parts of the Republic.

“Comico has seriously declared its distance from the idea of an Islamic State or caliphate in the DRC.”



Screenshot of Video Claiming ISIS Presence in Congo.
Source: ISIS Media via Tom Feneux Twitter Feed, <https://twitter.com/tomfeneux/status/919602825159733248>, Public Domain.



Uncertainty over ISIS Attack Claim in Kyrgyzstan

OE Watch Commentary: On 28 October, the Russian-language Kyrgyz website *kloop.kg* reported in the excerpted article that the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) claimed an attack in Bishkek that killed a Kyrgyz policeman. According to the article, this was the first ISIS attack claim in Kyrgyzstan. However, it was unclear whether the attacker who killed the police officer, which was recorded on a security camera near a police station, was a member of ISIS or directed by ISIS. ISIS itself did not release a video of the stabbing but only a written statement on social media claiming the attack. If ISIS had shown its own footage of the attack it would provide a much stronger indication that the attacker had ties to ISIS and that the group was not opportunistically claiming the attack. In the absence of any proof from ISIS that its members were watching and filming or otherwise in contact with the attacker, the police in Kyrgyzstan are continuing the investigation but not acknowledging any broader ISIS presence in Kyrgyzstan.

According to the article, the police have located the suspect but his personal details did not immediately show evidence of ties to ISIS. The suspect also had no known ties abroad. The police officer also was in the wrong place at the wrong time; there was no reason for that officer to be targeted except that he was alone outside the police station, which made him a vulnerable target. Knife wounds killed him on the spot.

The stabbing comes one year after militants affiliated with al-Qaeda in Syria carried out a suicide (car bombing) attack against the Chinese embassy in Bishkek. It also comes at a time when ISIS is losing territory in Syria and Iraq, and amid concern about the potential exodus of Central Asian fighters from the Middle East. Although the evidence that has been released by the Kyrgyz police does not indicate a specific threat to the country from the group, ISIS's claim- whether true or not- shows that it is paying attention to Kyrgyzstan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Source: “ИГИЛ взяло ответственность за убийство милиционера в Бишкеке (ISIS takes responsibility for the killing of a policeman in Bishkek),” *kloop.kg*, 28 October 2017. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2017/10/28/smi-igil-vzyalo-otvetstvennost-za-ubijstvo-militsionera-v-bisheke/>

The media reported that Islamic State militants have committed their first attack on the territory of Kyrgyzstan. The terrorists took responsibility for the recent killing of a policeman in the center of Bishkek. The press service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has stated that the information from ISIS is being watched. Meanwhile the personal data of the suspect and his connection with the terrorists of ISIS are unknown. The dead policeman was a senior lieutenant, and he was 25 years old. On the day of the murder, he was going on vacation because he planned to take in part a wedding. The investigation is now underway.

“The media has reported that Islamic State militants have committed their first attack on the territory of Kyrgyzstan.”





Russian Security Concerns about ISIS in Afghanistan

OE Watch Commentary: When the Warsaw Pact collapsed, the Soviet Union lost its Western buffer zone. When the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia lost its southern buffer zone. The second Russian war in Chechnya highlighted the dramatic change within the Chechen cause as the Chechen resistance split from an independence movement to separate from Russia to support and further the spread of radical international Sunni extremism. Russia is very concerned about her southern border. During the early days of Operation Enduring Freedom, Russia supported the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan as a force to bring stability to the region. This stability failed to materialize. Now, as the accompanying article suggests, Russia views the US presence as a destabilizing factor and is looking for other paths to stability. Russia is working toward repairing and improving relations with Central Asia, Iran and Pakistan.

The accompanying passage from Russia's *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses Russia's specific concerns regarding its southern border. With the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) getting pushed back in the Middle East, Russian officials note the possibility that ISIS militants may relocate to Afghanistan. According to the author, this may "give Moscow the pretext to step up its military presence in those former Soviet states bordering Afghanistan." Accordingly, he claims that "in near future, it may be possible to observe the reinforcement of Russia's positions in the Central Asian region." **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Statements about jihadists “moving” into another region give Moscow the pretext to step up its military presence in those former Soviet states bordering Afghanistan. ...in the near future it may be possible to observe the reinforcement of Russia’s positions in the Central Asian region [through the] Central Military District.”



Panj river on the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Source: By Khwahan (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABeautiful_view_of_Panj_river%2C_of_the_border_between_Afghanistan_and_Tajikistan_the_in_Shughnon-shughnan_region.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0.

(continued)



Continued: Russian Security Concerns about ISIS in Afghanistan

Source: Igor Subbotin, “Афганское притяжение России. Почему Москва хочет укрепить свое положение в Центральной Азии (Russia’s Afghan Attraction. Why Moscow Wants To Strengthen Its Position in Central Asia),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16 October 2017. http://www.ng.ru/dipkurer/2017-10-16/10_7095_afgan.html

Most of all, Russia is concerned with strengthening Central Asia against the Islamic State (ISIS)...The Defense Ministry leadership asserts that ISIS is looking for a new region for habitation after suffering heavy losses in Syria and Iraq. “One of them is Afghanistan,” said Russian Deputy Defense Minister Aleksandr Fomin, who echoed his boss’s remarks in Dushanbe. The supposed transit of jihadists from Syria and Iraq to the Islamic Republic [of Afghanistan] was discussed by Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)...at a meeting of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group, which was held in Moscow... The aspects of the Afghan crisis were discussed by deputy foreign ministers.

While the existence of ISIS cells in Central Asia is certain, the question remains whether Syrian and Iraqi militants of the self-proclaimed “caliphate” could relocate to Afghanistan....Statements about jihadists “moving” into another region give Moscow the pretext to step up its military presence in those former Soviet states bordering Afghanistan. Given Shoigu’s proposals, in the near future it may be possible to observe the reinforcement of Russia’s positions in the Central Asian region [through the] Central Military District.

“The dynamics of the development of the Afghan crisis have caused Russia to consider military approaches, along with diplomatic measures, to tackling the problems surrounding the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan....Following a meeting with his Tajik counterpart, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said that the situation in Afghanistan “is not changing for the better” and suggested that Dushanbe take more interest in a plan to use the combined troops of Russia and Tajikistan. In the opinion of the Russian Defense Minister, such steps would help “guarantee that the tasks of ensuring security in the region are fulfilled.”

*The Afghanistan strategy announced by US President Donald Trump, which provides for a larger US contingent and increased pressure on Pakistan, may have acted as a catalyst. “As long as the United States remains in Afghanistan, Moscow will be concerned about Washington having long-term ambitions to develop ... an approach to Eurasia that could pose threats to Russia, for example from Central Asia,” Jeffrey Mankoff, deputy director and senior fellow with the Russia and Eurasia program of the Center for Strategic and International Studies... told *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. “And, of course, neither the United States nor Russia wants Afghanistan to return to the state it was in prior to September 2001, when radical rulers and civil war turned the country into a magnet for jihadists from around the world.”*

*Russia genuinely has cause for concern, given that... the Pentagon plans to complete the Afghan military’s “switch” from Russian Mi-17 helicopters to American UH-60 Black Hawks within three to five years.... “Helicopters, tanks, and weapons are a reminder that the Soviet Union once made a contribution to Afghanistan,” Omar Nessar, director of the Center for Contemporary Afghan Studies, told *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. “The full switch of the Afghan military and law-enforcement structures to US arms primarily suggests that this memory will no longer be there....”*

Zamir Kabulov, the Russian President’s Special Representative for Afghanistan, called on the United States to withdraw from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as its actions only strengthen the instability factor. Russia had previously avoided such strong statements... It is now working with the region in an attempt to iron out differences between key players. It was at Russia’s initiative that, after a hiatus of almost eight years, a meeting of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group was held in Moscow with the participation of the organization’s two new members, India and Pakistan. “Russia is trying to unite the region,” Nessar stated... “Moscow and probably Beijing realize that disunity makes the region weaker....”

Russia and the United States have not completely severed their contacts. On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Kabulov and his US counterpart, Alice Wells met. The Russian President’s Special Representative had a positive assessment of the meeting, but warned against drawing premature conclusions about progress between the two countries. Allegations by the White House that Russia has been arming the Taliban...have significantly complicated the Russian-American dialogue....

Moscow also disapproves of Washington’s intention to put pressure on Pakistan, which the international community suspects of harboring militants who conduct operations on Afghan territory....Kabulov stressed that...any military pressure on that country could prove another destabilizing factor... Pakistan’s military took part in a two-week Druzhiba-2017 [Friendship-2017] exercise in Karachayevo-Cherkesiya at the end of September... Pakistan’s Ministry of Defense explained that the maneuvers were aimed at strengthening military ties and sharing the experience needed to conduct counterterrorism operations. The regional approach that Russia has been practicing seems...to be the most promising one.... Moscow could take part in the process of Afghan reconciliation as well. “The best way to regain influence in Afghanistan is to act as a mediator in some political agreement between the warring parties, to offer to play a role in monitoring compliance with the deal, and then to provide assistance with the reconstruction of the post-war Afghan Government,” Mankoff said. “This approach does not seem realistic, but if Russia can play a constructive role in ending the conflict in Afghanistan (as well as Syria), I do not think the United States and other allies will stand in its way.” However, for the time being, Russia has to work exclusively with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s neighbors.



ISIS Video Claims Attack on Syrian Weapons Depot

OE Watch Commentary: In October, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) released a video through its media wing, the *Amaq News Agency*, showing an improvised drone dropping two bombs over a stadium in Deir Ez Zor, Syria. According to *Euronews-Farsi*, the Syrian army used the stadium to store weapons and other armaments.

The video is posted on the *Al-Ansar* site, which is an ISIS affiliate. The video—which is edited for propaganda purposes—begins with a caption, “Footage of Deir Ez Zor, Syrian weapons destruction.” According to the site, the stadium destruction is a “victory” for ISIS. In the first few seconds of the nearly three-minute video, drone footage shows an improvised bomb dropping over the stadium, which sets off the first wave of explosions. Nearly fifty seconds later, a second bomb is dropped. The remainder of the video shows footage from presumably nearby Syrian towns. Men can be heard praising the bombings as they watch the blaze from the explosions. The video ends with a drone flying over the devastation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**

Source: Hamleh Daesh ba pahbad be estadium Deir Ez Zor: En hedam tajhee zat artesh-e Sooreye (Drone attack by the Islamic State in stadium in Deir Ez Zor: Attack against Syrian Army),” *Euronews-Farsi*, 24 October 2017. <http://fa.euronews.com/2017/10/25/isis-drone-bombs-syrian-government-munitions-warehouse-in-stadium-near-deir>

“In this video, drone footage shows two bombs dropping in a stadium where the Syrian army was storing its weapons.”



Screenshots From Video of Alleged ISIS Drone Strike.
 Source: Al-Ansar News, <https://alansar.info/?video=د-ة-ي-م-ال-س-ال-ة-ل-و-د-ل-ة-ف-ص-ا-و-ق-ا-م-ع-ا-ك-و>



Hamas Rejoins the Resistance Axis

OE Watch Commentary: In early 2012, Hamas broke ties with the Syrian government and threw in its lot with Syria’s rebels and their backers. Hamas’s “external leadership” moved from Damascus to Doha and for the next several years shuttled between there and Istanbul. The ascent of the emerging Qatari-Turkish “Muslim Brotherhood Axis,” which Hamas had joined, came to an abrupt halt with the overthrow of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi in the summer of 2013. This new bloc’s regional influence declined, and by the summer of 2017, Hamas’s external leadership had been expelled from Doha following Qatar’s spat with its Gulf neighbors. Turkey, meanwhile, was scrambling to contain Kurdish secessionism and spillover from Iraq and Syria.

According to Arabic-language media reports, in October 2017 Hamas rejoined the “Resistance Axis,” the Iranian-led de facto alliance that also includes Syrian loyalist forces, Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, and Yemen’s Huthi Movement. According to the first accompanying passage, Iran is seeking to formalize the alliance by deepening military and political coordination among its members. Published in the Palestinian daily *al-Quds*, the article claims that “Iran wants to build the axis on new foundations, relying on unified decision-making on some political issues, regarding Israel for instance, as well as decisions of war and peace. These include the potential of an escalation on the ground against the [Israeli] occupation on multiple fronts.” The article adds that Hamas’s position on this reported plan to centralize decision-making is unclear.

A key figure in Hamas’s rapprochement with Iran is Saleh al-Arouri, who was elected as the party bureau’s deputy leader in early October. Al-Arouri played a founding role in the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’s military wing, and spent over a dozen years in Israeli jails. In the years following the party’s split with Damascus, he shuttled between Qatar and Turkey. In June 2017, he and other Hamas officials were forced out of Doha; al-Arouri resettled in Beirut. Following his first formal visit to Tehran in late October, he returned to Beirut’s southern suburbs and met with Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, in what the second accompanying excerpt calls a key milestone in Hamas’s return to the Resistance Axis.

Hamas returns to the Iranian fold in a position of relative strength, having recently agreed to an Egyptian-brokered reconciliation agreement with its rival Fatah. The reestablishment of Hamas-Iran ties may not sit well in Cairo, but the Egyptian government’s strategic priority on its eastern flank is preventing the reconciliation deal from collapsing. Thus, according to the second passage, from the pro-Hezbollah Lebanese newspaper *al-Akhbar*, Egypt is unlikely to take any steps that prevent Hamas’s return to the Resistance Axis. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“*Hezbollah and Iran want to revive the so-called ‘Resistance Axis’ following the Syrian crisis.*”

Source: هل يحتاج الجيش المصري إلى الرافال والميسترال والغواصات؟
 “Source Tells al-Quds: al-Aruri and Nasrallah Meeting Succeeded in Mending Hamas and [Islamic] Jihad Ties with Iran,” *al-Quds*, 2 November 2017. <http://www.alquds.com/articles/1509611718867356300/>

Al-Arouri is considered one of the most pro-Iran, pro-Syria and pro-Hezbollah figures [in Hamas]. He supported restoring relations with this axis following their major disagreements due to the Syrian crisis in 2011... “Over the past two years, Hezbollah has redoubled its efforts to bring Iran and Hamas’s viewpoints closer together”... “Hezbollah and Iran want to revive the so-called ‘Resistance Axis’ following the Syrian crisis. Iran wants to build the axis on new foundations, relying on unified decision-making on some political issues, vis-a-vis Israel for instance, as well as decisions of war and peace. These include the potential of an escalation on the ground against the [Israeli] occupation on multiple fronts. Hamas’s view on this is unclear”... These efforts come as Hezbollah continues to play an important role in mending relations between the Islamic Jihad Movement and Iran. Another source discussed differences between the leaders of Islamic Jihad and Iran after the latter sought to intervene in the movement’s internal affairs and attempted to impose people in specific positions as well as decisions, something that was rejected by the movement. The source pointed to ongoing discussions sponsored by Hezbollah in order to bridge the differences...

Source: حماس ومحور المقاومة منه بدأت وإليه تعود
 “Hamas and the Resistance Axis: Where it Began, Whence it Returns,” *al-Akhbar*, 2 November 2017. <http://al-akhbar.com/node/285764>

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.



Syria: Anti-Kurdish Militia Emerges in Manbij

OE Watch Commentary: An air of rebellion looms over Manbij, a key success story in the campaign to seize and hold territory taken from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Since ISIS's expulsion in late summer 2016, the city has been controlled by the "Manbij Military Council," an appendage of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). SDF leadership is dominated by Kurds, and Manbij falls within the self-declared Syrian Kurdish proto-state of "Rojava." Simmering discontent over Kurdish hegemony in this ethnically diverse area threatened to boil over in early November, when protesters took to the streets and much of the city went on strike in response to reports of attempted forced conscription by the SDF. The first accompanying passage, from the English-language news website *Syria Direct*, describes how several men were detained for failing to enlist in the purportedly voluntary "self-defense forces."

As happened throughout Syria in 2011, an armed faction has emerged alongside Manbij's protesters. As with the "Free Syrian Army" (FSA) units of yore, Manbij's new armed group relies on the Internet (particularly YouTube and Facebook) to make its presence known, using social media to spread its message and document its exploits. Calling itself the 'Qeyam Movement,' as of early November the armed group has posted several videos of its hit squads assassinating SDF members. In contrast to the mostly Sunni FSA rebels, this group's political platform is nationalist and anti-secessionist. As the accompanying excerpt from its founding statement explains, its goal is to "stand against the imperialist secessionist policy" which "threatens the future of Syrian unity and of all Syrians."

The 'Qeyam Movement' may be a local reaction to Arab displacement and Kurdish dominance of an ethnically diverse area that has long been ruled by tribal consensus. Given the current state of regional affairs, though, the group may be a proxy force. The third accompanying passage suggests that Qeyam receives assistance if not direction from Turkey, given its specific targeting of Kurdish forces. The fourth passage, citing unnamed "American analysts," claims that the group is backed by Iran and/or the Syrian government and is being used to reclaim SDF-held territory. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"... committed to the unity of Syrian territory... we have established the Qeyam Movement... to stand against the... secessionist, terrorist, treasonous parties."

Source: "Tribal leaders halt conscription policy by Kurdish-led forces in Manbij, Tabqa," *Syria Direct*, 8 November 2017. <http://syriadirect.org/news/tribal-leaders-halt-conscription-policy-by-kurdish-led-forces-in-manbij-tabqa/>

Kurdish forces in northern Syria are conscripting residents into "self-defense forces" despite local opposition... On Sunday, the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces arrested—and later released—at least half a dozen men for military service, said Muadh, a Manbij resident who was detained... joining the Self-Defense Forces was mandatory until local Arab tribes met with Kurdish officials in Manbij earlier this week. After negotiations between the two groups, enlistment in the Self-Defense Forces in Manbij became voluntary.

Source: Qeyam Movement Twitter Feed (@syriafree1c), 15 October 2017. <https://twitter.com/syriafree1c/status/919611098701160451>

After all the suffering experienced by all groups of the Syrian people throughout the world and committed to the unity of Syrian territory and people both in and out of the country, in all its components, religions and ethnicity, we have established the Qeyam Movement, whose goals are to stand against the imperialist secessionist policy carried out by the secessionist, terrorist, treasonous parties. This project threatens the future of Syrian unity and of all Syrians.

Source: حركة القيام.. فصيل عسكري جديد تعرف على أهدافه "Qeyam Movement... Get to Know the New Military Faction's Goals," *AnaPress*, 18 October 2017. <https://goo.gl/oUFKVv>

According to political analyst Hossam Najjar... "Turkey pushed for this new formation to fight the Kurds in these purported statelets. The Qeyam Movement's nucleus are Syrians who belonged to the Free Syrian Army in various parts of Syria and who were gathered to fight the Kurds. Some of them are from the factions in Homs that resettled in northern Syria. This movement aims to fight the Kurds as a Turkish proxy, but it has the right to fight so long as Kurdish secessionists aim to establish their own state..."

Source: تساؤلات عن خطة واشنطن لما بعد انهيار داعش "Questions on Washington's Post-ISIS Plans," *al-Rai*, 20 October 2017. <http://www.alraimedia.com/ar/article/special-reports/2017/10/20/799213/nr/nc>

Unconfirmed reports claim that the Kurdish administration is being implemented on all resources in the territories it controls, and that it controls all administrative functions, including imposing Kurdish language in schools even for Arab students... In studying the Qeyam Movement's announcements American specialists believe that the group is mostly following Iran and al-Assad, despite suggestions that it is part of the Syrian opposition by using the colors of the opposition... The American position considers that Iran and al-Assad could seek to exploit Kurdish-Arab differences to weaken the SDF and regain territories east of the Euphrates.



Qeyam Movement Logo.

Source: Qeyam Movement YouTube Page, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCy5qcoB2FvCzM8849j-p2WA>, Public Domain.



Iran: UAVs Successfully Armed with Smart Bombs

OE Watch Commentary: On 31 October 2017, the Iranian military launched a multi-day military exercise named “Devotees of Velayat Airspace-7” near Isfahan to showcase its latest military capabilities. While the exercise included bombing runs with F-4, F-5, and indigenous Saeqeh [“Lightning”] jets (derived from the F-5), the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-affiliated *Tasnim News* highlighted the use of smart bombs dropped from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The Iranian UAV program dates back to 1986 when the IRGC used crude drones to survey Iraqi lines and fortifications during the Iran-Iraq War. However, in recent years, the Iranian UAV program has advanced tremendously. There are credible reports of Iranian UAVs in use in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Until recently, Iran used UAVs either for surveillance or as ‘kamikaze’ drones, circling over battlefields until their operators identified a target of opportunity. While line-of-sight operation long limited drone operations, on 1 April 2016, Iran announced that it had managed to tie UAVs to satellite GPS guidance. Despite the claims of the excerpted article that Iran attached ‘smart bombs’ to the UAVs, it is unlikely that this is true. More likely, the Iranian military has successfully wedded bombs onto its GPS-directed UAVs and created a sort of poor man’s smart bomb. This provides Iran with an important new capability as Iranian missiles have never been accurate enough to take out specific military targets: While Iran’s unprecedented 18 June 2017 missile strike on militants near Deir az-Zour, Syria, made headlines, for example, there is no indication it actually hit its target.

The excerpted article reports that the regular army (as opposed to the IRGC) was controlling the advanced ‘smart bomb’ UAVs. Given that the IRGC usually takes custody of Iran’s most advanced weapons systems, the army’s possession illustrates both how deeply UAVs are now integrated into Iranian military operations and suggests that the IRGC may have even more advanced platforms as it will always seek to maintain a qualitative military edge over the regular Iranian army. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Akhbar-e Razmayesh: Pehpahd-haye Nahaja Rasman beh Bombha-ye Hoshmand (News of the [Military] Exercise: UAVs now Officially have Smart Bombs),” *Tasnim News*, 31 October 2017. <https://goo.gl/6YQoGQ>

UAVs Successfully Armed with Smart Bombs

According to a report from the defense correspondent for Tasnim reporting from the military exercises in Isfahan, for the first time, army long-range UAVs capable of electronic warfare and equipped with smart bombs took the enemy by surprise and defeated the enemy. General Masoud Rozkhoush, the spokesman for the seventh airborne warfare command for the “Devotees of Velayat Airspace-7” war games, said with regard to the above announcement, “At this stage of the exercise, teams specializing in new fields of modern warfare in the exercise area confronted the hypothetical enemy...

He added that also present were heavy Sukhoi-24 bombers and F-4 Phantoms equipped to carry out precision bombing of pre-defined points from high altitude at night and the F-4s also used flares to illuminate the battle area and destroy targets.

“UAVs...equipped with smart bombs took the enemy by surprise and defeated the enemy.”



An Iranian Karrar-4 UAV on display.

Source: Iran Ministry of Defense, <http://mod.gov.ir/sites/default/files/images/40%20karrar.jpg>, Public Domain.



Iran: Possible to Expand Missile Range

OE Watch Commentary: Iran’s ballistic missile arsenal has grown steadily since the 1980s when the Islamic Republic relied on Scud missiles in the so-called “war of the cities” and both Iran and Iraq launched missiles at each other’s population centers. In 1998, Iran publicly unveiled the Shahab-3 missile, a variant of the North Korean Nodong. Over subsequent years, it has experimented with solid fuel and multi-stage rockets, leading to the 2008 introduction of the Sajjil missile. In 2009, Iran launched a satellite from a multi-stage Safir rocket, in theory the same technology that would be necessary to build an intercontinental ballistic missile.

While the Shahab-3B in theory could have a range of 2,500 kilometers [1553 miles]—enough to put all of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel in Iran’s crosshairs—there is little evidence that Iran has yet built ballistic missiles that could hit targets further afield. Many experts put Iran’s current missile range at no more than 2,000 kilometers [1242 miles].

If the comments of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) chief Mohammad Ali Jafari excerpted here from the *Fars News Agency* are true, however, then the decision to limit the range of Iran’s ballistic missile arsenal to just 2,000 kilometers is a decision guided by policy rather than technical ability. Jafari suggests that Iran will expand the range of its arsenal in reaction to a potential US attack. Such a statement is reminiscent of the 2005 explanation by then-Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Hassan Rouhani that a decision to limit Iran’s nuclear enrichment program was transactional and depended on European and US policies rather than any technical limitations. In particular, Jafari says he objects to the ‘Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act’ which became public law (No. 115-44) on 2 August 2017. However, the fact that he made his statement almost two months after the passage of new sanctions in the US Congress suggests his threat is rhetorical because, if it were real, Iran would already have taken the action he threatens.

Jafari also said that the range of their missiles is limited by the policies set by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. If this is correct, the IRGC may expand the range of its arsenal after Khamenei’s death and during the transition between supreme leaders. It would also suggest that a new supreme leader will face no technical impediment to bolstering the range of Iran’s arsenal. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Tavan Afzayesh Barad Moshakha-ye Iran Vujud Darad (The Ability to Increase the Range of Iran’s Missiles Exists),” *Fars News Agency*, 31 October 2017. <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13960809000633>

General Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, at the “World without Terror” conference held this morning in Tehran, and speaking to a gathering of reporters and in response to questions with regard to the ability of IRGC missiles to respond to threats, said:

“The range of our missiles is limited by the policies set by the Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei], and that is 2,000 km. Although there is the capability to increase the range, this level is currently enough because the Americans have enough bases within a radius of 2,000 km around our country, and in the event of an attack [on us], they will receive a response.

“The range of our missiles is limited by the policies set by the Supreme Leader.”



An Iranian Khorramshahr ballistic missile with a 2,000-kilometer range.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, goo.gl/NeAwMu, CC BY 4.0.



Iran: We Will Investigate Cyber Accusations if 'Serious'

OE Watch Commentary: In June 2017, hackers attacked email accounts of several dozen British members of parliament. According to both *The Times* of London and *The Guardian*, British intelligence attributed the attacks to hackers from inside the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the excerpted article from the *Iranian Labor News Agency*, a semi-official Iranian news portal, Bahram Ghassemi, the spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, suggests that the reported incident was fabricated by “anti-Iranian circles,” adding that “the American government or the Jerusalem occupying regime resort to a variety of issues on a daily basis to incite public opinion against Iran.” However, he also said that if true, the Iranian government would take it seriously and investigate.

The foreign ministry’s castigation of the United States, Great Britain, and Israel are gratuitous. Ghassemi’s statement acknowledging the possibility of such hacking emanating from inside Iran also demonstrates how the Iranian foreign ministry and, more broadly, the more public power centers inside the Iranian system, may be blind to the activities of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ (IRGC) Passive Defense Organization and other Iranian power structures engaged in cyber activities and cyber warfare.

That blindness to the activities of the IRGC also means that neither the Iranian foreign ministry nor, for that matter, the broader Iranian government, have any power to investigate alleged Iranian hacking and cyber aggression, no matter what proof foreign governments might offer. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Pasekh-e Ghassemi beh Ada’ye Rezhim Sihonisti, Britania, va Amerika darbarayeh Hamlat-i Siberi Iran (The Answer of Ghassemi to the Accusations by the Zionist Regime, Great Britain, and the United States about Iranian Cyber Attacks),” *Iranian Labor New Agency*, 3 November 2017. <https://goo.gl/pCSStA>

Accusations about Iranian Cyber Attacks

Bahram Ghassemi, in a conversation with the political correspondent of the Iranian Labor News Agency, in response to claims by the authorities of the Zionist regime, Great Britain, and America with regard to Iranian cyber-attacks, said, “We should not be surprised if the regime occupying Jerusalem and America make these claims which, without doubt, are the continuation of past hatred against the state and nation of Iran.” He stated that he didn’t believe the accusations and hatred, and said, “The issue that has been brought up in Britain is related to the news circulated by anti-Iranian circles. If such an issue is serious, Iran will certainly pursue the matter and will investigate it in different ways, but we won’t be surprised if the American government or the Jerusalem occupying regime resort to a variety of issues on a daily basis to incite public opinion against Iran.”

“If accusations [of a cyber attack] are serious, Iran will certainly pursue the matter.”



The Parliament of the United Kingdom, allegedly the site of an Iranian cyber attack.

Source: By Maurice from Zoetermeer, Netherlands (The British Parliament and Big Ben) via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ABritish_Houses_of_Parliament.jpg, CC BY SA 2.0.



Mega Project: New Istanbul Airport to be World's Largest Hub

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey is building the airport of the future: a massive hub with six runways, a huge air traffic control tower, the world's largest duty-free and the capacity to handle over 200 million passengers a year upon its eventual completion. The project, which is currently called 'Istanbul New Airport,' is envisioned to be the world's largest airport by 2023 and the world's busiest airport by passenger numbers. Recently, Turkish officials announced that the construction of the airport was approximately 70% complete; and that the first phase would be opened on 29 October 2018, with all six runways expected to be complete by 2028. This project will impact not only the Turkish aviation sector but regional and international travel and aviation routes. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press provide important details about the mega project.

The construction of the airport is planned in four phases. When the first phase is complete and operational in October of next year, it will have the capacity to move 90 million passengers per year. Construction is moving ahead at full speed, and when fully complete, the mega airport will have multiple hotels, a 70,000 vehicle parking capacity, a fire station and other support facilities. As the first passage notes, the new airport is also noteworthy for the 19,000 acres of land that it occupies. The article claims that this is over three times the size of the largest airport in the world in terms of land mass, which is the Beijing Airport, at 5750 acres. As the second accompanying passage notes, the airport will be named after Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and will replace Istanbul Atatürk Airport, which is expected to close in 2018.

Located on the Black Sea coast on the European side of Istanbul, the airport will be 22 miles outside the city and serve the city with rail, metro and bus links. If the 'Istanbul New Airport' is actually able to accommodate 200 million passengers a year on its eventual completion, it would make it the world's busiest airport by passenger traffic. It would surpass Hartsfield–Jackson Atlanta International Airport, which, according to the Airport Council International, handled 101 million passengers in 2015, when it became the first airport to break the 100 million passenger threshold. To put this in context, the Dubai International Airport handled 78 million passengers in that same year, while Heathrow pushed through 75 million travelers. As the first passage notes, this will make Turkey an important aviation hub for Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. In addition, the airport will become the main base of Turkish Airlines, the national flag carrier airline of Turkey.

End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)



Location of the Istanbul International Airport (under construction).

Source: By Römert/OpenStreetMap contributors (Own work, based on OpenStreetMap/openstreetmap.org) via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3Istanbul_International_Airport_Location_Map_\(English\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3Istanbul_International_Airport_Location_Map_(English).png), CC BY SA 1.0, 2.0, 3.0

Source: "İstanbul Yeni Havalimanı'nın yüzde 71'i tamamlandı! İşte yeni görüntüler (71 Percent of the Istanbul New Airport has been completed! Here are some new images)," *Haberturk.com*, 6 October 2017. <http://www.haberturk.com/ekonomi/is-yasam/haber/1306409-ucuncu-havalimaninda-son-durum-istanbul-yeni-havalimani/8>

"The New Airport" whose first phase is set to open on 29 October 2018, and whose construction is moving forward at full speed, is 71% complete...

The Istanbul New Airport is planned to be one of the largest airports in the world and is expected to have the capacity to handle over 200 million passengers a year, when all its phases are complete. The airport will have terminal buildings, multiple air traffic control towers and six independent runways able to handle any airplane type, along with connecting taxi routes...

The project also includes hotels, open and covered parking for 70,000 vehicles, a fire station and other similar support facilities. The airport will be complete in four phases. The airport, whose investment expenses are forecasted as 10 billion euros, is planned to have its first phase completed at the end of 2018...

Prime Minister Yıldırım, who highlighted that the first phase of the airport, which is among the world's rare projects, will handle 90 million passengers, said "Even just the first phase [of the project] is equivalent to the world's largest airport, if not bigger. So, with the completion of this airport, our country is becoming the aviation meeting point of Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Asia, and the center of aviation. No doubt this will add a totally different dimension to the region's economy and the global economy"...

Istanbul New Airport is also noteworthy for the 7,694 hectare land that it occupies. Right now, the largest airport [in terms of land] is the Beijing Airport, which is 2,330 hectares, so [the Istanbul New Airport] will be over three times that. The Atlanta International Airport is 902 hectares, and London Heathrow is 227 hectares.

"...our country is becoming the... center of aviation. No doubt this will add a totally different dimension to regional and global economy."

- Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım

Source: "3. Havalimanının İsmi Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Havalimanı Olacak! (The Third Airport will be called Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Airport)," *Rayhaber.com*, 21 September 2017. <http://www.rayhaber.com/2017/09/3-havalimaninin-ismi-recep-tayyip-erdogan-havalimani-olacak/>

Following the clarification of many questions regarding the airport, its name has also been clarified. Even though many different names were considered, the Transportation, Maritime and Communication Minister Lütfi Elvan gave the answer to the question surrounding the name of the airport. He confirmed the claims that the airport would be named after the 12th President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and declared that the third airport would be called Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Airport.



The Congo's Other Conflict-Ridden Area

OE Watch Commentary: The Greater Kasai Region has dominated most of the news coming out of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) recently. Interethnic conflict in the south-central portion of the DRC has pushed some 3.2 million people onto the brink of starvation. However, while much of the international focus has been on how to alleviate that suffering, another region is also seeing escalating violence. As the accompanying article describes, Eastern Congo, in particular the provinces of North and South Kivu, are the sites of stepped-up attacks from armed opposition groups angry that President Joseph Kabila clings to power even though he was supposed to step down in December 2016 when his second and final term expired.

The eastern part of the DRC has long been a source of tension and conflict. Much of the country's two civil wars were fought there, and dozens of small, armed groups, known as Mai Mai, who claim to be local self-defense militias, call the area home. During the last few months, two insurgencies - one in South Kivu and the other in North Kivu - both with broad support, have emerged with the aim of toppling the recalcitrant President.

This past June in South Kivu the National People's Coalition for the Sovereignty of Congo (CNSPC), led by former national army ally William Yakutumba, began attacking army positions. Although it is uncertain how many fighters are under Yakutumba's command, with estimates ranging from under 1,000 to 10,000, he has successfully driven the military out of large areas. He has also resisted some counterattacks, though at least once he was beaten back by UN peacekeepers when his fighters attacked a town. His future plans remain unknown as he has not been heard from for a while. There is doubt, however, that he could presently overthrow Kabila, especially since many of his fighters, as the article describes, are motivated not by the politics in distant Kinshasa but instead interethnic rivalries and their own chronic marginalization.

This past June also saw the National Movement of Revolutionaries (MNR) in North Kivu become active as it began to attack villages. Their attacks suggest that this group is larger and more powerful than the local Mai Mai. Typically, when the local Mai Mai launch an attack they can resist army firepower for 30 to 40 minutes; the MNR has resisted up to three hours. Additionally, it has been responsible for several attacks in a month, leading some to believe they have a supply of heavy weapons and ammunition. Others are not so sure of their intent or capabilities and claim they are just bandits. As often happens in news from remote parts of the DRC, it is difficult to know whether they are a powerful new revolutionary movement or a group of bandits- or both.

The insecurity in both Kivus has led to displacement of more than 23,000 people and a tremendous decrease in farm output. Moreover, with less development in the region because of wary foreign investors, construction of a hydroelectric dam has been delayed. Thus, while the humanitarian disaster in the country's Greater Kasai Region is drawing much of the international focus, concerns regarding the deteriorating situation in the eastern part of the country are quite warranted, as the article's author explains. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Small, armed rebel groups in the eastern Congo known as Mai Mai.

Source: Matchbox Media Collective/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/80073447@N02/9897416936/in/gallery-131158262@N04-72157661064828240/>, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

“While attention has focused on the raging conflict and humanitarian crisis in Kasai in the southern Democratic Republic of Congo, armed opposition groups in the east of the country have stepped up attacks and are threatening to wage all-out war.”

Source: Claude Sengenya, “Rebellion fears grow in eastern Congo,” *IRIN*, 31 October 2017. <http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2017/10/31/rebellion-fears-grow-eastern-congo>

While attention has focused on the raging conflict and humanitarian crisis in Kasai in the southern Democratic Republic of Congo, armed opposition groups in the east of the country have stepped up attacks and are threatening to wage all-out war.

For Rukumbuzi, youths recruited by CNSPC [National People's Coalition for the Sovereignty of Congo] are also more likely to be motivated by chronic marginalisation and historic inter-ethnic rivalries than by any preoccupation with who is in power in distant Kinshasa.

When the local Mai-Mai launch attacks, “they only resist the army's firepower for 30 or 40 minutes. What we are seeing today is that the alleged Mai-Mai are resisting for one or two or three hours and plan attacks on three, four, or five locations within a month. This suggests a supply of munitions and heavy weapons.”

These attacks have led more than 81,000 commercial farmers to abandon their fields and to a total revenue loss of some \$1.9 billion over three agricultural seasons, according to the Congolese League of Women Peasant Organisations (LOFEPACO).



Mozambique's First Islamist Attack Against the State

OE Watch Commentary: Until 5 October 2017, Mozambique, with a Muslim population of approximately 18% - the overwhelming majority of them Sufi, a mystical sect opposed by scripturalist Muslims such as the Wahhabis – had not experienced a terrorist attack. On that day, according to the accompanying article, a predawn raid by 30 men on three police stations in the small town of Mocimboa da Praia left two policemen dead, although a different report claims the two fatalities were security guards, and occurred when the men robbed a bank. The attackers told the locals that their fight was not with them but with the state and the police, as they stole weapons and occupied the town. They explained that they rejected state health, state education, and paying taxes. Swift responses to the raid by security forces from other districts resulted in a gun battle that left at least 14 people dead.

The attackers appear to have been a group of young men who had formed a sect in the same place they attacked, a town where they control two mosques and want to implement Sharia [Islamic law]. They call themselves “al-Shabaab.” However, initial reports are that this was not a Somali al-Shabaab attack, nor was it an externally driven international jihadi plot. Instead it was a homegrown event, with all Mozambican attackers. In a country proud of its inter-religious relations, this was shocking news. Retrospection of what led to this violence has pointed to numerous potential causes, requiring a bit of history to understand them.

Islam was present in the area before it became a Portuguese colony. The colonists, favoring Catholicism, tried to squelch Islam, but it continued to gain adherents. When the country gained independence in 1975, it was estimated that 13% of the population was Muslim. All religions were oppressed by the country's Marxist-Leninist government, but Islam was particularly under siege as many of the state's leaders did not understand it. When Mozambique finally shifted to multiparty democracy, much of that oppression was lifted, although tensions still periodically flared up, leaving many Muslims to continue feeling marginalized.

African graduates from educational institutions in Saudi Arabia returning to Mozambique in the 1970's gained control of some of the country's mosques. The national Islamic Council was created by Wahhabists, and in partnership with the authorities, grew in the 1980's and 1990's. Splinter organizations, especially in the north of the country, would appear in later decades and soon controversies emerged with regards to Sufi practices, dress codes, alcohol, and education. However, despite these issues, there had been no violence against the state.

One other factor must be noted. Despite a massive economic boon related to the discovery of oil and gas, the Muslim-majority northern area received little in the way of the billions of dollars invested in offshore drilling, fueling anger among the impoverished populace. It is uncertain what finally ignited that powder keg, but as the article states, there are deeper social and religious issues that must be addressed when dealing with the cause of this attack. A response such as all-out repression of Muslims by the government could prove to be counterproductive. As the article points out, this “could radicalize other Muslims and root the problem deeper and more widely – think only of Boko Haram in West Africa in 2009.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The government must devise a careful and well-thought response to this new Islamist threat. Downplaying the affair as ‘banditry’ and dealing only with the sect when it’s clear that there are broader religious and social dynamics at play risks seeing the problem reemerge elsewhere.”



Mozambique.
Source: OCHA via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mozambique_-_Location_Map_\(2013\)_-_MOZ_-_UNOCHA.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mozambique_-_Location_Map_(2013)_-_MOZ_-_UNOCHA.svg), CC BY 3.0.

Source: Eric Morier-Genoud, “Why Islamist attack demands a careful response from Mozambique,” *The Conversation (South Africa)*, 18 October 2017. <https://theconversation.com/why-islamist-attack-demands-a-careful-response-from-mozambique-85504>

The fact that this first Islamist attack was carried out by Mozambicans makes the event no less shocking, particularly in a country proud of its sound and relaxed inter-religious relations.

The government must devise a careful and well-thought response to this new Islamist threat. Downplaying the affair as “banditry” and dealing only with the sect when it’s clear that there are broader religious and social dynamics at play risks seeing the problem reemerge elsewhere.

In turn, going for an all-out repression to eradicate the “Islamist threat” could radicalize other Muslims and root the problem deeper and more widely – think only of Boko Haram in West Africa in 2009.



Burundi Leaves International Criminal Court

OE Watch Commentary: Burundi, mired in protests and violence, has withdrawn from the International Criminal Court (ICC), becoming the first country to do so. As the accompanying article describes, last year, South Africa, the Gambia (before President Yahya Jammeh was ousted from office), and Burundi had all indicated their intention to leave the ICC. However, South Africa and the Gambia withdrew their request prior to the end of the one-year withdrawal process. Burundi did not.

The withdrawal occurs as the country is spiraling deeper into the crisis that began in April 2015 when President Pierre Nkurunziza, constitutionally limited to two terms, declared he was seeking a third one. A failed coup attempt followed shortly after. More recently his cabinet's attempt to change the country's constitution (so that he could stay in office until 2034) has aggravated the situation. In total, since announcing his third term bid, hundreds have been killed, the economy has become moribund, and 400,000 people have sought refuge in neighboring countries. UN human rights investigators have accused the Burundi National Intelligence Services, police force, military, and members of Imbonerakure - the youth wing of Nkurunziza's ruling party - of forced disappearances, sexual violence and a campaign of terror. The investigators' report further designates Nkurunziza as behind the big decisions, including those that resulted in serious human rights abuses.

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that President Nkurunziza would want to withdraw from the ICC, the international tribunal whose website says it "investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity." The response from leaders in the international community concerned with the protection of human rights has been extremely negative, essentially declaring that he is doing this to shield himself from the court's prosecution.

Although Nkurunziza, whose history puts him at marked risk of prosecution by the ICC, has strong personal reasons for his country to leave the international tribunal, there is significant anti-ICC sentiment in many African nations. The ICC is accused of bias as the overwhelming majority of its investigations target those on the African continent. Indeed, in February 2017 the African Union called on its member states to withdraw en masse, a resolution that was not legally binding and was opposed by some states.

It is unlikely that the small country of Burundi will change its mind and rejoin the ICC as long as Nkurunziza is in power. With his control of the security forces and a willingness to use them to violently silence critics, he remains out of reach of both the ICC and many others who don't want to see the rise of another generation of African strongmen who refuse to leave office and operate above the law. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Burundi, a former German and Belgian colony, has been in a state of deadly political turmoil since 2015, when protests broke out after the ruling party announced that President Pierre Nkurunziza would seek a third five-year term.”



President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi.

Source: Ilyas A. Abukar/AMISOM, <https://goo.gl/VRoN8A>, Public Domain.

Source: Timothy Jones, “Burundi becomes first country to leave International Criminal Court,” *Deutsche Welle*, 27 October 2017. <http://www.dw.com/en/burundi-becomes-first-country-to-leave-international-criminal-court/a-41135062>

The country notified former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of its intent to leave the court on October 27, 2016, as one of three countries — along with South Africa and The Gambia — to make such moves last year. Both South Africa and The Gambia later took back their withdrawals.

Burundi, a former German and Belgian colony, has been in a state of deadly political turmoil since 2015, when protests broke out after the ruling party announced that President Pierre Nkurunziza would seek a third five-year term.

A UN commission of inquiry said last month that crimes against humanity, including killings and sexual violence, were still being committed in Burundi. The commission asked the ICC to open an investigation as soon as possible.



CIA map of Burundi.

Source: CIA via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:By-map.png>, Public Domain.



Somalia: Two Top Defense Officials Quit

OE Watch Commentary: The announcement could not have come at a worse time. Both Defense Minister Abdirashid Abdullahi Mohamed and Army Chief General Mohamed Ahmed Jimale resigned amidst stepped up attacks by the al-Shabaab terrorist group against army bases in south and central Somalia, and just prior to the massive truck bomb explosion that took over 350 lives in Mogadishu. Defense Minister Abdirashid Abdullahi Mohamed cited a lack of consultations on issues related to the Defense Ministry as the reason for his departure. No reason was supplied for Army Chief General Mohamed Ahmed Jimale's resignation, though there have been reports of a rivalry between the two men, as the brief accompanying article details.

The resignations leave the nascent government with sudden and unexpected vacancies in two of the most important security related jobs in the country. Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo has reportedly nominated General Abdi Jama Hussein to fill the slot of Army Chief, and it is likely there will also soon be a replacement for the departed Defense Minister. However, any new individuals in these positions will still be on the steep slope of a learning curve during a time when the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is handing off all of its peacekeeping duties to Somali forces as it prepares to leave the country; the country is teetering on the brink - if not already in - a devastating famine; and the threat of al-Shabaab continues.

It is unknown if some of the conditions that led the previous two individuals to resign have been repaired. Even with the Defense Minister and Army Chief gone the problem of rivalry between the two offices could continue. In a country with multiple clans and seemingly endless subclans, rivalries are prevalent and persistent, as evidenced by the difficulty in forming and maintaining a government.

There is hope that Somalia's new president will be able to stabilize the government and improve the quality and capabilities of the fledgling Somali army. However, there is also concern that al-Shabaab will take advantage of this transitional period of top Somali military leadership not only to launch new attacks but also to recruit terrorists. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Somali Minister of Defense Abdirashid Abdullahi Mohamed, 12 April 2017.

Source: Ilyas Ahmed/AMISOM, https://www.flickr.com/photos/au_unistphotostream/33151876444, Public Domain.

“Somali officials say the country's defense minister and army chief have resigned as the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab group steps up attacks on army bases across south and central Somalia.”

Source: Somalia's Defense Minister and Army Chief resign,” *Shabelle Media Network (Somalia)*, 12 October 2017. <http://radioshabelle.com/somalias-defense-minister-army-chief-resign/>

Somali officials say the country's defense minister and army chief have resigned as the al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab group steps up attacks on army bases across south and central Somalia.

There have been reports of a rivalry between the two outgoing military leaders.

Somalia in recent weeks has seen an increase in attacks by al-Shabab extremists, who have overrun several army positions.



Maj. Gen. Mohamed Ahmed Jimaale, the Chief of Somalia Defence Forces, 25 May 2017.

Source: Omar Abdisalan/AMISOM, https://www.flickr.com/photos/au_unistphotostream/34843412676, Public Domain.



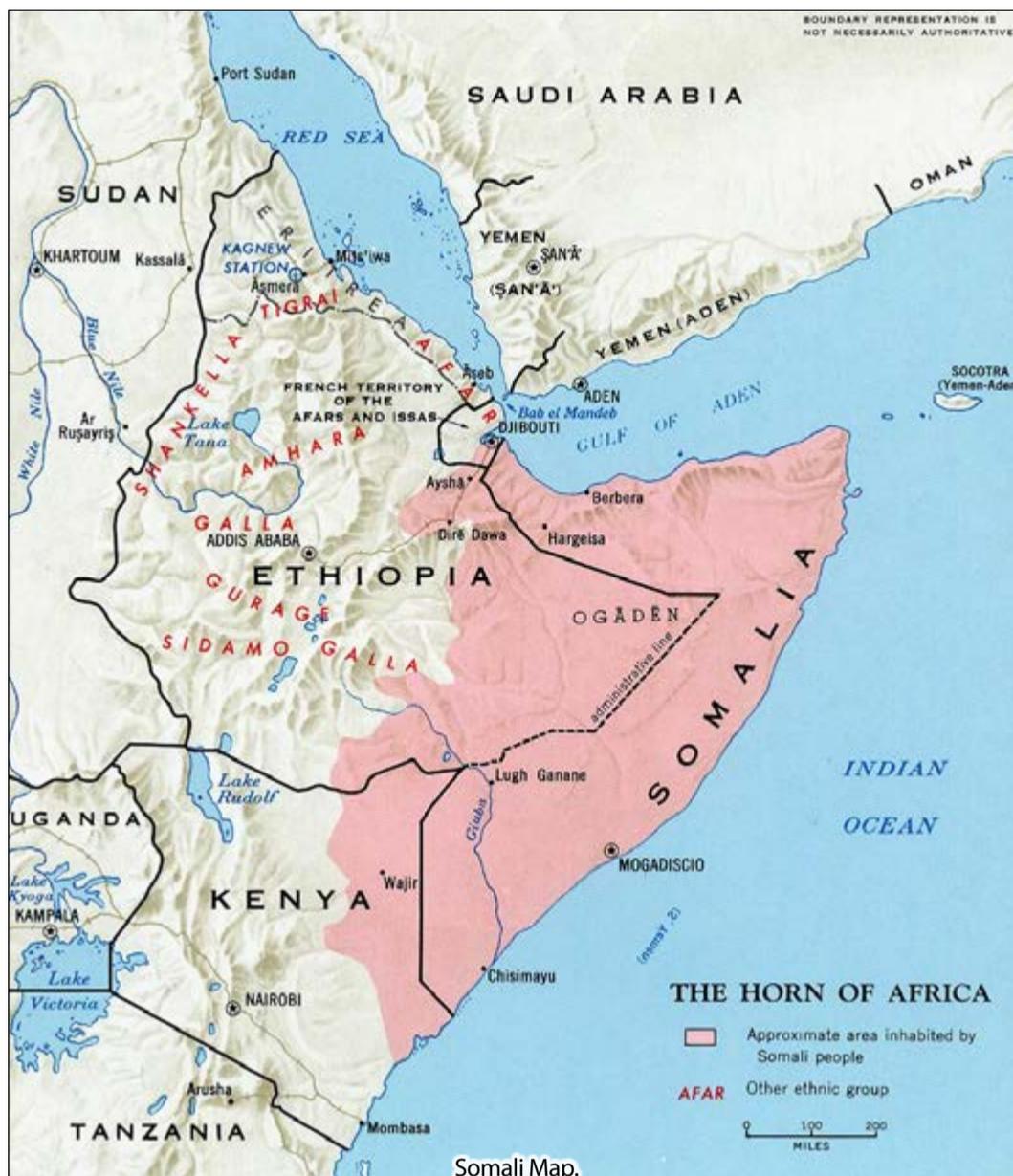
Somalia Reaches Out for Help in Fighting Al-Shabaab

OE Watch Commentary: As the accompanying article's headline states, in late October, Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo visited Ethiopia to seek its backing for a new offensive against al-Shabaab in Somalia. Farmajo also visited other countries, including Uganda and Djibouti, asking them to join the fight against the terrorist group. So far, he has found receptive ears. With al-Shabaab terrorists viewed as a threat not just to Somalia but to the entire Horn of Africa, governments are looking for ways to contain and eventually eliminate them. Shortly after Farmajo's visit, Ethiopia's prime minister Hailemariam Dessalegn affirmed that his country would continue both its effort and solidarity with Somalia in the fight against al-Shabaab. Other countries soon followed.

The appeal for support comes against the backdrop of several recent al-Shabaab attacks, including against the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali Armed Forces that have ended with numerous soldiers from both services dead. Then there is the mid-October truck bombing in the capital, Mogadishu, which killed over 350 people and injured 400. That attack's massive casualty numbers garnered international attention and an increased awareness that, despite the setbacks al-Shabaab has suffered in recent years at the hands of AMISOM and Somali troops, including a loss of significant amounts of territory it had occupied, the terrorist group is still quite viable and deadly.

Somalia reaching out for help from its neighbors needs to be placed in the context of AMISOM's plans to draw down its forces in 2018 and leave the country entirely in 2020. It is a timetable nervously viewed by many who are unsure that the Somali Armed Forces will be ready for a transition that leaves them solely responsible for the country's security. The African Union wants AMISOM to conduct a final push against al-Shabaab before it withdraws, weakening the group such that it would not be a match for Somali troops. In reaching out to nearby African countries for their support in a new offensive against al-Shabaab, Somalia's president is trying to ensure that indeed the terrorist group will not pose as grave a danger against his military as they presently do. Whether through AMISOM, in conjunction with AMISOM, or through other means, support from other African countries in weakening al-Shabaab would be most welcome by Somalia's relatively young government.

Even before the massive bombing in Mogadishu, there had been pressure from many quarters, both African and non-African, to extend AMISOM's mandate. It remains to be seen what the final word on that force, whose mandate has been extended in the past, will be. Meanwhile, the reverberations from the truck bombs have strongly reminded African countries to realize the need for immediate concerted efforts against al-Shabaab to prevent the same from happening on their soil. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



“[Al-Shabaab] is not only a problem of Somalia but of the region. This is why I have come here seeking for support of a neighbouring country” Farmajo told reporters...”

Source: “Somalia: Farmajo in Ethiopia to Seek Backing in New Offensive On Al-Shabaab,” *Dalsan Radio (Somalia)/allAfrica.com*, 23 October 2017. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201710260457.html>

“The problem of Alshabaab is not only a problem of Somalia but of the region. This is why I have come here seeking for support of a neighbouring country” Farmajo told reporters.

Ethiopia is a troop contributing country in the 22000 strong African Union peacekeeping force.

Farmajo next stop is Djibouti where he is expected to seek similar backing.



Vigilantes to Combat Insurgencies?

OE Watch Commentary: Some African countries with militaries too weak to combat insurgencies within their borders have turned to vigilante groups for assistance. The accompanying article claims that this can be a double-edged sword. While many of these groups have mobilized to protect their local communities and have an intimate knowledge of both the local terrain and people that can be extremely helpful, they also have a tendency to expand their roles, commit serious human rights abuses, and sometimes even challenge the state's authority.

A review of several African vigilante groups by the article provides keen insights into the potential opportunities as well as costs associated with utilizing them. Referencing an International Crisis Group report, the article discusses the experiences and trajectories of the Kamajors in Sierra Leone, the Zande Arrow Boys in South Sudan, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Nigeria, and the Teso Arrow Boys in Uganda, which all contain important lessons. It claims that while some stick to their original roles of community protection and counterinsurgency, over time others morph into ethnic militias, and perhaps ironically, insurgencies themselves. To a large extent which direction a group takes – remaining under or affiliated with the government versus opposing it - is dependent on how the agendas of local leaders actually align with those of the national government. Having mutually beneficial objectives can help keep vigilante groups from veering off track as their leaders realize the benefits that will accrue to both them and their people by adhering to the joint goals.

Contrasts among various vigilante groups helps illustrate this point of mutual objectives, with the Arrow Boys of Teso being a positive example. This group, which battled the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda and whose initial objective was to protect their local communities, was successful in large measure because the national government and the local Teso leaders agreed on the Arrow Boys' role and how they would work in conjunction with the Ugandan army. Having strong local and national political oversight along with local legitimacy were additional factors in the group's success.

When the LRA spread north, so did the Arrow Boys, and a related group was formed, the Zande Arrow Boys of South Sudan. However, in contrast to Uganda working with its Arrow Boys, the South Sudan Arrow Boys group was first treated with neglect and then later outright hostility by the government. As the fighters' frustration mounted, they became increasingly autonomous in their relationship with the national authorities and eventually many sided with the rebels during the civil war. Similarly, the case of the Kamajors fighting in Sierra Leone also shows what can happen when a government exerts only weak control over vigilantes. Eventually the Kamajors came to view themselves as a substitute for the basically defunct army and began brutally abusing civilians.

There are many other examples and lessons to be learned in the accompanying article regarding the use of vigilante groups to combat insurgencies. However, the author sums up the dilemma of whether or not to use these non-state armed actors, describing them as possibly a necessary evil, but one that needs to be limited in scope and finite in existence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



In 2011 Arrow Boys in South Sudan, such as the ones pictured here, provided local protection against the LRA.

Source: Guy Degen/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fieldreports/with/5811950270/>, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Source: Ned Dalby, "Fighting African insurgencies: Are vigilantes the solution?" *African Arguments*, 23 October 2017. <http://africanarguments.org/2017/10/23/fighting-african-insurgencies-are-vigilantes-the-solution/>

Turning to non-state armed groups to combat insurgencies is a big risk. But there are ways to limit the dangers.

Often lacking the resources to fight insurgents on their own, governments may be tempted to subcontract certain security functions to vigilantes. Many of these groups mobilise to protect their own communities, and their local knowledge and community networks can make them more effective than state security forces.

Due to their local roots, vigilante groups enjoy greater legitimacy among their communities and are familiar with the local language, geography and culture. Early and close engagement with them can have positive outcomes and even bolster state credibility in the long term.

Vigilante groups are also often guilty of committing egregious abuses, preying on civilians and becoming involved in illicit activities. Here too, the government's policies to curb such tendencies are decisive.

“Turning to non-state armed groups to combat insurgencies is a big risk. But there are ways to limit the dangers.”



To Negotiate or Not with Mali's Jihadists?

OE Watch Commentary: Since 2016, attacks by Malian jihadist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, such as Ansar al-Din and Macina Liberation Front have began increasing in Mali. Malian religious and traditional leaders have advised the government to negotiate with the jihadists. The excerpted French-language article from *maliweb.net* discusses a regional forum in central Mali where 500 participants reiterated their call to negotiate with such groups, which are not signatories to the Algiers Agreement. The Algiers Agreement of 2015 set out an agenda for political and security sector reforms to devolve power and financial resources in a unified, secular Mali. However, it was not recognized by these jihadist groups, a secular Tuareg militia, an Arab separatist militia, and Tuareg ex-jihadist group.

The participants of the forum urged the government to do three things: “the establishment of a dialogue with the non-signatory groups of the Algiers agreement, control of sermons, and disarmament of militias.” The call to control the sermons in mosques is meant to prevent religious leaders from using their platforms to recruit and spread jihadist ideology. According to the article, members of Ansar al-Din and Macina Liberation Front have trained in terrorist camps and have been influenced by these sermons. The leader of Macina Liberation Front, Hamadou Kouffa, was a preacher before becoming a jihadist leader. The 500 participants also urged for the disarmament of militia groups in the country. However, the same hurdles to negotiations that existed in 2016 still exist for upholding such recommendations. The jihadists want France to end its operations in Mali; Mali's president refuses negotiations with the jihadists as a matter of principle. (Also see: “Mali's Dilemma over Dialogue with Insurgents,” *OE Watch*, September 2017) **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “Retour de la paix et la sécurité au Centre et au Nord : La discussion avec Iyad et Amadou Kouffa, un impératif (Return of peace and security to the Center and to the North: The discussion with Iyad and Amadou Kouffa, an imperative),” *maliweb.net*, 8 November 2017. <http://www.maliweb.net/insecurite/retour-de-paix-securite-centre-nord-discussion-iyad-amadou-kouffa-imperatif-2648172.html>

Faced with the multiple attacks by the men of Hamadou Kouffa and Iyad Ag Ghali in the center and the north of Mali, the regional forum on the contribution of religious leaders and traditional notables for the return of peace and security held last weekend in Mopti recommended, among other things, the establishment of a dialogue with the non-signatory groups of the Algiers Agreement. According to the organizers, this meeting of over 500 participants from all circles in the region aimed to find ways and means to establish and maintain a lasting peace in the region. At the end of the meeting, the participants made several recommendations: the forum asked, among others, for the establishment of a dialogue with the non-signatory groups of the Algiers agreement, control of sermons, and disarmament of militias.

The willingness to negotiate with the terrorist leaders, including Iyag Ag Ghali and Hamadou Kouffa, is coming back for the second time. The National Accord Conference held last July had also requested the same.

“The willingness to negotiate with the terrorist leaders, including Iyag Ag Ghali and Hamadou Kouffa, is coming back for the second time.”



Ansar Dine Rebels.

Source: Voice of America (VOA), <https://www.voanews.com/a/mali-rebels-say-they-will-create-moderate-islamic-state/1120755.html>, Public Domain.

VOA



First Capital Command Evolves in Brazil and South America

OE Watch Commentary: “Organized crime grows stronger where the state is absent,” said Lincoln Gakiya, a São Paulo-based prosecutor and one of the greatest authorities on organized crime in Brazil, at a recent press conference. Mr. Gakiya was referring to the First Capital Command (Primeiro Comando da Capital or PCC) - Brazil’s largest criminal organization. As the first passage discusses, the group has been maintaining its operations in prisons while consolidating control over organized crime and drug trafficking in São Paulo (its principal operational base) and other areas throughout Brazil.

Although the PCC originated as a prison gang, it is now considered Brazil’s most powerful criminal organization. However, what makes it truly unique is that the group’s leadership is largely unknown to authorities. What is known is that the PCC was originally founded as a self-protection gang within the Brazilian prison system. It became more formalized in the wake of the October 1992 massacre at the Carandiru prison in São Paulo, where Brazilian security forces killed over 100 prisoners following a riot. Today, the PCC is believed to have members in two thirds of the country. The group is also thought to control drug trafficking routes between Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Colombia for shipment outside South America, making it a transnational criminal group.

As the second passage discusses, Luiz Carlos da Rocha- a key leader within the PCC- was arrested in July 2017 after evading arrest for 30 years. Referred to by authorities as Cabeça Branca (Portuguese for White Head), da Rocha lived in the shadows of the criminal community like a ghost and underwent multiple surgeries to conceal his identity. His arrest is significant because he “maintained a vast cocaine trafficking empire in South America.” His shipments are thought to have been procured from neighboring countries to include Bolivia, Peru and Colombia. Prior to his arrest, Luiz Carlos da Rocha also served as a key cocaine supplier to criminal organizations within Brazil; especially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Furthermore, as the third passage discusses, the group claimed responsibility for the largest heist ever reported in April 2017 when PCC operatives armed with guns and hand grenades stole millions of dollars from a security vault in Ciudad del Este, in Paraguay. Other signs that the group has become transnational are its money laundering and weapons trafficking activities in areas outside South America. In terms of strategy, the PCC is actively looking to increase the volume of its cocaine shipments to foreign markets while still maintaining a presence in Brazil. The group is also actively recruiting FARC dissidents in its quest to further gain access to key cocaine producers. The PCC may have started out as a prison gang, but open source channels indicate that the group now maintains a significant power base in Brazil and in other areas within South America. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“... the PCC now maintains widespread operations in Sao Paulo and in other areas throughout Brazil.”

Source: “O avanço do PCC (PCC Spreads),” *Revista Isto É*, 13 July 2017. <https://istoe.com.br/o-avanco-do-pcc/>

Brazil watched appalled at recent clips of intense violence inside its prisons which was orchestrated by the PCC criminal organization. However, this heinous violence was not the only thing that shocked Brazil as following the aftermath of the incident, PCC leader Marcos Willians Herbas Camacho, alias Marcola (currently serving time in a maximum-security prison) indicated that the PCC now maintains widespread operations in Sao Paulo and in other areas throughout Brazil.

Source: “Tras 30 años, capturan a uno de los capos de las drogas más buscados en Brasil (After 30 Years, Authorities Arrested One of the Biggest Drug Lords in Brazil),” *BBC Mundo*, 2 July 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-40472297>

Brazilian Police arrested a renowned drug kingpin identified as Luiz Carlos da Rocha, aka “Cabeça Branca” (White Head) in July 2017. Prior to his arrest, this individual served as a key leader within the PCC and maintained a vast cocaine trafficking empire in South America. According to authorities, Luiz Carlos underwent multiple plastic surgeries which helped him evade authorities for more than 30 years.

Source: “La historia de la banda criminal que hizo el robo de ‘película’ en Paraguay (The Story of the Criminal Gangue Responsible for the ‘Movie Scene’ Robbery in Paraguay),” *elsalvador.com*, 25 April 2017. <http://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/internacional/341314/la-historia-de-la-banda-criminal-que-hizo-robo-de-pelicula-en-paraguay/>

The First Capital Command (PCC) was responsible for the robbery at the headquarters of Prosegur, Ciudad del Este, in Paraguay. It is believed that the action was carried out by a group of 30 to 50 PCC members who were armed with rifles, grenades, and explosives. During the robbery, they used explosives to penetrate the buildings’ façade which enabled their entry and enabled the theft of six million dollars.



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Coca Production Soars in Colombia

OE Watch Commentary: Colombia is currently seeing its highest coca production since 1994. Soaring coca production is concerning as the country is currently in the process of implementing an important peace accord with the country’s largest guerrilla organization – the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC, per its Spanish acronym). A key part of the agreement stipulates that the FARC will renounce drug trafficking and work with the government to replace coca production with alternative crops. However, the agreement has ironically created an incentive for peasant farmers to continue growing coca plants knowing they will later be awarded subsidies if they agree to renounce this activity and grow legitimate crops such as potatoes and fruit instead. As the second passage discusses, some experts say this is simply a misinterpretation of a paragraph of the peace accord, which “talks about the benefits that will be provided to those willing to substitute coca cultivation for legal crop production.”



Erythroxylum coca, Erythroxylaceae, Coca, flower.
Source: JBy H.Zell (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Erythroxylum_coca_1003.JPG, CC BY-SA 3.0.

In Putumayo, a department along Colombia’s border with Ecuador and a key coca production zone, farmers said they would be willing to renounce drug production if the government provided a viable alternative for them to earn a living. Furthermore, peasants signed a pledge to produce legal crops earlier this year, but many doubt they can support their families on food crops alone. As the third passage discusses, for many farmers, one of the biggest issues with switching from coca production to legitimate crops is the lack of clarity provided by the government. In short, the idea to eradicate coca production by producing legal crops requires a solution for farmers who are simply concerned with earning a living to support themselves and their families. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“... a principal concern is the... lack of specificity with regard to how direct subsidies are going to work. There is also a lack of clarity regarding investments that will need to be made by the government to implement crop substitution.”

Source: “Se dispara siembra y producción de coca en Colombia (Cultivation and Production of Coca Soar in Colombia),” *El Nuevo Herald*, 14 July 2017. <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/colombia-es/article161480183.html>

In 2012, coca production was at its lowest level in the past decade with 47,790 hectares utilized to cultivate the plant. However, since 2013, production rates have steadily soared in Colombia. At present, 63 percent of all coca plants are grown in Nariño, Putumayo and Norte de Santander.

Source: “¿Por qué se disparó la siembra de coca en Colombia? (Why the Cultivation of Coca Plants in Colombia Soared),” *El País*, 23 July 2017. <http://www.elpais.com.co/colombia/por-que-se-disparo-la-siembra-de-coca-en.html>

Carlos Serrano, commander of Poseidon Task Force Against Drug Trafficking - whose mission is to combat the FARC and drug trafficking activities in the Department of Nariño – states that on the one hand, there was a misrepresentation of paragraph 4 in the peace agreement which talks about solutions to eradicating production of illicit drugs. This paragraph also talks about the benefits that will be provided to those willing to substitute coca cultivation for legal crop production.

Source: “Los problemas que enfrenta la sustitución de coca (The Problems Faced When Substituting Coca Crops),” *El Tiempo*, 10 May 2017. <http://www.eltiempo.com/datos/problemas-de-la-erradicacion-de-coca-en-colombia-85662>

For the Fundación Ideas para la Paz (Ideas for Peace Foundation), a principal concern is the lack of balance in terms of commitment and a lack of specificity with regard to how direct subsidies are going to work. There is also a lack of clarity regarding investments that will need to be made by the government to implement crop substitution. Another concern is how the government will deal with those farmers who are not interested in crop substitution and what the consequences will be for non-compliance.



FARC and Colombian Government Squabble over Peace Accords

OE Watch Commentary: Years of talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) leaders finally ended in December 2016 after the two parties reached agreements on how the guerilla organization would demobilize under the peace accords meant to end a 52-year armed conflict. But nearly a year after the agreement's inception, the FARC and the government continue to squabble about expectations. The FARC argues that the government is not holding up its end of the deal while the government claims that high level drug traffickers are using the accords to be released from prison along with thousands of other demobilized FARC members.

The first accompanying passage discusses the FARC's complaints that the government is not holding up its end of the deal in providing billions of dollars promised for education, land reform, construction of rural infrastructure, and guaranteed political representation over the next decade. The FARC is particularly upset about education and infrastructure because part of the demobilization deal dictated that members would leave encampments and report to designated zones in areas throughout the country. This is happening, but the FARC claims that the schools are not fully functional in some zones and infrastructure has taken longer than expected to build. This has led to further concerns that the funding to do what was promised may not be available in the quantities as originally promised.

On the opposite side, the government has lashed back at these complaints stating that the FARC would not allow builders into the demobilization zones before the peace talks concluded. The government is also less than pleased with how long it is taking the group to hand over weapons and explosives. However, these concerns took a back seat in September 2017 when the government realized that the FARC peace accords are being exploited by powerful drug lords looking to receive a virtual "get out of jail" free card, as discussed in the second passage. This is likely because past mobilization agreements in Colombia have been exploited by crime bosses in a similar manner. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

"...former FARC leader Ivan Marquez said the government has not followed through on promises of food, clothing, money or housing."

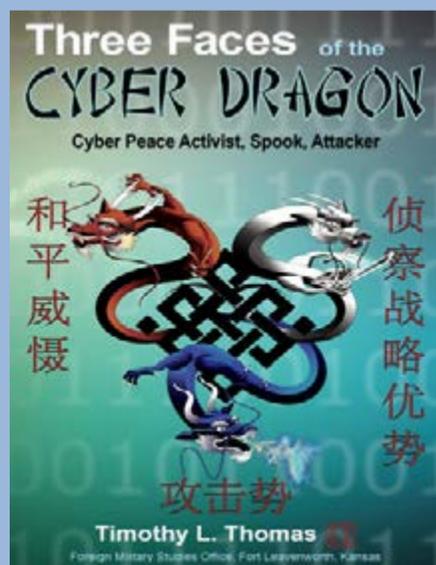
"... at least 25 drug traffickers appear on the list of names of more than 3,800 prisoners submitted to the government by the FARC [to be released from prison]..."

Source: "¿Se está cumpliendo el acuerdo con las Farc? (Is the Government Complying with FARC Peace Accords?)," *La Semana*, 18 February 2017. <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/se-esta-cumpliendo-el-acuerdo-con-las-farc/515855>

In exchange for the rebels' agreeing to lay down their weapons, the government promised billions of dollars in aid and education, land reform, rural infrastructure and guaranteed political representation over the next decade. Santos also committed to protecting the rebels from reprisals by right-wing paramilitary groups. However, former FARC leader Ivan Marquez said the government has not followed through on promises of food, clothing, money or housing. In many cases, the government failed to build the tent cities in time for the rebels' arrival from their jungle and mountain hideouts, he said.

Source: "Así se han construido los listados de las Farc (How the FARC has Compiled a List of Group Members)," *El Espectador*, 17 September 2017. <http://colombia2020.elespectador.com/politica/asi-se-han-construido-los-listados-de-las-farc>

El Espectador reported that at least 25 drug traffickers appear on the list of names of more than 3,800 prisoners submitted to the government by the FARC. Under the terms of the peace accord signed last year, confirmed FARC members on the list are to be released from prison in order to join the demobilization process. At least 5 foreigners were on the list including a Mexican national who served as broker for the Sinaloa Cartel and Los Zetas and two Italian nationals who worked as intermediaries for the Italian Mafia.



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>



FARC-Preferential Electoral Districts

OE Watch Commentary: One feature of the power-sharing agreement reached by the Colombian administration of President Juan Manuel Santos and the leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) is a guaranteed set of legislative seats for the FARC. According to information in the accompanying references, 10 are to be at-large, but 16 more are geographically representative. About 167 of Colombia's approximately 1120 county-level administrative entities will be the loci of the special electoral districting. In these counties, voters will apparently get to vote twice, once for the normal seat corresponding to their electoral district, and another, the candidates of which are to be chosen from a set of organizations more-or-less controlled by the FARC. The new electoral concept apparently expires in 2026. For opponents of the agreement this was one of its more offensive features. The geographic areas represented are said to be those 'most harmed by the conflict,' a euphemism that for detractors of the agreement hides the culpability of the FARC in those precise locations. The zones are also highly coincident with coca crops and smuggling corridors, which are controlled by the FARC.

The second accompanying reference, while perhaps not perfectly in accord with the final legislative determinations, has an excellent set of interactive maps for those who wish to view one visual/spatial perspective of where the conflict was, and perhaps where it remains. For an excellent map expressing an early interpretation of what the FARC negotiators in Havana had asked for, see: <http://www.pares.com.co/mafias-y-conflicto/3466/>. It is from mid-2016, just after the agreement was publicly announced from Havana. Apparently, the FARC leaders got what they had sought. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the guerrilla group is not being given legislative seats arbitrarily...”

“...in all of the special districts there are illicit crops...”

Source: Felipe Fernández, “El Congreso de Colombia aprueba ‘circunscripciones especiales’ a las FARC (Colombian Congress passes ‘special electoral districts’ to the FARC),” *Panama Post and Blu Radio*, Bogotá, 10 November 2017. <https://es.panamapost.com/felipe-fernandez/2017/11/10/congreso-colombia-circunscripciones-especiales/>

“According to the Minister of the Interior, Guillermo Rivera, those electoral seats are prohibited to persons who are not certified in their quality as victims, including prohibition against the new FARC party, he said. Nevertheless, this proposal in transition has generated multiple critiques, but in spite of the objections, the National Government has said that the guerrilla group is not being given legislative seats arbitrarily.”

Source: Juan Esteban Lewin et al, “Estas son las circunscripciones especiales (These are the special electoral districts),” *La Silla Vacilla*, 26 April 2017. <http://lasillavacia.com/hagame-el-cruce/estas-son-las-circunscripciones-especiales-60690>

“One of the controversial points of the Agreement with the FARC are the special electoral districts of peace, the locations about which the Administration has maintained in strict discretion. La Silla finally found out which they are, where they are going to be and what characteristics they have....They are 16 zones where the inhabitants can vote two times: for the congressional representative in ordinary elections and for a second candidate from lists from social organizations, significant citizen movements, indigenous reservations or afro-community councils for the 2018 and 2022 elections....In eight of every ten counties and in all of the special districts there are illicit crops in the jurisdiction. And they are zones strongly hit by the conflict.”



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FARC Looks to Politic in Venezuela

OE Watch Commentary: The first accompanying reference is from the blog of Venezuelan writer Alfredo Coronil Hartmann, opposed to the continuing consolidation of Marxist party power in Venezuela and northern South America. It relates a recent meeting of the FARC in Caracas in which the subject of building a FARC political party structure in Venezuela is broached. Such a move by the FARC makes sense on a number of levels. Certainly it explains why the word ‘Colombia’ was changed out for the word ‘Común’ (common) in the FARC initialing, which now stands for Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común (perhaps Alternative Common Revolutionary Party or perhaps ‘Alternative Shared’ or ‘Alternative Joint’ Revolutionary Party). Smuggling routes don’t end at the international borders, either. In this, Marxist internationalism can be a commercial alleviative, dedicated as it seems to be in this part of the world to the flow of commodities. As a central element of the Bolivarian block, the FARC will be amply welcomed by officialdom in Venezuela and will enjoy effective political space within the overall, internationalizing Marxist party structure. The mission call to help Venezuela oppose the empire at least fits a shared historical-cultural legacy of the two nations, a legacy to which the accompanying photograph alludes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

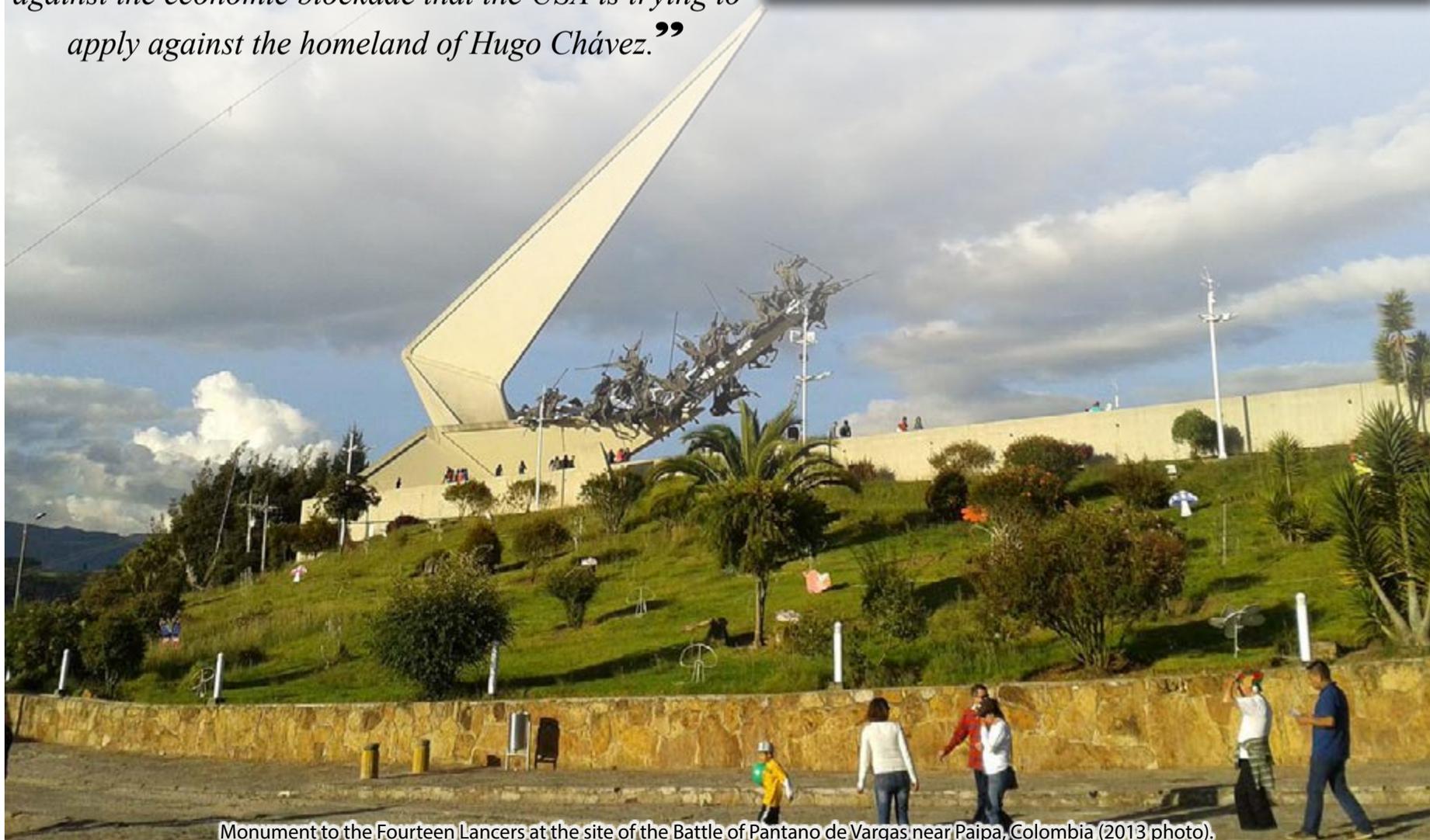
“The organization of the FARC-Venezuela encounter expects to contribute to peaceful coexistence, to the union of the common borders, to the fight against paramilitarism, to the eradication of corruption and the smuggling of extractive resources and to the struggle against the economic blockade that the USA is trying to apply against the homeland of Hugo Chávez.”

Source: Libardo Muñoz, “Primer encuentro para crear estructura FARC en Venezuela (First get-together to create a FARC structure in Venezuela)” in “¿Un partido de las Farc en Venezuela? (A party of the FARC in Venezuela),” *Para Rescatar el Porvenir*, Caracas, 11 November 2017. <https://pararescatarelporvenir.com/2017/11/11/un-partido-de-las-farc-en-venezuela/>

“This internationalist activity of the FARC party in Venezuela is ‘an indispensable exercise in the current and complex context created by imperialism with the open shameless complicity of fascism and the ultra-right, that is mounting attacks against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.’”

Source: Efe, “Las Farc se preparan para crear estructura política en Venezuela (The FARC prepare to create a political structure in Venezuela),” *El Mundo*, 11 November 2017. <http://www.elmundo.com/noticia/Las-Farc-se-preparan-para-crear-estructura-politica-en-Venezuela/362614>

“This Saturday and Sunday, the recently created political party, Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común, FARC) celebrates its first act in neighboring Venezuela, with the objective of beginning its implantation in the oil-rich country... The organization of the FARC-Venezuela encounter expects to contribute to peaceful coexistence, to the union of the common borders, to the fight against paramilitarism, to the eradication of corruption and the smuggling of extractive resources and to the struggle against the economic blockade that the USA is trying to apply against the homeland of Hugo Chávez.”



Monument to the Fourteen Lancers at the site of the Battle of Pantano de Vargas near Paipa, Colombia (2013 photo).

Source: Jrdelacruz via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Monumento_a_los_catorce_Lanceros_-_Pantano_de_Vargas.jpg, CC BY SA 3.0.



Venezuela, Entrance for Empires

OE Watch Commentary: In the accompanying reference, Venezuelan author Elizabeth Burgos describes in unflattering terms the returned role of Cuba as interlocutor between foreign powers and Latin America, and describes Venezuela as the entryway. Elizabeth Burgos is an author of some renown, having transitioned away from being an apologist for radical socialism (including author of the iconic *I, Rigoberta*). The new empires of which she writes are, of course, China and Russia. The United States is all but absent from her text. She uses as a guide to her description a book written by Cuban defector Rafael del Pino a quarter century ago. As presented by Burgos, that book, *Proa a la libertad* (Prow Toward Liberty, Planeta, 1991) remains illuminating today for the ideological, forensic and practical historical context of the Marxist strategy and model for the region. She does not strike a hopeful note, but obviously sees this as a turning point. In her view, now that the Marxist party has control of the Venezuelan population, we will see the remaking of the society in the post-Cold War Marxist model, an effort that will proceed under the tutelage of the new Marxist empires, with intercession by Cubans.

End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)

Source: Elizabeth Burgos, “Venezuela, puerta de entrada de los nuevos imperios (Venezuela, port of entry of the new empires),” *Revista Zeta (Caracas)*, 10 November 2017. <http://revistazeta.net/2017/11/10/venezuela-puerta-entrada-los-nuevos-imperios/>

‘Cuba, true to its mission as the Madam [or Matchmaker] for empires, will be the interlocutor to the new imperial guardians of Venezuela: China and Russia’, affirmed the author, with the addition that both ‘empires’ forged themselves in the heat of communism.... The objective of the [Venezuelan] regime to exercise absolute power unlimited in duration, is not practicable without Cuba. At this point in time, the castro-chavista regime, with control of the key sectors of the State, among them the armed institutions being now a consummated fact, equally the destruction of the liberal democratic Republic and thereby its economy, now is the moment to reorganize the society and the economy in the image of the model that has arisen from communism: Russia, Belorussia, Vietnam and of course, China. In the economic sphere, State capitalism. In the political, absolute control of the society under the aegis of the single party.

“Cuba... will be the interlocutor to the new imperial guardians of Venezuela: China and Russia.”



Opposition protesters holding a sign criticizing the alleged Cuban intervention in Venezuela saying “Cuba Out” (2014).
Source: By Jamez42 (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ACuba_Out_Sign_Venezuela_2014.jpg, [CC0], via Wikimedia Commons.



Mexico's "Invisible Wall"

OE Watch Commentary: The most common adjective used to describe Mexico's southern border with Guatemala and Belize is probably "porous." The large volume of Central American migrants, including many families and unaccompanied minors from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala attempting to cross into Mexico and travel north suggests as much. The simultaneous operations of criminal groups involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, migrant smuggling and other sinister pursuits in the region adds several layers to the challenge. In response to these challenges, and to facilitate the legal flow of commerce, migration, tourism and temporary workers, the Mexican president launched Plan Frontera Sur (Southern Border Plan) in 2014. The plan's principle purpose was to protect migrants traveling through Mexico. However, the accompanying passages claim that the increased security measures are having the opposite effect.

On paper, Plan Frontera Sur includes five key components: regular and ordered migration; improvements in infrastructure for border security and migration; migrant protection; shared regional responsibility; and interagency cooperation. However, in recent months sources have been reporting that Mexico has created an "invisible" border wall in its southern border, which entails "intense police and military vigilance, cartels, human trafficking organizations, and widescale deportations" with the "risk [of] being robbed, raped or extorted by drug cartels and even police." This "invisible wall" on Mexico's southern border is making it particularly hard for Central Americans traveling north.

The second passage claims that the "invisible wall" is working, noting that in 2016 alone, 47,678 Hondurans were deported from Mexico to Honduras while only 21,587 were deported from the United States. Critics further claim that the plan is not vested in protecting migrants, and assert that if it were important to Mexico, measures would be implemented to protect the thousands of victims that are killed by organized crime groups, police and harsh conditions (desert in the north) while transiting through Mexico every year. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: "El muro empieza en el sur (The Wall Starts in the South)," *El País*, 17 February 2017. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/02/06/mexico/1486340656_933536.html

Intense police and military vigilance, cartels, human trafficking organizations, and widescale deportations are factors that contribute to the invisible wall along Mexico's southern border. Every individual who chooses to enter Mexico via the southern border knows they risk being robbed, raped or extorted by drug cartels and even police.

Source: "Hondureños se enfrentan a un "muro invisible" (Hondurans Face an "Invisible Wall")," *El Heraldo*, 04 October 2017. <http://www.elheraldo.hn/minisitios/hondurenosenelmundo/1113825-471/hondure%C3%B1os-se-enfrentan-a-un-muro-invisible>

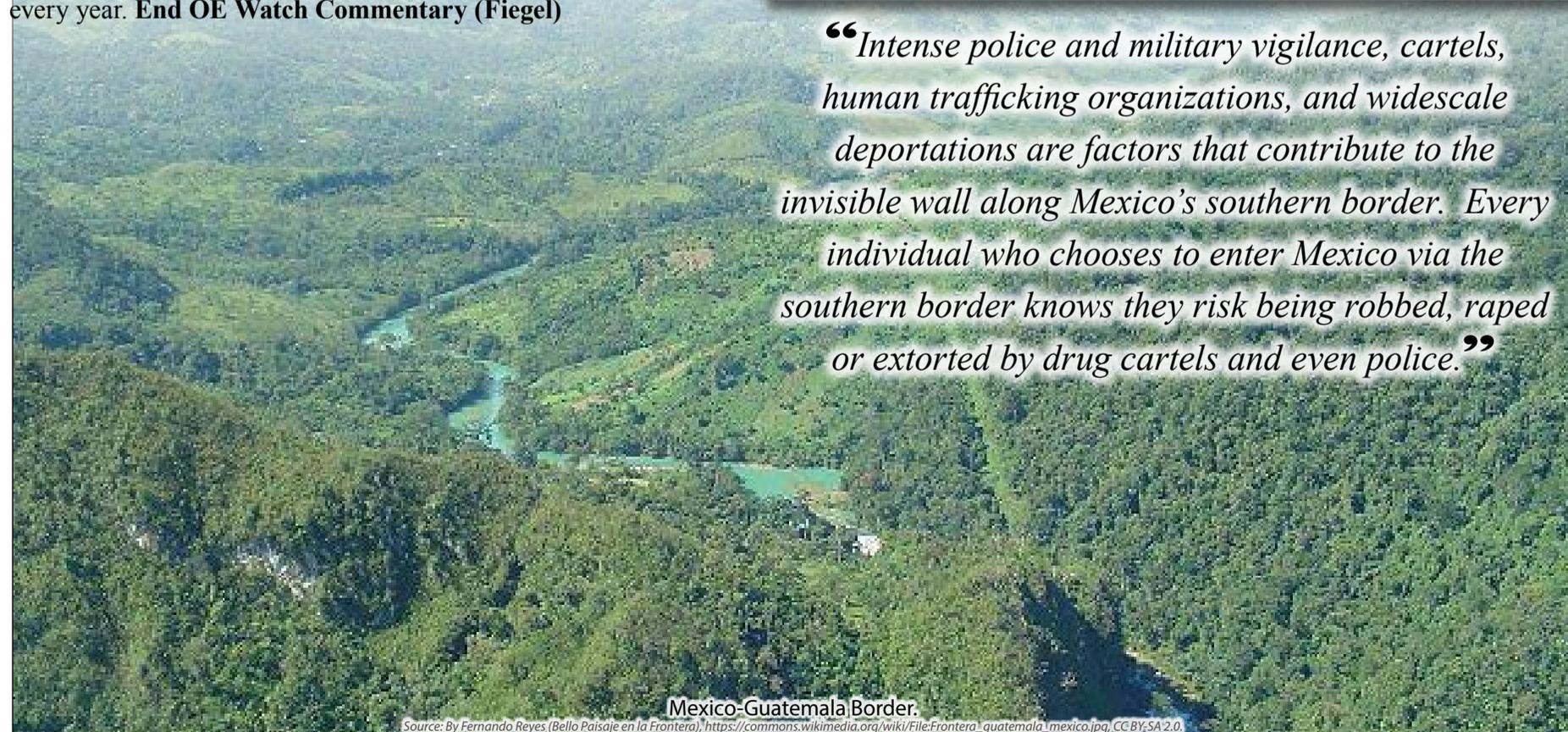
The Southern Border Plan that Mexico has been carrying out since 2014 to prevent the entry of migrants into its territory is now the biggest obstacle for thousands of Hondurans who wish to fulfill the "American Dream."

In Chiapas, Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Tabasco, immigration security has increased and not without consequence. In fact, out of 69,370 deportations of Hondurans recorded in 2016, 47,678 were in Mexican territory against 21,587 that occurred in the United States, according to figures from the Consular and Immigration Observatory of Honduras (Connigho). According to a detailed analysis made by Manuel Antonio Flores, master in population and development and professor of economic and social research of the National Autonomous University of Honduras (UNAH), this phenomenon is classified as an "invisible wall."

Source: "Plan Frontera Sur: entre el desierto y el plomo (South Border Plan: Between the Dream and the Bullets)," *El País*, 18 March 2015. https://elpais.com/elpais/2015/03/06/planeta_futuro/1425657094_335230.html

Plan Frontera Sur has caused routes to disperse significantly. Before, there were two very clear routes. Now there are many routes and migrants are much more likely to suffer violence at the hands of authorities and of organized crime.

"Intense police and military vigilance, cartels, human trafficking organizations, and widescale deportations are factors that contribute to the invisible wall along Mexico's southern border. Every individual who chooses to enter Mexico via the southern border knows they risk being robbed, raped or extorted by drug cartels and even police."



Mexico-Guatemala Border.

Source: By Fernando Reyes (Bello Paisaje en la Frontera), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Frontera_guatemala_mexico.jpg, CC BY-SA 2.0.



Weaponized Drone Linked to Organized Crime in Mexico

OE Watch Commentary: On 20 October 2017, Mexican Federal Police detained four men in Guanajuato, in possession of a weaponized drone that could be remotely detonated. *HispanTV* and other outlets reporting on this incident indicated that the men were allegedly linked to a criminal organization in Mexico. Since the beginning of this year, there has been a significant increase in violence in Guanajuato related to organized crime. The accompanying passages discuss the incident, which may indicate that criminals are incorporating more advanced and dangerous drones.

As the first passage notes, the Attorney General of Guanajuato, Carlos Zamarripa Aguirre, confirmed that the four men were arrested for possession of a drone affixed with a large explosive charge with a remote detonator. The second passage points out that Guanajuato is disputed land among Jalisco New Generation, The Zetas, and Sinaloa cartels.

According to reports, the four men were travelling in a stolen white Mazda SUV when they were stopped by authorities on the Salamanca-Morelia highway. Initially, they were stopped because the vehicle was reported as stolen and the men were suspected of a robbery. When authorities searched the vehicle, they discovered an improvised 3DR drone, taped with explosive materials attached by means of a rope and a remote radiofrequency detonator. According to *HispanTV*, which is a Spanish language news outlet operated by Iran's state-owned broadcasting company, police officials stated they had seen similar explosives before but never attached to a drone. *Periódico am* further reported that, in addition to the drone, authorities seized an AK-47, six cell phones, and other weapons that are used exclusively by the Mexican Army. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**

“... four men were arrested in the Salamanca municipality for possession of a drone affixed with a large explosive charge with a remote detonator.”

Source: “‘Dron bomba’ listo para detonar a distancia (Drone bomb readied for remote detonation),” *Periódico am*, 20 October 2017. <https://www.am.com.mx/2017/10/20/sucesos/dron-bomba-listo-para-detonar-a-distancia-385808>

“The Attorney General of the State, Carlos Zamarripa Aguirre, confirmed that four men were arrested in the Salamanca municipality for possession of a drone affixed with a large explosive charge with a remote detonator.”

Source: “Dron explosivo: Último artefacto del crimen organizado en México (Explosive drone: the latest object of organized crime in Mexico),” *HispanTV*, 21 October 2017. <http://www.hispantv.com/noticias/mexico/357219/incautan-dron-crimen-organizado-violencia>

“Guanajuato is disputed land among Jalisco New Generation, The Zetas, and Sinaloa cartels.”

Source: “Interceptan ¡dron bomba! (Drone bomb intercepted!),” *Periódico am*, 20 October 2017. <https://www.am.com.mx/2017/10/20/leon/sucesos/interceptan-dron-bomba-385781>

“Additionally, three of the men had weapons used exclusively by the Mexican Army.”

1986

2016

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Panama Reaches Milestone in Biometric Registries

OE Watch Commentary: Panama has a state-of-the-art border management system that includes a biometrics-capture program called BITMAP (Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert Program) to identify high-threat travelers. Using this program, the country has captured and shared a substantial amount of data regarding such travelers.

BITMAP was installed in late 2011 at Tocumen International Airport, Panama's largest international airport. Authorities also use the system at other airports across the country, as well as at overland entry points. Panamanian security services use BITMAP to obtain biometric records on foreigners entering the isthmus through various routes. In fact, as the first excerpt claims, Panama has obtained more than 20,000 biometric records since the system was installed. This figure surpasses the biometric records of several nations combined. As part of the BITMAP program, Panamanian authorities examine the fingerprints of foreign nationals entering the country as tourists. When they appear before immigration officials, the agents check whether they were previously registered. If not, they are fingerprinted, photographed, and their passport is digitized and saved in the same record. In certain cases, an iris scan of their eyes is taken.

Individuals entering the country via the jungle or other non-traditional paths are required to register at stations in communities with BITMAP technology. Once processed, those foreign nationals who do not pose security threats to the region are allowed to continue on their way. As the second excerpt discusses, the BITMAP system identified the 25 Pakistani nationals with links to terrorism who were detained last July.

Just a few years ago, a program like BITMAP in Central America was considered to be futuristic, but now it is a reality. More importantly, it continues to serve a key role in identifying high-risk travelers entering Central America and has been cited as a model for the entire world. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Some 25 Pakistani citizens with terrorist links were arrested in Panama after an analysis of biometric encryption made in the country through the BITMAP system.”

Source: “EE.UU. destaca cooperación con Panamá en registro de datos biométricos (U.S. Government Acknowledges Cooperation with Panama in Biometric Registries),” *La Estrella de Panama*, 20 July 2017. <http://laestrella.com.pa/panama/nacional/eeuu-destaca-cooperacion-panama-registro-datos-biometricos/24013724>

A protocol ceremony in acknowledgement of Panamanian Security agencies (Security Council, Ministry of Security, National Migration Service, National Border Service, National Air and Sea Service, and National Police) took place in July 2017 at the United States Embassy in Panama headquarters. The purpose of the ceremony was to acknowledge Panama's 20,000 registries in the biometric database. During the ceremony, both nations discussed the importance of gathering and exchanging information of potentially dangerous individuals as it is a key component to early mitigation of security threats.

Source: “Arrestan a 25 sospechosos de terrorismo en Panamá (25 Suspected Terrorists Arrested in Panama),” *Crítica*, 21 July 2017. <http://www.critica.com.pa/nacional/arrestan-25-sospechosos-de-terrorismo-en-panama-482458>

Some 25 Pakistani citizens with terrorist links were arrested in Panama after an analysis of biometric encryption made in the country through the BITMAP system.

Source: “Panamá lidera la region en registros biométricos (Panama Leads the Region in Biometrics Records),” *Diálogo*, 27 September 2017. <https://dialogo-americas.com/es/articulos/panama-leads-region-biometric-records>

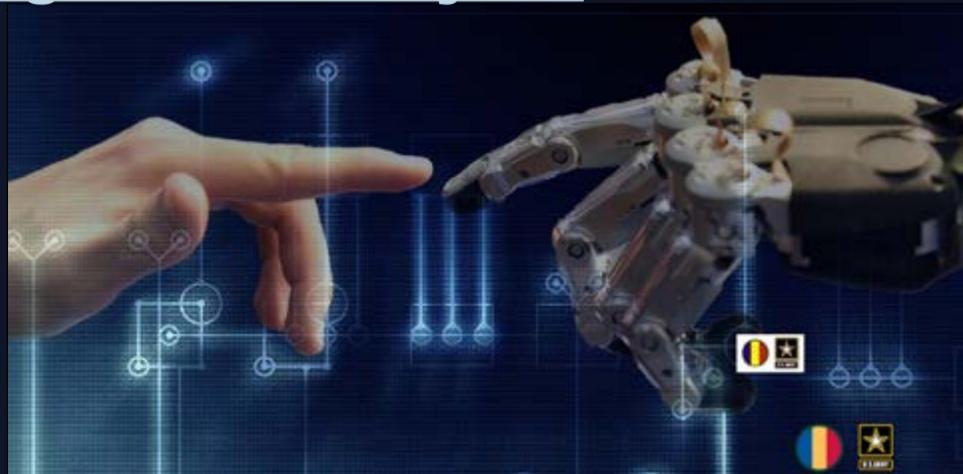
Panamanian authorities capture fingerprints from people entering the country as tourists and from individuals entering the country from the jungle or other non-traditional ports of entry. When they appear before SNM officials, the agents check whether they were previously registered with BITMAP. If not, they are fingerprinted, photographed, and their passport is digitized and saved in the same record. In certain cases, an iris scan of their eyes is taken.

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Cuba Unlikely to End Dual Currency System

OE Watch Commentary: In 1995, the Cuban government announced the beginning of limited economic reforms in response to the ‘Special Period in Time of Peace’ (an extended period of economic crisis that began in 1989 primarily due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union). As the accompanying excerpt from the pro-government source, *La Joven Cuba* notes, “it was decided to not use one single exchange rate, but several simultaneously to achieve greater state profits.” The Dual Currency system replaced the US Dollar as the primary currency for the Cuban economy with the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) and instated a local currency, Moneda Nacional (MN), solely for Cubans. The system included a government set exchange rate between MN and CUC such that “for national persons and citizens, the rates would be 24 or 25 for 1 (presently) and the exchange rate for state companies would be 1 for 1.”

For the Cuban economy, profit is multiplied because the CUC is pegged to the US dollar but the prices of socialist goods are set by the government, offering the Cuban people a barrier to international inflation or economic shocks. In other words, Cubans capture dollars from tourists and other non-nationals by forcing the exchange to CUC without letting inflation of the dollar affect the cost of living. The system is often criticized by Cubans and tourists because many transactions require complex calculation of the exchange rates to make change or determine the cost of a product. For example, if a tourist goes to a restaurant and prices are listed in MN (the citizen’s currency), the restaurant will need to calculate the equivalent cost for the tourist paying in CUC (pegged to the dollar), and make change accordingly.

The Cuban government first announced that it would work to integrate the economy back into a single currency in 2013. Such a conversion would involve devaluing the CUC. However, since 2013, the government has made no major policy change regarding the Dual Currency system. Cuba’s tourist market is a primary source for the government to generate hard currency for buying imports. With over two million tourists per year, the Dual Currency System creates a unique benefit to Cuban currency reserves and allows the state to use tourism profits to subsidize social spending.

The excerpt points out that removing the Dual Currency System without creating alternative sources for companies to generate profit, would be disastrous for the Cuban economy, noting that “about 35 percent of the companies that are profitable today would cease being profitable.” It is unlikely that Cuba will adjust to a single currency system soon. The Dual Currency System has become vital to Cuban economic growth, as a split currency system allows for subsidized goods, access to hard capital, and potentially decreases the cost of living while preventing the effects of international inflation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kelsay)**

“... about 35 percent of the companies that are profitable today would cease being profitable.”



A combination of CUC and MN being used to pay for a meal.

Source: Zach Kelsay.

Source: Alejandro Martínez, “El problema no es la doble moneda (The Problem is not the Double Currency),” *La Joven Cuba*, 13 October 2017. <https://jovencuba.com/2017/10/13/el-problema-no-es-la-doble-moneda/>

On their first steps towards building Socialism, the Russians managed their currency in this manner to solve some internal problems of their economy. Along with the ruble, they created the chervonets ruble. The ruble was the real currency they used for foreign exchange. To avoid chaos in domestic trade and hyperinflation, they used chervonets. For this, they established a fixed exchange rate, maintaining a constant equivalence ratio between the two currencies. This was a temporary measure and they returned to normalcy: one single currency.

When comparing with Cuban practice, we can note the defects of our “duality.” Undoubtedly, this was a measure for resolving objective needs to sustain our economy. It was not distant from the conditions of the formerly mentioned case. But the implementation of this monetary policy had its peculiarities, which allowed the growth of the economy. Precisely these peculiarities have delayed the long-desired monetary unification.

The reason for change was not and is not the same for all economic agents. It was decided to not use one single exchange rate, but several simultaneously to achieve greater state profits. For national persons and citizens, the rates would be 24 or 25 for 1 (presently) and the exchange rate for state companies would be 1 for 1. This made the income of companies to multiply as much such as the ratio of the exchange rate, concealing the true productive efficiency that they could reach. Thus, part of the profitability of the socialist state enterprises is subordinated to the anomaly of this system, delaying the desired economic benefit: the unification of the exchange rates. If this happened right now, it would mean a significant drop in business profitability. To be concrete: about 35 percent of the companies that are profitable today would cease being profitable.



China to Build Military Maintenance Facility in Thailand

OE Watch Commentary: On 8 October, six months ahead of schedule, China sent the first batch of 28 NORINCO-built VT-4 tanks to Thailand. According to the first accompanying article, the VT-4s will replace Thailand's ageing M-41 light tanks and will be commissioned into a newly established division in Khonkhaen Province, Thailand-- a plateau that borders Laos and Cambodia. The Royal Thai Army's military equipment standardization board must first inspect and carefully vet the tanks prior to completely accepting them. According to *Defence Blog*, an independent military news source, the VT-4 is "equipped with turbocharged diesel developing 1,200 horse power coupled to an automatic transmission." It weighs 52 tons and is armed with a 125mm smoothbore gun and fitted with an automatic loader. It also has a secondary armament of coaxial 7.62-mm machine gun and remote-controlled 12.7mm machine guns. The first article explains that ten more VT-4s are expected to be shipped to Thailand within a year.

According to the second accompanying article, China plans to move forward to build a repair and maintenance center in Thailand to create a more efficient means to maintain the tanks and other military equipment. Along with setting up the maintenance center, the second article places hope in that "some technologies will be transferred as well," stating that "this is a key component of Chinese arms sales to Thailand as it will eventually enhance self-reliance." It will be interesting to see how this growing partnership develops and what level of trust China ultimately puts in Thailand with its technology, some of which could be proprietary. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Cooperation with an allied country to build a military production facility is essential because, in the future, when some military hardware from that country is out of service, equipment will need to be repaired and maintained...”

Source: Sompong Nonhasa, "VT4 Tanks Reach Thailand Ahead of Schedule," *Shepard Media*, 13 October 2017. <https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/landwarfareintl/vt4-tanks-reach-thailand-ahead-schedule/>

A \$137 million contract had been signed in March 2016 for these tanks to be delivered to the (RTA) by March 2018. The project will replace the ageing M41 light tank that will soon retire.

Additionally, China will build a logistics and maintenance centre for the RTA in Thailand, where Chinese technicians and engineers will be stationed.

The army will procure a second batch of ten VT4s with a budget of \$55 million under FY2017 funding, plus it will seek a third batch of ten more tanks. The earliest of these could be delivered within a year.

Source: Dylan Malyasov "China unveils first VT4 tanks produced for Royal Thai Army," *Defence Blog.com*, 1 August 2017. <http://defence-blog.com/army/china-unveils-first-vt4-tanks-produced-for-royal-thai-army.html>

The VT4 is armed with a 125mm smoothbore gun and fitted with an automatic loader. Secondary armament of VT4 consists of coaxial 7.62-mm machine gun and remote-controlled 12.7mm MG operated by the tank commander.

Source: Sompong Nondhasa, "D&S 2017: China to Build Maintenance Centre in Thailand," *Shepard Media*, 2 November 2017. <https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/mil-log/ds-2017-china-build-maintenance-centre-thailand/>

A local repair and maintenance centre will benefit equipment support in the future.

Apart from setting up the centre, some technologies will be transferred too. This is a key component of Chinese arms sales to Thailand as it will eventually enhance self-reliance.

Deputy Minister of Defence Gen Udomdej Sitabutr commented, 'Cooperation with an allied country to build a military production facility is essential because, in the future, when some military hardware from that country is out of service, equipment will need to be repaired and maintained. If that can be done by ourselves, or some key spare parts can be built ourselves, then we can save a lot of budget to solve those issues.'



A VT-4 tank undergoing inspection.

Source: Kekoku, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d1/VT-4_in_Thailand.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.



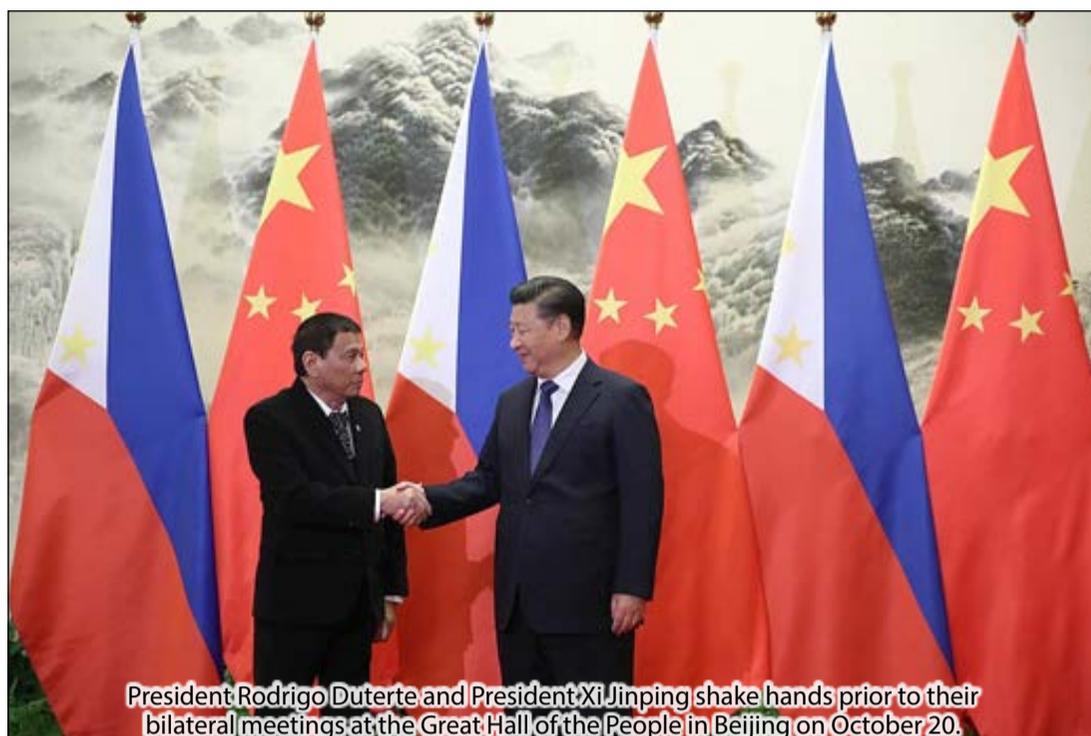
China's Military Assistance to the Philippines

OE Watch Commentary: The People's Republic of China (PRC), often noted for its outwardly unconditional foreign aid, where the PRC supplies monetary, capital, and military goods to governments with whom the country is seeking closer ties, has begun to increase military assistance to the Philippines. As the excerpt from the Chinese pro-government *Global Times* points out, "China handed 50 million yuan (\$7.53 million) of military assistance to the Philippine government to help combat terrorism." The excerpt also indicates that earlier in June, "a second batch - 3,000 assault rifles, 3 million rounds of ammunition and 90 sniper scopes - also arrived in the Philippines. The aid sent a positive signal of practical Sino-Philippine cooperation and anti-terrorism collaboration."

According to the second excerpt from a pro-Philippine government source, on 23 October, the June aid was successful in ending a five-month long siege by terrorists lined to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Philippine city of Marawi, which displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The end of the siege also served as fodder for increased cooperation at a meeting between the Philippine and PRC governments on 25 October, where both sides sought an increase in "bilateral security engagements," leading to an increase in counterterrorism and security operations.

While the PRC is actively locked in territorial disputes with the Philippines, the partnership for counterterrorism potentially signals "a starting point not only for friendlier Beijing-Manila ties but also for a closer relationship between China and Southeast Asia." The extent of the partnership, however, remains to be seen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Shanks)**

“Meeting at the Department of National Defense, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and his Chinese counterpart Gen. Chang Wanquan agreed to increase the two nations’ bilateral security engagements in the coming months in a bid to strengthen their defense and military relations.”



President Rodrigo Duterte and President Xi Jinping shake hands prior to their bilateral meetings at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on October 20.

Source: By King Rodriguez of Philippine Presidential Department (<https://goo.gl/hLaA8G>) [Public Domain].

Source: "Beijing's aid to anti-terror fight supports regional stability," *Global Times*, 23 October 2017. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1071634.shtml>

On June 28, China handed 50 million yuan (\$7.53 million) of military assistance to the Philippine government to help combat terrorism. Duterte received the weapons in person. Earlier this month, a second batch - 3,000 assault rifles, 3 million rounds of ammunition and 90 sniper scopes - also arrived in the Philippines. The aid sent a positive signal of practical Sino-Philippine cooperation and anti-terrorism collaboration....

This can be a starting point not only for friendlier Beijing-Manila ties but also for a closer relationship between China and Southeast Asia. More and more facts have demonstrated that cooperation between Southeast Asian countries and China is conducive to regional stability.

Source: "Manila, Beijing eye transfer of more Chinese weapons, cooperation in fight vs terror," *Philstar—Global*, 25 October 2017. <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/10/25/1752394/manila-beijing-eye-transfer-more-chinese-weapons-cooperation-fight-vs>

“Meeting at the Department of National Defense, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana and his Chinese counterpart Gen. Chang Wanquan agreed to increase the two nations’ bilateral security engagements in the coming months in a bid to strengthen their defense and military relations.”

...Lorenzana and Chang agreed to enhance their fight against terrorism and extremism, just days after the Philippines announced the end of the siege of Marawi City in Mindanao.

To achieve this goal, the two nations are looking at the possibility of improved intelligence sharing, joint counterterrorism exercises and specialized training.

Chang said there were already plans for China to donate another batch of weapons and equipment later this year or early next year to help Manila in fighting terrorism which the two nations consider as a “common enemy.”

Lorenzana also thanked China for its support in the military’s operations in Marawi including its earlier donations of rifles and ammunition which the defense chief said, “helped a lot in our fight against terrorists in Marawi.”...



Duterte Seeks to Ease Tension in the South China Sea

OE Watch Commentary: On 30 and 31 October, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte visited Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe in Japan. The excerpted Chinese-language article from *dwnnews.com* offers a Chinese perspective on the outcome of his visit. The article suggests that China is satisfied that Duterte sought to ease tensions over concerns about Chinese activities in the South China Sea. The article states that Duterte expressed to Abe that he was not prepared to become enemies with China and that dialogue was the best way to resolve disputes in the South China Sea. Duterte also said he was hopeful about China not expanding its presence in the South China Sea or occupying new reefs and islands.

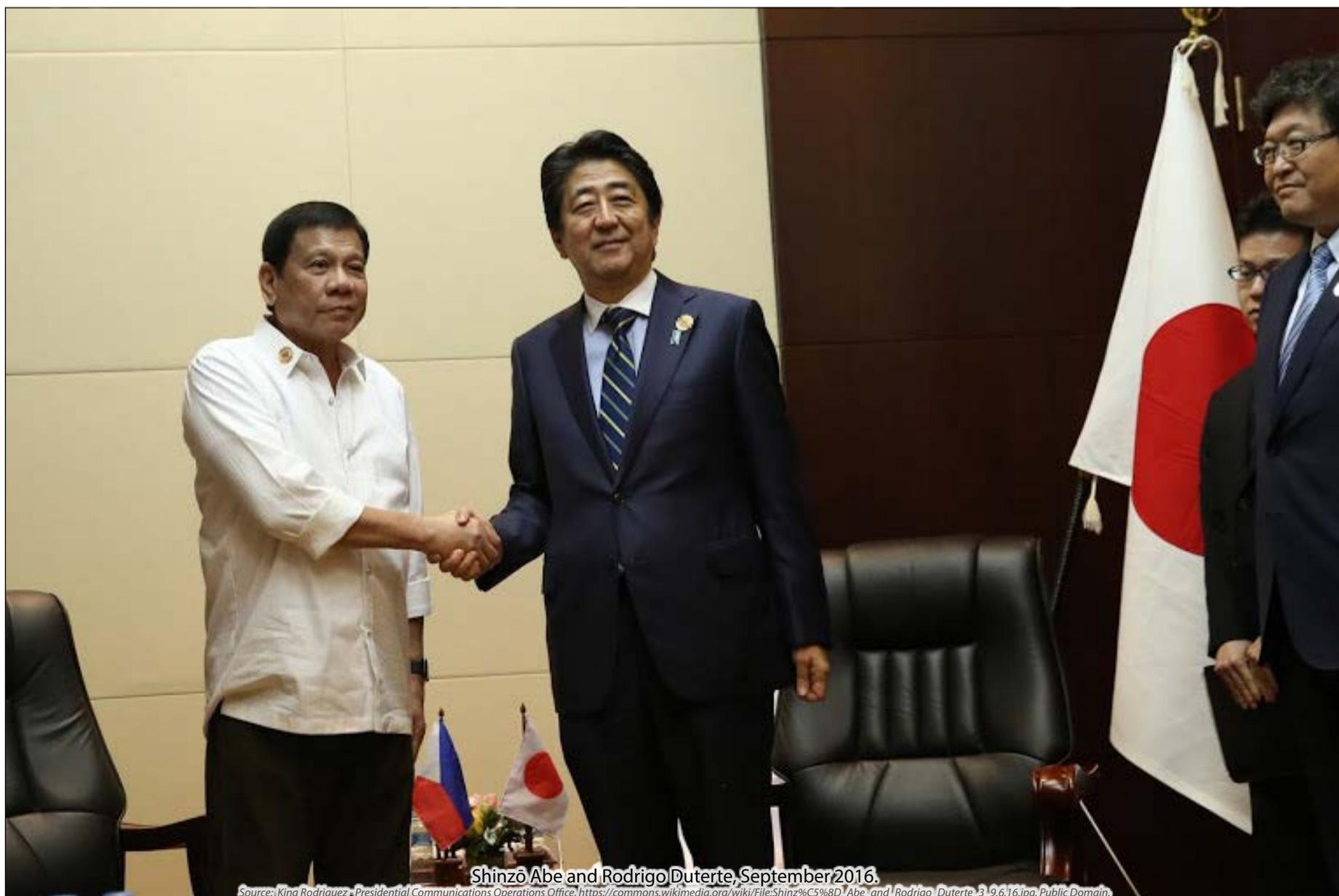
The article notes that Duterte reiterated that Japan and the Philippines should not aggravate the “superpower,” and that it was pointless to protest China’s construction of artificial reefs and islands in the South China Sea. These artificial reefs, according to Duterte, should be treated differently than other natural contested islands and reefs that China is occupying.

The article discusses that the Japanese government spokesman did not elaborate on Japan’s positions after the meeting, except to say that freedom of navigation issues were discussed. Duterte’s stance towards China is less confrontational than that of the Japanese government and is welcome for China. This is likely why *dwnnews.com* emphasized Duterte’s statements in the article. It may also explain why the Japanese government spokesman had few comments after the meeting between Abe and Duterte. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “访日回国 杜特尔特立即表态不与中国为敌 (Visiting Japan Duterte Immediately Says China is Not an Enemy),” *dwnnews.com*, 1 November 2017. <http://news.dwnnews.com/global/news/2017-11-01/60020965.html>

President Rodrigo Duterte said on 31 October that he hopes China will honor its promise not to occupy new islands and reefs in the South China Sea. Duterte also reiterated that the resolution of maritime affairs meant that the superpower should not be annoyed. After returning from his second visit to Japan, Duterte told reporters that he is still optimistic that China will cease new expansion in the South China Sea in accordance with the agreement reached between the two sides. Duterte also said that the Philippines is not prepared to be enemies with China and that dialogue with Beijing is still an important strategy for preventing China’s dissatisfaction and settling maritime disputes. A Japanese government spokesman said Abe and Duterte also discussed maritime security and free navigation issues, including in the South China Sea, but did not elaborate.

“Duterte.. said that the Philippines is not prepared to be enemies with China and that dialogue with Beijing is still an important strategy for preventing China’s dissatisfaction and settling maritime disputes.”



Shinzo Abe and Rodrigo Duterte, September 2016.

Source: King Rodriguez - Presidential Communications Operations Office, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shinzo_Abe_and_Rodrigo_Duterte_3_9_6_16.jpg, Public Domain.



Chinese and Indian Competition in Space Heats Up

by Sudha Ramachandran

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/chinese-indian-competition-space-heats/>

OE Watch Commentary: India and China have been competing for markets, resources and influence on land and sea, especially in Asia, Africa and the Indian Ocean. This competition is spilling over into outer space. China and India are using satellites in space to win influence and secure their geo-political and economic interests. The accompanying passages from Chinese and Indian sources provide insight into this competition.

As the first accompanying passage notes, on 5 May India began a new diplomatic push in South Asia by launching the “South Asia satellite” into space. Built and launched by the government-run Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), the satellite will provide communications and meteorological data to India’s South Asian neighbors, including Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The satellite is an attempt to not only strengthen India’s ties with its smaller neighbors and promote India-led regional co-operation but also to contain mounting Chinese influence in the region and counter its space co-operation with these countries.

For example, China’s influence in Sri Lanka has grown due to robust bilateral economic and defense ties. Space collaboration has taken this cooperation to a higher level. In 2012, China put a commercial satellite into space for Sri Lanka. As the second accompanying passage discusses, China is now extending its Beidou Navigation Satellite (BDS) System to Sri Lanka and is setting up at least 10 Continuously Operating Reference Stations there for this purpose. Having drawn Sri Lanka into its orbit, China is attempting to build additional space partnerships with Afghanistan, Nepal and the Maldives—much to Delhi’s alarm. In response, India has turned to space diplomacy to court neighbors and allies in East Asia. As the third passage discusses, India set up a dual civilian- and military- use satellite tracking and imaging center in Vietnam “that will give Hanoi access to pictures from Indian earth observation satellites that cover the region, including China and the South China Sea.”

China’s space program is more advanced, better-funded and extends over a larger range of activities than India’s more focused program. China’s space program is likely to keep it ahead in the Sino-Indian race in and over space. In the short term, Sino-Indian competition can be expected to deepen in the commercial satellite launch business. This competition is likely to intensify as more private players enter the space sectors of the two countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ramachandran)**

“India made its biggest space diplomacy push today when... the ‘South Asia’ satellite was launched successfully... with an objective to provide different communication applications in Ku-band with coverage over South Asian countries...”

“China’s home-grown BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) will expand its cooperation to Thailand and Sri Lanka, and then to the entire Southeast Asia, in a bid to go global...”

Source: “India aces space diplomacy test with Modi’s satellite gift to South Asia; 14 things to know,” *Economic Times/India Times*, 5 May 2017. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/science/india-aces-space-diplomacy-test-with-modis-satellite-gift-to-south-asia-14-things-to-know/articleshow/58534107.cms>

India made its biggest space diplomacy push today when the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-F09), carrying the GSAT-9 or the “South Asia” satellite, was launched successfully at 4.57 p.m. from Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh...

The GSAT-9 has been launched with an objective to provide different communication applications in Ku-band with coverage over South Asian countries, the ISRO said...

Data from GSAT-9 will be shared with Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It was also offered to Pakistan, which turned it down. India is also working with Afghanistan but a deal has still not be ironed out.

Source: “China’s BeiDou system to expand cooperation to SE Asia,” *China Daily*, 1 April 2017. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-04/01/content_28774844.htm

China’s home-grown BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) will expand its cooperation to Thailand and Sri Lanka, and then to the entire Southeast Asia, in a bid to go global, the system’s operator has said...

Wuhan Optics Valley BeiDou this year will cooperate with Sri Lankan related authorities to develop at least 10 CORS [Continuously Operating Reference Stations] in the South Asian country for such applications as land surveying and mapping, ocean fishery and disaster warning, Du [general manager of Wuhan Optics Valley BeiDou Holding Group Co.] said.

Source: “India to build satellite tracking station in Vietnam that offers eye on China,” *India Today*, 25 January 2016. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-to-build-satellite-tracking-station-in-vietnam-that-offers-eye-on-china/1/578967.html>

India will set up a satellite tracking and imaging centre in southern Vietnam that will give Hanoi access to pictures from Indian earth observation satellites that cover the region, including China and the South China Sea, Indian officials said.



By Road and Rail to the Roof of the World

OE Watch Commentary: Tension continue to rise between China and India over the disputed territory of Arunachal Pradesh. As the first accompanying passage from *Hindustan Times* discusses, India recently celebrated another milestone in its race to build road and rail infrastructure in the disputed area—making military logistical lines shorter and more capable. Until recently India had not put much effort into improving the roads and any other means of transportation within Arunachal Pradesh. China protests all infrastructure moves made by India into Arunachal Pradesh.

India has its work cut out for it. The terrain from the Brahmaputra River on the Assam plane, which sits at roughly 200 ft above sea level, to the border post with China at Bum La, which sits at 15,200 ft above sea level, is a very steep rise. The cost of road and rail would be very expensive and time consuming. There is also the fear in India that a good road, or a road at all, once constructed could likewise be used by the Chinese to invade deep into Arunachal Pradesh, as they did in 1962, when lead Chinese forces reached as far south as Bomdila before retreating northward back across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) or de-facto border with China.

However, as the second passage notes, now that China is building its own roads and rail links on the Himalayan plateau, India has announced and engaged in various road and rail link projects. The latest logistical round fired was inaugurated months ago as India opened up rail service between the State of Assam and the Arunachal Pradesh frontier town of Bhalukpong.

Bhalukpong is the starting point for all travelers seeking to go up the Himalayan face northward towards the Chinese border or LAC. It is also the only road to Tawang, a favorite place for tourists and Buddhist pilgrims en route to its historical monastery. Foreign visitors must stop in Bhalukpong to pick up a Protected Area Permit (PAP) to continue any further north. After securing documentation, there is only the one road from Bhalukpong to Tawang. It is a painstakingly slow route. Massive rock and mudslides frequently wash out the road and there have been multiple traffic fatalities due to vehicles running off or being swept off the road. There is commercial helicopter service to Tawang but it is spotty and dangerous due to weather. In October an Mi-17 Indian Air Force helicopter taking off from the helipad at Tawang crashed, killing all seven on board.

Road and railway are vital elements to India's strategic goals in the disputed territory. However, it took five years to finish the section to Bhalukpong. It will be an even more formidable and time consuming engineering task to connect Bhalukpong to Tawang by rail, likely taking years or decades to complete if it is completed at all. In the meantime India continues to modernize the road. (For more information, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dtwv8_jBrmw) **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Indian Army trucks approach Sela Pass from Tawang.
Source: Dodge Billingsley.

(continued)



Continued: By Road and Rail to the Roof of the World

“Bhalukpong is the gateway to Tawang 330km uphill by road. The project brings Indian trains 50km closer to China border.”

Source: “Train to Tawang near China border in Arunachal closer to reality,” *Hindustan Times*, 4 April 2017. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/train-to-tawang-near-china-border-in-arunachal-closer-to-reality/story-uz71E02T2wK91mQAUyhAHK.html>

India’s bid to take trains to Himalayan heights has inched closer to reality with the start of survey work for a broad gauge track to Tawang, the focus of China’s claim on Arunachal Pradesh.

Source: “Train to Tawang brings China border 50km closer to India,” *Hindustan Times*, 10 August 2015. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/train-to-tawang-brings-china-border-50km-closer-to-india/story-e6z6gH3y1RUxxAQfv0bXhI.html>

Last year, China opened a railway line connecting Tibetan capital Lhasa to Shigatse 257km west. More importantly for New Delhi, Shigatse is north of Sikkim and a show of Beijing’s intent to expand the Chinese railway network to the politically charged border with India and Nepal.

This made the NDA government plan railway connectivity to areas bordering China. Earlier this year, the Railway Board cleared a proposal for final location survey of a proposed 378km track from central Assam’s Sonitpur district to Tawang. The alignment envisaged starts with the 52km Dekargaon-Bhalukpong stretch laid in the last five years.



From “The Pragmatic Dragon: China’s Grand Strategy and Boundary Settlements.”
Source: Used by permission of the author Eric Hyer.



India's Effort to Counter China's Growing Naval Presence

OE Watch Commentary: The continued expansion of China's naval presence in the South China Sea region has been a cause for concern for its neighbors. According to the accompanying passage, prompted by its growing concern, India is seeking to join forces with 10 area "friendly countries" to try to "counter conventional and non-conventional threats through cooperation." The article explains that for the first time, India is offering to share "real time information and intelligence" with the navies of regional countries including Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri-Lanka, and Mauritius. For example, through the GSAT-7 satellite – Rukmini, the Indian Navy can offer a complete picture of the Indian Ocean. The intelligence would then allow Indonesia, Mauritius, and Malaysia to coordinate with India's Navy to mobilize ships as needed to counter any threats. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: "Real Time Intelligence Sharing with Friendly Countries Offered by India Amidst Increasing Chinese Presence," *India Today*, 3 November 2017. <http://idrw.org/real-time-intelligence-sharing-with-friendly-countries-offered-by-india-amidst-increasing-chinese-presence/>

As China becomes more aggressive in the South China Sea region, India has formed a new grouping of friendly countries and Navies in the Indian Ocean to explore areas of mutual interest and cooperation.

It has got together Navies of 10 friendly countries under a single umbrella.

Once the information and intelligence sharing agreement is operational, it would mean countries like Indonesia, Mauritius, and Malaysia would be acting in coordination with India Navy. "On the basis of information shared by India, Indonesia and Malaysia can mobilize ships to handle threats," a senior officer who was part of the discussion told India Today.

Speaking exclusively to India Today the First Admiral of Indonesia B. Irawanto said, "It is great move, no one can take on all threats alone, there [is a] need for cooperation and coordination between friendly navies."

“...no one can take on all threats alone, there [is a] need for cooperation and coordination between friendly navies.”

Indonesia and Malaysia Trying to Control Flow of Militants

OE Watch Commentary: Indonesia and Malaysia have been working together to add five joint command posts along the borders of Sabah, Sarawak, and Kalimantan and to boost joint trilateral maritime patrols with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines, with Brunei and Singapore as observers. According to the accompanying article from a Malaysian news source, there are currently four posts along the borders of Sabah and Sarawak. The plan aims to increase patrols to control the flow of militants. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: "Malaysia, Indonesia to Boost Border Patrols to Curb Militancy," *The Star*, 28 September 2017. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/09/28/malaysia-indonesia-to-boost-border-patrols-to-curb-militancy/>

Malaysia and Indonesia would be adding five more joint command posts along the borders of Sabah, Sarawak and Kalimantan to curb any possible militant movement in the region.

Hishammuddin said that along with the setting up of more posts, the joint trilateral maritime patrols by Malaysia, Indonesia, and Philippines as well as Brunei and Singapore as observers, will be boosted to a three-pronged approach which includes land and air patrols.

"The five posts, along with the four located in Ba'Kelalan, Lubok Antu, Biawak and Seliku, will increase our presence and patrol frequencies to make sure movements of unwanted parties like militants can be stopped"...

The joint air patrols initiative will be launched on October 12 at the Subang Air Force Base. He said before the launch of the land patrols, there would be joint exercises between the countries' armies.

“The five posts, along with the four located in Ba'Kelalan, Lubok Antu, Biawak and Seliku, will increase our presence and patrol frequencies to make sure movements of unwanted parties like militants can be stopped...”





Drug Trafficking in Southeast Asia

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article describes Thailand's largest ever seizure of crystal meth, shedding light on the ongoing drug problem and the actors behind it in the Golden Triangle-- an area that covers Myanmar's Shan State, Laos and northern Thailand. According to the article, drugs are "churned out in unprecedented volume by Myanmar-based drug labs operated by the Wa (a self-governing ethnic group)." These drugs are then smuggled from Myanmar through Laos and into Thailand, destined for Malaysia or even Australia.

According to the website *People's of the World*, approximately half of the world's one million ethnic Wa live in Myanmar, where they are mostly concentrated in the southeastern and northeastern parts of Shan State. Previously, the ethnic Wa grew poppy to produce opium. However, recently they have been focusing more on producing crystal meth. In 1989, the Wa had formed a military wing, which the highlighted article describes as a "powerful militia." The article explains that the Wa churn out ice, heroin and highly-addictive caffeine-laced methamphetamine pills to fund their powerful militia. For more information on the ethnic Wa, see <http://www.peoplesoftheworld.org/text?people=Wa>. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: "Thai Police Make 'Largest Ever' Crystal Meth Seizure," *Singapore News*, 17 October 2017. <https://sg.news.yahoo.com/thai-police-largest-ever-crystal-meth-seizure-091322948.html>

Police said the seizure was made on Monday in the northeastern province of Nakhon Ratchasima when a pick-up truck tried to evade a checkpoint before dawn.

It (the drug) is being churned out in unprecedented volume by Myanmar-based drug labs operated by the Wa -- a self-governing ethnic group behind the drug trade in the Golden Triangle which covers Myanmar's Shan State, Laos and northern Thailand.

Drugs are smuggled south into Thailand, mostly destined for Malaysia or even Australia -- the world's largest per capita consumer of crystal meth -- where the price surges.

The Wa churn out ice, heroin, and highly-addictive caffeine-laced methamphetamine pills to fund their powerful militia.

“The Wa churn out ice, heroin, and highly-addictive caffeine-laced methamphetamine pills to fund their powerful militia.”



Nandeng, Wa-Bang, Northern Shan State, Myanmar.

Source: David and Jessie Flickr Account, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/74568056@N00/3880588519>, CC BY 2.0.



Security for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

OE Watch Commentary: When the government of Pakistan signed agreements with China to develop infrastructure projects as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) several years ago, it considered infrastructure security an important factor alongside economic growth. The accompanying excerpted articles demonstrate that a recent incident involving the kidnapping and murder of two Chinese citizens in Pakistan is causing Pakistani authorities to increase security to protect CPEC projects. The articles also provide insight into how the incident may impact Chinese-Pakistani relations.

The first article comes from the Chinese government news agency *Xinhua* and it reports on China's reaction to the announcement that "DNA reports have confirmed that the two persons killed in Balochistan in June 2017 were the same two Chinese nationals, who were kidnapped from Quetta in May 2017." The article notes that Pakistan already provided China information in June that the two abductees were "probably dead." The quote from the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson stating that it "will continue to support Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism and safeguard national stability" shows that China has not reacted harshly to the news. The two Chinese citizens killed did not work on CPEC projects and the Chinese government appears to be satisfied with Pakistan's efforts for security on CPEC projects so far. Pakistan established the Special Security Division in 2016 with 9000 soldiers from the Army and several thousand paramilitary personnel under the command of a two star general to protect CPEC projects.

The second article from *Dawn*, a widely read English-language newspaper in Pakistan, reports on new security units that will be set up to protect Chinese citizens working in Pakistan. The article notes that Pakistani officials "decided to establish two more specialised units in Sindh — in addition to an existing one — for the security of Chinese nationals working in the province" and that the two units "would be set up in Hyderabad and Sukkur, respectively, as the existing unit was responsible for the security of Chinese nationals in Karachi alone." The article also reports that the current unit providing protection for Chinese workers is made up of "as many as 1,358 personnel, mostly retired army men" and that officials believe that "1,469 personnel were needed for the identical purpose." It is significant that Pakistan decided to double the number of personnel assigned to protect Chinese citizens working on various CPEC projects, but it is worth noting that the new units will not be assigned in Balochistan where the two Chinese people were abducted and killed.

The kidnapping and murder of two Chinese citizens in Balochistan earlier this year does not appear to have caused any major issues in Chinese-Pakistani relations. The formation of two new units to protect Chinese workers demonstrates steps Pakistan is taking as it continues to work on CPEC projects and conduct the nation-wide counterterrorism effort 'Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad.' **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

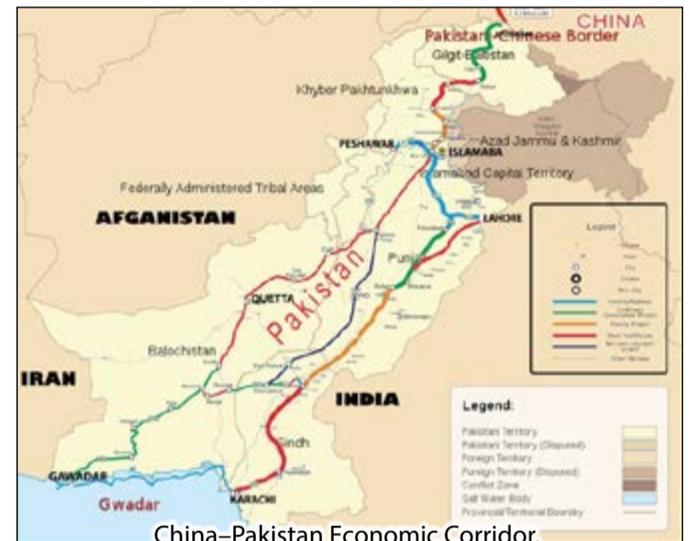
“It was decided that two more units would be set up in Hyderabad and Sukkur, respectively, as the existing unit was responsible for the security of Chinese nationals in Karachi alone.”

Source: Imtiaz Ali, "New security units to be set up in Sindh for Chinese working on CPEC projects," *Dawn*, 28 October 2017. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1366711>

Police on Friday decided to establish two more specialised units in Sindh — in addition to an existing one — for the security of Chinese nationals working in the province on projects relating to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). A meeting chaired by Inspector General of Police A.D. Khawaja at the Central Police Office also decided to recommend to the provincial government the recruitment of over 1,400 policemen for the new units. The participants exchanged views about "restructuring" of the Special Protection Units (SPUs) and provision of security to the CPEC...

It was decided that two more units would be set up in Hyderabad and Sukkur, respectively, as the existing unit was responsible for the security of Chinese nationals in Karachi alone...Informed sources told Dawn that the meeting was informed that presently as many as 1,358 personnel, mostly retired army men, had been recruited for providing security to the Chinese nationals working on CPEC-related projects in the province.

The meeting was told that as many as 1,469 personnel were needed for the identical purpose, but retired army personnel who also met the required criteria were not available in Sindh for recruitment. Therefore, it was decided that 1,469 fresh recruitments would be made in the police department for the new units. The new recruits would be selected from the waiting list of policemen...Meanwhile, the IGP issued directions for setting up a Chinese desk at Karachi airport where personnel of Special Branch would be deployed for foreigners' security...



China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.
Source: Javedpk05 via Wikimedia Commons,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AChina_Pakistan_Economic_Corridor.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: "Pakistan confirms death of 2 kidnapped Chinese nationals," *Xinhua*, 30 October 2017. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-10/30/c_136715642.htm

Pakistan on Monday confirmed the death of two Chinese nationals who were killed in southwestern Balochistan province days after they were kidnapped from Quetta, the provincial capital in May this year. "The DNA reports have confirmed that the two persons killed in Balochistan in June 2017 were the same two Chinese nationals, who were kidnapped from Quetta in May, 2017," Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement... "The Government of Pakistan would continue to conduct thorough investigation and apprehend the perpetrators of this crime and to bring them to justice," the statement said...

The Pakistani side provided China information in June that the two abductees were "probably dead." Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying, speaking on the matter in June, has stressed that China opposes terrorism in any form, and that China will continue to support Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism and safeguard national stability.



The Armenian Security Cooperation Quandary

OE Watch Commentary: On 12 October 2017, the Armenian Parliament approved a deal for a \$100 million loan from Russia to purchase weapons. While at first glance the deal does not stand out from previous agreements, the accompanying excerpted articles point out some noteworthy aspects of it.

The first article from *lin.am*, a Russian language news website in Armenia, discusses the agreement and mentions how a “previous loan related to military-technical cooperation for \$200 million between Armenia and Russia was signed in June 2015.” The recent \$100 million loan agreement is reportedly the first half of another \$200 million loan, though a key difference is that in 2015 Russia stipulated which weapons Armenia could purchase.

The article also includes some analysis as to what Armenia could acquire with the loan and notes the possibility to purchase self-propelled artillery systems. According to estimates of the inventories of the Armed Forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan, self-propelled artillery is one area in which Azerbaijan has an advantage, including double the overall number of systems and more modern systems like the 152mm 2S19 Msta-S. The expert quoted in the article believes “Russia will not agree to sell the “Msta-S” self-propelled howitzers to Armenia” and instead points to the 152mm 2S5 Giantsint-S which he notes “are somewhat outdated, but practically fulfill the same combat tasks.”

The piece from *Lragir*, an independent Armenian news website, is a brief interview with Eduard Sharmazanov, the Vice President of the Armenian National Assembly and it provides an official viewpoint of the deal and the security situation facing Armenia. Sharmazanov mentions that the loan agreement allows Armenia to purchase weapons “from Russia not at market prices, but [at Russian] domestic prices.” The purchase of weapons at prices the Russian military receives domestically is something that takes place through Armenia’s membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), though Sharmazanov’s comment that “The weapons that Russia will sell to Armenia for \$100 million could be sold to others for \$500 million,” makes it appear as if Armenia is getting preferential treatment.

Lastly, the interviewer asks Sharmazanov about the ongoing Russian sales of weapons to Azerbaijan, which has been, as Sharmazanov notes, “...one of the painful issues in Armenian-Russian relations.” In the past few years Armenian officials have been increasingly vocal about their frustration over Russia’s sales of weapons to Azerbaijan and have made attempts to look for additional security cooperation partners. If the recent approval of the loan from Russia is any indication, Armenia remains closely allied with Russia despite the quandary. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Armenian officials consider [Russian] weapons sales to Azerbaijan to be one of the painful issues in Armenian-Russian relations...”

Source: Sargsyan, Aram. “Какие виды вооружений будут поставлены Армении по новому военному кредиту? (Which types of weapons will Armenia be given from the new military loan?),” *lin.am*, 23 October 2017. <http://ru.lin.am/1203132.html>

Experts continue to discuss the meaning and goals of the new Russian “military loan.” Remember that on 12 October, the Armenian government approved an agreement to receive a new “military loan” from Russia, upon which \$100 million will be provided for preferential terms for the acquisition of modern weapons and equipment from Russia...The previous loan related to military-technical cooperation for \$200 million between Armenia and Russia was signed in June 2015.

What problems will the new batch of Russian weapons solve for the Armenian Armed Forces, keeping in mind the acquisition by Azerbaijan of the same Russian and other countries’ weapons worth billions?...

Assessing the military-technical aspects of this and looking at the question of what types of weapons will be provided to the Armed Forces of Armenia under the new agreement, (expert) Eduard Abrahamyan (noted), that the Armenia Army needs powerful artillery systems...but that Russia will not agree to sell the “Msta-S” self-propelled howitzers to Armenia...“I think that the \$100 million loan will give us an opportunity to purchase (other) mobile artillery, which is noticeably non-existent in the armed forces...it is realistic that Armenia will acquire the 2S5 “Giantsint,” which are somewhat outdated, but practically fulfill the same combat tasks. The purchase of these corresponds to obtaining inexpensive weapons...

Source: Папуян, Сирануш. “Если вы знаете, где можно купить оружие дешевле, скажите (If you know where it is possible to buy cheaper weapons, then say so),” *Lragir*, 17 October 2017. <http://www.lragir.am/index/rus/0/interview/view/58776>

Interview with Eduard Sharmazanov, Vice President of the Armenian National Assembly

Lragir: *Mr. Sharmazanov, how do you regard the new loan agreement (for weapons)...Are we not just increasing our dependence on Russia?*

Sharmazanov: *...Russia already provided Armenia with a \$200 million loan and now agrees to give another \$100 million at our request...complaining about this loan is equal to complaining about strengthening security...At the moment not a single country can provide us with weapons on such terms, or even terms close to it...Parliament passed a decision, according to which Armenia purchases weapons from Russia not at market prices, but (Russian) domestic prices. Many in Armenia protested and asked why Russia is slow with deliveries of weapons in the framework of the \$200 million loan. The weapons are delivered...The weapons that Russia will sell to Armenia for \$100 million could be sold to others for \$500 million.*

Lragir: *Do Russia’s sales of weapons to Azerbaijan also come from our interests?*

Sharmazanov: *Our position is known – Armenian officials consider [Russian] weapons sales to Azerbaijan to be one of the painful issues in Armenian-Russian relations...*



A New Chapter in Uzbek-Russian Security Cooperation

OE Watch Commentary: Shavkat Mirziyoyev's first year as Uzbek President has been notable for his efforts to repair relationships with neighboring and regional governments after years of strained relations under former President Islam Karimov. The accompanying excerpted articles report on recent Uzbek-Russian security cooperation and provide insight into the new partnership that is emerging between Uzbekistan and Russia.

The first article from *Gazeta.uz*, a Russian language website with news on Uzbekistan, reports on the Uzbek-Russian joint military exercise that took place "at the mountain-field training center 'Forish'." It notes that the exercise concluded with "the two countries carrying out a counterterrorism operation to eliminate an armed group in difficult to reach mountainous terrain." The exercise marks the first time that Uzbek and Russian Armed Forces have worked together since 2007, when they both participated in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Peace Mission exercise. They also held a joint exercise at the Forish training center in 2005. There are currently no other scheduled joint Uzbek-Russian exercises.

The second article is from the online version of the Russian daily newspaper *Kommersant* and it discusses the military-technical agreement that the countries signed earlier this year. The article notes various aircraft and tanks of the Uzbek Armed Forces that could be refitted under the agreement, but the most important aspect of the agreement is how "Uzbekistan receives the same de facto privileges as Russia's CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) partners" and that this means "Uzbekistan has the right [to] purchase weapons and equipment not at commercial prices, but [at Russian] domestic prices." It is worth remembering that Uzbekistan suspended its membership in the CSTO in 2012. The right to purchase Russian arms at lower than commercial prices might be a way for Russia to either entice Uzbekistan to return to the CSTO or establish good relations with President Mirziyoyev, but this may only be partially successful. As the article notes, "Russia expected that Uzbek Su-25 attack aircraft and MiG-29 fighters ready for repairs would be modernized at locations in the Russian aviation industry," but that "even after signing the agreement, the Uzbek military preferred to send them not to Russia, but to the 558th aircraft plant in Belarus." While Uzbekistan and Russia have increased security cooperation since President Mirziyoyev came into office, there are signs that this could be slow to develop. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The situation changed after the death of Uzbek President Islam Karimov. Already with his successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the militaries of the two sides have signed an agreement on military-technical cooperation...The terms of the agreement are unprecedented: Uzbekistan receives the same de facto privileges as Russia's CSTO partners.”



Vladimir Putin with Shavkat Mirziyoyev.
Source: The Russian Presidential Press and Information Office via Wikimedia Commons
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AVladimir_Putin_with_Shavkat_Mirziyoyev_\(2017-04-05\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AVladimir_Putin_with_Shavkat_Mirziyoyev_(2017-04-05).jpg), CC BY-SA 3.0.

Source: “Военные учения Узбекистана и РФ завершены (The military exercise of Uzbekistan and Russia has finished),” *Gazeta.uz*, 7 October 2017. <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/10/07/mil/>

The special tactical exercise of units of the Ministries of Defense of Uzbekistan and Russia has ended at the mountain-field training center “Forish”...On the last day of the exercise, soldiers of the two countries carried out a counterterrorism operation to eliminate an armed group in difficult to reach mountainous terrain...

Source: Ivan Safronov and Aleksandra Jorjevich, “Список, вооружающий воображение (A weapons wish list),” *Kommersant*, 4 October 2017. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3428668>

As it has been reported to Kommersant, Uzbekistan has decided which types of weapons and military equipment it wants to acquire from Russia. There is interest in armored vehicles and ammunition as well as Su-30M fighters. However, according to Kommersant's information, Uzbekistan's inquiries do not match up to its finances...

...on September 20 Nikolay Patrushev, (Russian) Security Council Secretary, discussed the prospects of military-technical cooperation at a meeting with Viktor Makhmudov, Security Council Secretary under the President of Uzbekistan...the sides touched on the issue of repairing the equipment Tashkent inherited after the collapse of the Soviet Union (T-62 and T-72 tanks brought to the level of T-62M and T-72B3 and “Mi” type helicopters)...up until 2005 there were separate deliveries of BTR-80s, Mi-8 helicopters, and various caliber ammunition. Afterwards, the Uzbek security services' interests were limited to supplies of ammunition and explosives...Russia and Uzbekistan did not sign larger contracts.

The situation changed after the death of Uzbek President Islam Karimov. Already with his successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the militaries of the two sides have signed an agreement on military-technical cooperation...The terms of the agreement are unprecedented: Uzbekistan receives the same de facto privileges as Russia's CSTO partners. In particular, Uzbekistan has the right purchase weapons and equipment not at commercial prices, but (Russian) domestic prices (for example, according to this arrangement, Kazakhstan acquired Russian Su-30M fighters)...

...Russia expected that Uzbek Su-25 attack aircraft and MiG-29 fighters ready for repairs would be modernized at locations in the Russian aviation industry. However, even after signing the agreement, the Uzbek military preferred to send them not to Russia, but to the 558th aircraft plant in Belarus...



Russian Military Raising Accession Standards and Training Levels

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying interview of Colonel General Viktor Goremykin, Chief of the Russian Federation Defense Ministry Main Personnel Directorate, in the Russian Journal *Oriyentir* discusses some recent developments in the Russian military's efforts to promote enlisted professionalization. In particular, Colonel Goremykin discusses the legal and regulatory measures required to increase the quality and quantity of contract servicemen. Towards this end, the Russian Federation is in the process of tweaking the program for contract serviceman accession and developing a system for their professional development. If successfully implemented, the Russian Federation will have, for the first time, a multi-tier system for selecting, training, and employing contract serviceman through a full career life cycle.

In terms of contract serviceman accession, Russia is implementing a three-stage process for selecting candidates involving an initial, preliminary, and in-depth (final) selection. The initial selection will be a two-step process first involving a computer-based assessment on the Russian Ministry of Defense website designed by the General Staff Academy of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, and then an interview with an Armed Forces representative at an initial recruiting station, unit of intended service, or local military commissariat (draft board).

The preliminary selection includes military orientation; filing a formal application for service, verification of personal data and background (citizenship information, academic and employment history, law enforcement background check, and medical documentation); preliminary medical examination; and preliminary psychological examination. If no disqualifying conditions are found, the findings are sent to the recruiting station for further review. Both the initial and preliminary stages may be conducted at the unit of intended service.

In-depth selection is carried out at certain recruiting stations with all candidates who passed the preliminary selection. Sometimes preliminary and in-depth selection occur at these recruiting stations, in cases where the candidates live nearby. In-depth selection includes further verification of personal data and background; in-depth medical examinations; in-depth psychological examinations; physical fitness exam; building the candidate's personnel file; and registration for access to state secrets (if necessary). The selection process is completed when the candidate's eligibility for military service is determined. The selection process typically takes 1-2 weeks to 6 months, depending on the: needs of the Armed Forces; previous civil education and military training; place of residence, and unit training cycle. After the candidate is assessed into service, the new serviceman is in a probationary status for three months. The commander of the military training unit may discharge the new serviceman at this time, if deemed in the best interest of the Armed Forces. This probationary status applies both to contract serviceman that are assessing into the military from civilian status and former conscripts that are changing their status to contract serviceman. *(continued)*

Source: Andrey Sokolov, "Система Контрактного Отбора Доказала Свою Эффективность (The Contract Recruitment System Has Proven Its Effectiveness)," *Oriyentir Online*, 1 August 2017. <http://orientir.milportal.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/8.17.pdf>

In accordance with the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation and taking into account the instructions of the President of the Russian Federation an extremely important role in carrying out Army reform is assigned to the improvement of the system for manning the Armed Forces and the phased transition of service members at private and NCO level to a contract footing. A number of new legal regulatory documents governing this process as well as other aspects of the defense department's personnel policy have recently been adopted...

[Sokolov] Colonel General, to begin our conversation, please describe the system for the selection of candidates for military service under contract that is operating at the present stage.

[Goremykin] First of all a few words about how we arrived at the need for the development of the selection system. In May 2012 Edict No. 604 of the President of the Russian Federation "On the Further Improvement of Military Service in the Russian Federation" set the starting point for the present stage in the development of military service under contract for personnel at private and NCO level, and this is currently continuing...During this period work was carried out on an unprecedented scale, as a result of which the number of service members performing military service under contract in the military posts of soldiers (seamen), sergeants (petty officers), and warrant officers more than doubled...In four and a half years more than 330,000 people have been selected for military service under contract. At present the number of service members under contract already exceeds the number of drafted service members.

[Sokolov] What tasks have been set for the personnel bodies in the sphere of manning the troops with service members under contract?

[Goremykin] ...A guideline target of 405,000 military posts subject to filling with service members under contract has been established for the year 2017...

[Sokolov] From what sources are you planning to improve the quality of selection of service members under contract?

[Goremykin] One important but not fully realized source that we can see is work with citizens who are subject to the draft and who have received higher education...As a result of this work in the military districts and in the Northern Fleet in 2015-2016 alone more than 11,000 people with higher education were accepted for military service under contract instead of service under the draft...

“In four and a half years, over 330,000 people have been selected for military service under contract. At present the number of service members under contract already exceeds the number of drafted service members.”

- Colonel General Viktor Goremykin, Chief of the Russian Federation Defense Ministry, Main Personnel Directorate

(continued)



Continued: Russian Military Raising Accession Standards and Training Levels

In terms of enlisted professional development, Russia has laid out guidelines for standardizing the training of contract serviceman (enlisted soldiers and warrant officers) throughout the Russian Armed Forces. These personnel would include all contract serviceman in major branches (Ground Forces, Navy, Aerospace Forces) and specialty branches (Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN) and Airborne Troops (VDV)) found in the Ministry of Defense. This standardization involves establishing specific requirements and qualifications for contract service as they progress through their careers. Russia envisions a five-tier system for contract serviceman career development.

The first tier is for training of serviceman to fill rank-and-file entry level positions. These positions would have been (or currently are) filled by conscripts. This level of training is accomplished in two phases. The first phase involves a six week ‘basic training’ that is conducted at 29 training units and 4 higher military educational institutions. The second phase involves attendance at a Military Occupational School (MOS). This training usually lasts from three to 10 months, but some programs are as long as two years, 10 months. This second phase may be omitted if the serviceman assesses into the Armed Forces with a valid MOS, such as one provided through a Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF) program, vocational school, or other means.

The second tier is for squad leaders, tank commanders, crew leaders, etc. Candidates for second-tier positions are picked from the first tier based upon leadership qualities and technical proficiency, having served at least two years in a first-tier position. In addition, there are more administrative requirements relating to age, health, education level, physical fitness, and military discipline. They receive an additional three months of training that may be conducted at various locations, depending on branch of service and specialty.

The third tier is for platoon leaders and deputy platoon leaders. (In the Russian system, contract serviceman often fill platoon leader positions for the ‘Combat Support Platoons’ that are found in most battalions.) Candidates for these positions are selected based upon recommendations from their immediate supervisor and have served at a tier two position for 3-5 years. They receive an additional three months of training that may be conducted at various locations, depending on branch of service and specialty.

The fourth tier is for contract serviceman serving in regiments, brigades, and divisions. Candidates for these positions are selected from third-tier contract serviceman, who have served at least 10 years. They receive three to five months of staff training at the Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School (RVVDKU). The fifth tier is for contract serviceman serving at the Army Group-level and higher echelons. Candidates for these positions are selected from fourth-tier contract serviceman, who have served at least 15 years. They also receive three to five months of staff training at the RVVDKU.

The accompanying article from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discusses how increasing the number of contract serviceman has allowed Russia to reduce draft quotas for conscripts. The Russian Federation has made significant strides in improving enlisted servicemen’s quality of life and raising the prestige of military service, as described by Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev, Chief of the Russian Federation National Center for Defense Management. (Apparently, many young men are now viewing service as a two-year contractor as being more advantageous than being a one-year conscript.) Russia has made legislative changes to allow young men that have reported to draft boards, but not conscripted, to now work in the government. Previous legislation was worded to not only bar draft dodgers from government positions, but also young men who reported to draft boards but were not drafted due to the needs of the government. (In certain areas, particularly the North Caucasus, military service is very prestigious, with regional draft quotas often being met or exceeded. The young men turned away in such situations often had difficulty finding employment in the security services, which are also considered prestigious in these areas.) Russia appears to be making significant gains in regard to enlisted professional development. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Yuriy Gavrilov, “Призывник по конкурсу: Военкоматы России стали более тщательно отбирать в строй солдат-новобранцев (Drafted through Competition: Russia’s Military Commissariats Have Begun Selecting New Recruits to the Ranks More Carefully),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 19 October 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/10/19/voenkomaty-stali-bolee-tshchatelno-otbirat-v-stroj-soldat-novobrancev.html>

The mass recruitment of contract soldiers into the Armed Forces has enabled the generals to toughen the requirements applied to young men of draft age. In essence, it is a matter of organizing a kind of personnel filter at the country’s military commissariats. Commanders, who were for a long time compelled to deal with not very healthy subordinates, undereducated people, and arrant slobs, are now full of optimism. It seems that the Defense Ministry has decided to put an end to the practice of drafting such a contingent into the Army once and for all.

What is more, the selection of fixed-term draftees has been placed on a competitive footing in many regions of Russia. Priority in the process of selecting future soldiers is being given to strong, educated lads who have some pre-Army military training and who are geared toward conscientious service.

“Over seven or eight years, especially during the last three to four years, the quality of draftees has undoubtedly improved. This is due to the established state policy. Draftee numbers have diminished. But the reduction of their recruitment is actually making it possible to select a smaller number from a larger number for the Armed Forces’ needs while raising their quality,” Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev, Chief of the Russian Federation National Center for Defense Management.

As an example, he referred to the following statistic. Whereas, previously, two out of 10 draftees would make it into the ranks, now it is one. At the same time, the Army is not experiencing any shortfall of soldiers, as previously. The number of young Russian citizens who are prepared, and even keen, to serve for the legally-required 12 months is progressively rising. Moreover, vacancies in the soldiers’ ranks are more and more frequently being filled by soldiers with valid occupational military occupational specialties.[acquired from DOSAAF programs or higher education] It is precisely this fact that has made it possible to reduce the draft intake to 134,000 in the current fall, which is 18,000 fewer than it was in the same period last year...

(continued)



Continued: Russian Military Raising Accession Standards and Training Levels

“Over seven or eight years, especially during the last three to four years, the quality of draftees has undoubtedly improved. This is due to the established state policy. Draftee numbers have diminished. But the reduction of their recruitment is actually making it possible to select a smaller number from a larger number for the Armed Forces’ needs while raising their quality..”

- Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev, Chief of the Russian Federation National Center for Defense Management



TOP TWO, BOTTOM RIGHT: Scenes from Day of recruit on the basis of the mountain junction of the Southern Military District (Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia)

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=46577@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.

MIDDLE TWO, BOTTOM LEFT: Control firing of the tankers of the South-Eastern Military District within the framework of the final inspection (Kadamovsky, Rostov region)

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=46749@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.



Russia's Development of Electromagnetic Pulse Weapons

OE Watch Commentary: The first accompanying excerpt from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discusses Russia's development of a new Electromagnetic Pulse Weapon (EMP) program. The Alabuga [Алабуга] EMP program is being developed by the Radioelectronics Technologies Concern (KRET) [Концерн Радиоэлектронные Технологии (КРЭТ)]. One component of the program involves the development of an EMP missile that emits an electromagnetic pulse 200-300 meters above an enemy position by means of a high-frequency high-power electromagnetic field generator. This EMP would create an ultra high frequency (UHF) field of approximately 3.5 kilometers, not only disabling computers, radars, communications systems and precision weapons, but also making them unusable by damaging their electronic components. Although the system is nonlethal and causes no adverse effects to humans, the electromagnetic effects of the missile (up to 100 gigawatts) are reportedly comparable to a nuclear weapon.

The second accompanying excerpt from *Svobodnaya Pressa* discusses the development of a now abandoned ground vehicle based EMP weapon. The Ranets-Ye [Ранец-Е], is based on a MAZ-543 wheeled chassis, weighing around 5 tons. The Ranets-Ye is essentially a short-range surface-to-air system in which the kill element utilized is not a missile, but a 60 degree cone of 500 megawatt SFH radiation that lasts 20 nanoseconds. This EMP is capable of neutralizing all aircraft, cruise missiles, and any munition with electronics. At a range of 8-14 kilometers the EMP destroys electronic components, and disrupts electronic at a range of up to 40 kilometers. The Ranets-Ye consists of a diesel generator, electromagnetic pulse generator, and targeting radar. The system is also reportedly capable of integrating into air defense networks, in order to obtain targeting data.

Although these capabilities are impressive, the Ranets-Ye was not adopted by the Russian military for two reasons. First, in order to be effective, the system needs a direct line-of-site to the target. Second, the system requires 20 minutes to recharge its capacitors between pulses. Recent technological advances in capacitor technologies and the proliferation UAV and missile technologies may resurrect the Ranets-Ye, or lead to the creation of a similar, new program. The Ranets-Ye could be a very effective air defense system. The 60 degree cone of energy emitted from the system would be excellent for targeting various stealth technologies and small UAVs with small radar signatures, as precise coordinates required. In addition, such a system may be quite economical and has fewer sustainment issues, as it does not require expensive missiles and associated provisioning.

The *Svobodnaya Pressa* article also explains what technologies future Russian EMP weapons could be based upon. The Soviet Union, and later the Russian Federation, have also conducted research on developing more powerful EMP pulses with new technologies, or in Russian parlance 'new physical principles.' In the 1980s and 1990s, the Russians experimented with crossing plasma streams to generate powerful bursts of radiation, possibly strong enough to disrupt the operation of an ICBM warhead. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Ivanov, "В России создали электромагнитные бомбы (Electromagnetic Bombs Created in Russia)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 28 September 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/09/28/v-rossii-sozdali-svch-bomby.html>

Russia's creation of electronic munitions damaging enemy equipment through a powerful microwave pulse has moved into the stage of specific experimental development. RIA Novosti was informed of this by Vladimir Mikheyev, advisor to the first deputy general director of Radioelectronics Technologies Concern (KRET) [Концерн Радиоэлектронные Технологии (КРЭТ)]...He lifted slightly the veil of secrecy over so-called Project Alabuga. Rossiyskaya Gazeta already reported that tests began back a few years ago of "jammers" exploding at a height of 200-300 meters and shutting down electronic equipment within a radius of 3.5 kilometers. Because of this, a potential enemy loses the capability of effective control of his own weapons -- communications and means of command and control and guidance do not function.

According to Mikheyev, a package of scientific research codenamed Alabuga concluded several years ago in which the main directions of development of electronic weapons became understandable. That said, their effect on equipment can vary, from "blinding" to physical damage of main electronic elements, circuit boards, assemblies, and systems...Now Russian military personnel and scientists from the military-industrial complex have moved on to a new stage of the project -- creation of electromagnetic weapons: projectiles, bombs, and missiles carrying a special magnetic explosion generator.

Source: Vladimir Tuchkov, "Российская «Алабуга» будет страшнее атомной бомбы (Russia's Alabuga Will Be Scarier Than an Atom Bomb)," *Svobodnaya Pressa Online*, 3 October 2017. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/182594/>

...Russia already has such a weapon [in reference to the Alabuga], which is totally viable. And has had it for a long time already. Admittedly, it has still not been put into service for reasons on which we will dwell below. In 2001 a working prototype of the Ranets-Ye electromagnetic device, which is based on a MAZ-543 wheeled chassis and weighs around 5 tonnes, was presented at a Malaysian military equipment exhibition.

Ranets-Ye is essentially a short-range surface-to-air system in which the kill element utilized is not a missile but an SFH electromagnetic pulse of up to 20 nanoseconds in duration and a power of 500 megawatts. It is capable of neutralizing all types of aircraft -- from UAVs to fighters and bombers -- cruise missiles, and all types of munitions that make use of electronics in one form or another. At a distance of 8-14 kilometers the pulse fries electronic components, and at a distance of up to 40 kilometers it disrupts the normal operation of electronic systems without destroying them. Its broad angle of diffusion of electromagnetic radiation -- 60 degrees -- should be including among its merits...The most important elements of this device are its diesel electric generator, electromagnetic pulse generator, and radar, which is designed to detect targets that need to be disabled. Incidentally, the device is linked to air defense systems' radar equipment, obtaining target data from it...

...an extremely interesting project that stood on the threshold of the transition from research and development to design planning with a view to building a prototype combat weapon based on new physical principles was dropped in 1993. In the 1980s the generation of local plasma formations in the atmosphere was achieved as a result of work on a joint project by the Radio Instrument Building Scientific Research Institute and the Ioffe Physical Technical Institute. They were obtained at the point of contact between two or more streams of powerful electromagnetic radiation. Aerial vehicles and also munitions were subjected to an impact that destroyed them when they encountered plasma clusters. The energy from such a plasma device may be sufficient to combat ICBM warheads...



Russia's 'Stealth' Detector: The Struna-1 Bistatic Radar

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpt from an article in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* discusses one component of Russia's solution to stealth technologies: the Struna-1 series of low altitude early warning radars which allow the detection of stealth aircraft. The system is manufactured by the Nizhny Novgorod Research Institute of Radio Engineering (NNIIRT), a division of the Almaz-Antey Joint Stock Company, the manufacturer of many of Russia's strategic air defense systems, including the S-300 and S-400.

The Struna-1 series is designed to detect the intrusion of low flying targets with small radar cross sections (cruise missiles, UAVs, light aircraft, parachutists, etc.) into relatively small geographical areas (military facilities, urban areas, etc.). The system uses a new, bistatic radar-based technology that functions by networking several transmit/receive stations. Each of these stations emits a low energy signal that is collected by all transmitters, and then triangulated to determine target altitude and flight direction. The system can also perform non-cooperative identification and classification into target categories. The Russians claim that the system's bistatic radar signature of target is two to three times greater than the monostatic signature of the same target. A typical, high density employment of the system involves placing transmit/receive station spans in two parallel chains, separated by 10 to 11 km, with stations in each span separated by 40 to 50 km distance (the span length is determined by elevation and terrain features). Although the system is usually deployed as a series of networked transmit/receive stations, it can function with just one station.

The 52E6 Struna-1 was the first iteration of the system, completed in 1999. The system reportedly operates at a frequency of 450 MHz, but other sources claim 390-430 MHz. The target detection probability is reportedly 80-90%, with a false alarm rate of one in a 72 hour period. The area coverage footprint for the first variant of the system was cited at 50 to 400 km, subject to the number of available stations. The current variant, which is in serial production for the Russian Armed Forces, is designated 52E6MU Struna-1MU. The principal difference between the versions is the newer technology, which permits smaller containers and lower power consumption for deployment and operation of the Struna-1MU. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Ruslan Melnikov, "Российская РЛС превратит истребители-"невидимки" США в устаревший хлам (Russian Radar Station Will Transform US Stealth Fighters into Obsolete Junk)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 16 October 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/10/16/v-ssha-rasskazali-o-rossijskom-otvete-na-stels-istrebiteli.html>

An effective system for countering aviation "stealth" technologies is being used in Russia. It is able to convert American fifth-generation F-22 and F-35 multirole "stealth" fighters into obsolete junk.

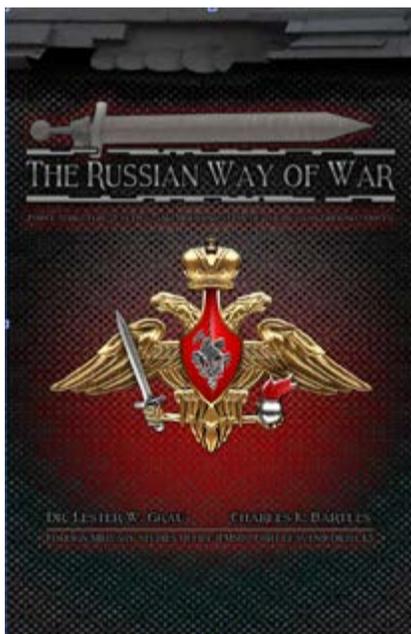
As reported by the American publication The National Interest this refers to the Struna-1 bistatic radar system, which differs from the majority of radars by the location of the transmitter and the receiver in two different places. This makes the radar more sensitive and it allows the tracking of targets developed with "stealth" technologies that are undetectable by ordinary radars. The Struna-1 ignores anti-radar coverings which scatter radar waves. "This allows the detection of not only 'stealth' aircraft, but also other targets such as hang-gliders [deltaplan] and cruise missiles," writes The National Interest.

It is also noted that the Struna-1 itself requires and transmits less energy, which makes it less vulnerable to anti-radar weapons.

This system is rather effective in searching for targets flying at low altitudes. The publication also cited the [maximum] limit of the [system's] detection altitude: seven kilometers.

"Although the Struna-1 bistatic radar is not a universal solution for the detection of 'stealth' aircraft, it represents a serious threat to NATO aviation. Integrated with other modern radars, the Struna-1 systems can provide the enemy with critically important information on the location and movements of 'stealth' aircraft," summarizes the American publication.

"An effective system for countering aviation 'stealth' technologies is being used in Russia. It is able to convert American fifth-generation F-22 and F-35 multirole 'stealth' fighters into obsolete junk."



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 the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

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The Konteyner OTH Radar to Help Combat Hypersonic Weapons

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Missile Attack Warning System (SPRN) has three components: 1. A satellite constellation (a space-based infrared system), that detects intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launches, and then tracks the ICBM's flight path. 2. The Voronezh-series of radars, with ranges of 4,000-6,000 kilometers, that are designed to detect ICBMs and medium range missiles that enter the exoatmosphere. These radars have one major weakness: they are designed to detect high-speed, high-altitude ballistic targets at the greatest possible range. Due to technical reasons, it is impossible for these radars to accurately detect and track slower targets, especially low-flying targets, such as cruise missiles. (Radars of this type cannot glance beyond the horizon since the radio signal is propagated in a straight line in the space that is being scanned.) 3. Over-The-Horizon (OTH) radars, with operating ranges of approximately 3,000 kilometers. OTH radars are capable of seeing beyond the horizon, because they use shortwave to reflect their signals off the ionosphere for long-range detection that is particularly effective at tracking low-flying targets, such as cruise missiles, as described in the accompanying article from *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*.

The Russians have experimented with OTH radars since the 1970s. In 2013, they started trials of the Konteyner OTH radar (which has been referred to as 'Product 29B6') and 'Konteyner-Z' manufactured by the Nizhny Novgorod Research Institute of Radio Engineering (NNIIRT), a division of the Almaz-Antey Joint Stock Company. The Konteyner has a range of up to 3,000 kilometers, with a coverage area of 60 degrees and maximum detection altitude of 100 kilometers. There are already plans to increase the coverage area by increasing the number of masts (currently 144) and by upgrading the receiver station hardware. The system is a bistatic radar, where typically the transmit and receive stations are separated by approximately 300 kilometers, as described in the accompanying article from *Svobodnaya Pressa*. The Konteyner OTH radar appears to be part of Russia's solution for defeating hypersonic weapons. The Aerospace Troops (VKS) estimate that in order to combat hypersonic weapons, the hypersonic weapons must be detected and target information must be provided to VKS interceptors at a range of at least 1,033 kilometers. In order to meet this requirement, these hypersonic weapons must be detected by the early warning radars at a range of at least 1,144 km. Although the Konteyner and several other types of Russian radar could theoretically detect a target at the required minimum range, Almaz-Antey has made it clear that there is still much work to do in developing new hardware, software, and algorithms for proper integration of OTH radars into the future aerospace defense systems that could possibly defeat a US hypersonic weapon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Vladimir Tuchkov, "«Воронеж», «Контейнер», «Тундра»: Засечь и пресечь атаку на Россию Три источника и три составные части системы предупреждения о ядерном нападении ('Voronezh,' 'Konteyner,' 'Tundra,': Locate and Suppress an Attack Against Russia)," *Svobodnaya Pressa Online*, 5 September 2017. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/180765/>

The creation of the Missile Attack Warning System's (SPRN) continuous radar field should be completed in 2018. Sergey Boyev, the Radiotechnical and Information Systems (RTI) Concern Chairman of the Board of Directors, announced this in a Kommersant interview. We need to say that this field actually has already existed since 2016 when the test operation of three Voronezh radars began in Yeniseysk, Barnaul, and Orsk. But one will be able to talk about the complete readiness of the Global Missile Attack Warning System when these radar sites will be placed on alert. Boyev assumes that this event should occur already at the end of this year. A continuous radar field will be obtained for the first time in the country's history. The northwestern axis of a possible missile attack was not monitored in the Soviet Union...

The over-the-horizon radars, the operating range of which reaches 3,000 kilometers. Their operation is based upon the effect of Novosibirsk Engineer Nikolay Kabanov. The effect is the reflection of shortwave band radio waves from the ionosphere. Having been reflected from the ionosphere (as light beams are reflected from a mirror), the wave turns toward the Earth's surface. Then, having struck an object, the wave returns to the receiving antenna along that same route... this radar sees absolutely all objects, which are located in the airspace, while tracking their motion trajectory to a depth of up to 3,000 kilometers, in other words, not only aircraft but also cruise missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles. During the setup work on the first over-the-horizon radar, the specialists demonstrated to the members of a Ministry of Defense commission how a small airfield in Norway operates, from which 2-3 seat light aircraft conduct flights. But, in the process, the Konteyner, in contrast to the Voronezh, is not capable of looking into outer space. These two types of radars supplement each other, while permitting them to obtain complete information on airborne and space objects.

The first Konteyner was placed in test operation in 2013 in the Mordovian Village of Kovylkino. The reception antennas are located here. The transmitting antennas are located 300 kilometers away – in Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast.

The radar's reception portion is a field with dimensions of 1,300 X 200 meters, on which 144 antenna masts with a height of 35 meters are located. Initially, the surveillance sector totaled 180 degrees, and it has been expanded up to 240 meters by the present time. The first Konteyner has already been placed on alert. The operating radius - is up to 3,000 kilometers. The cost of the first radar while taking development into account is R10 billion. However, subsequently, when the new radars will appear, the cost of each of them will be reduced.

The second Konteyner radar is being built in the Far East at the present time. It should be ready this year. RTI plans the construction of that number of over-the-horizon radars, which would also permit the creation of a continuous radar field for radars of this type. They assume that they will obtain a complete over-the-horizon field by 2025.

“...the latest Konteyner over-the-horizon radars... are most effective in determining the location of fast aerodynamic targets, in other words, aircraft and cruise missiles.”

(continued)



Continued: The Konteyner OTH Radar to Help Combat Hypersonic Weapons

Source: Dmitry Grigoryev, “Россию накроет сплошное противоракетное радиолокационное поле (A Continuous Missile Defense Radar Field Will Cover Russia),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 3 September 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/09/03/rossiiu-nakroet-sploshnoe-protivoraketnoe-radiolokacionnoe-pole.html>

An RTI Press Service spokesman explained that the latest Konteyner over-the-horizon radars will also participate in the creation of the single radar field along with the Voronezh, Dnepr, Don, and Podsolnukh radars that are already on alert duty. They can ensure the detection of ballistic missiles, but are most effective in determining the location of fast aerodynamic targets, in other words, aircraft and cruise missiles.

The Konteyner radars are more intended for determining the location and tracking aerodynamic targets such as aircraft or cruise missiles. Their operating principle is simple: The radiated signal is reflected from the ionosphere and permits it to see everything within 3,000 kilometers. This is pure physics. By way of illustration, during the tests of the Konteyner, our specialists saw in plain sight all of Western Europe with all of the objects in its airspace,” a press service spokesman told the Agency.

In other words, the Voronezh radars and the Podsolnukh and latest Konteyner over-the-horizon radars, which are part of the overall missile attack warning system (SPRN), determine the location of the targets, which reach outer space, and provide defense from aircraft and cruise missiles.

We must add that right now the first Konteyner radar is on test-alert. It is located in the outskirts of the Mordovian city of Kovytkino. The system permits the tracking and identification of military and civil aviation targets at a distance of up to 3,000 kilometers and at an altitude of up to 100 kilometers, and also detects cruise missile launches.

The radar’s antenna field numbers more than 100 masts and the first Konteyner tracks the space from Poland, Germany, and the Baltic to Turkey, Syria, and Israel on the northwestern axis. The complex’s capabilities are being increased so that the radar would be able to “see” all of the aerodynamic targets, including aircraft with small dimensions.

Right now the following radar centers are part of the Russian missile attack warning system: “Murmansk” based upon a Dnepr radar; “Pechora” based upon a Daryal radar; “Irkutsk” based upon two Dnepr radars; “Balkhash” based upon a Dnepr radar; “Baranovichi” based upon a Volga radar; “Lekhtusi” based upon a Voronezh radar; and, “Armavir” based upon two Voronezh-DM radars. Furthermore, today the Russian Navy operates three Podsolnukh over-the-horizon radars on the coasts of the Caspian Sea, the Sea of Japan, and the Sea of Okhotsk.

“...the Konteyner [OTH Radar], in contrast to the Voronezh [radar], is not capable of looking into outer space. These two types of radars supplement each other, while permitting them to obtain complete information on airborne and space objects.”



Konteyner OTH Radar.

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, https://function.mil.ru/news_page/world/more.htm?id=11873707@egNews, CC 4.0.



Russia Successfully Tests Satellite ‘Mothership’ with Two Interceptors

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpts from *Interfax-AVN* and *Izvestiya* discuss Russia’s recent experiment with a satellite ‘mothership’ (Kosmos-2521) that has two smaller satellites attached to it. These smaller satellites are reportedly capable of undocking from the mother satellite, rendezvousing with another satellite, conducting some type of assessment on it, and then returning to the mothership. These inspector satellites could be used for peaceful purposes, such as inspecting exteriors, refueling, and repair of other satellites. They are reportedly intended to diagnose problems in malfunctioning satellites, and then transmitting the data to earth in order to determine if there is a possible fix for the malfunction. The authors also mention possible military purposes for these ‘interceptor’ satellites, such as signals intelligence and even destroying other satellites. This idea may seem far-fetched, but Russia was able to conduct satellite rendezvous operations that resulted in the destruction of another satellite as early as 1968 (Kosmos-252 rendezvoused with, and destroyed the Kosmos-248 satellite). Russia’s experimentation with satellite ‘motherships’ and interceptors indicates that Russia may be intending to place small interceptor satellites on its future satellites. These ‘motherships’ could be of any satellite type (navigation, reconnaissance, weather, signals intelligence, etc.), only ejecting their interceptors in the event of hostilities. If this is the manner that Russia envisions the use of interceptor satellite technology, Russia could gradually increase its on-orbit anti-satellite capabilities with each new military and civilian satellite launch. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



AMOS-5 communications satellite.

Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin Blog, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/MAKS-2011/i-3nJkm7n>, CC 4.0.

“In the event of a global conflict, it is extremely important to destroy the enemy’s satellites in order to deprive him of communications, navigation, and the capability to conduct reconnaissance.”

- Military Expert, Valeriy Mukhin

Source: Sergei Valchenko, Nicholai Surov and Aleksei Ramm, “Россия послала на орбиту инспектора: Военные опробовали в действии уникальный маневрирующий спутник опознания и перехвата (Russia Sends Inspector Into Orbit: Military Test Operations of Maneuvering Identification and Intercept Satellite),” *Izvestiya Online*, 26 October 2017. <https://iz.ru/662230/sergei-valchenko-nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/rossiia-poslala-na-orbitu-inspektora>

Russia’s Space Troops have successfully tested a maneuvering military inspection satellite that is able to approach other orbiting satellites and inspect them. Such satellites allow the functionality of foreign spy satellites to be determined and, when necessary, they can be transformed into space interceptor satellites. In the opinion of domestic experts maneuvering inspection satellites will become an important element in the Russian orbiting constellation and they will play the role of instruments of deterrence in the military space race...

As Izvestiya was told by the Ministry of Defense, during the testing of the controls of the maneuvering military satellite, ground and orbiting means of communication, ballistic calculation methods and new software were tested. The capabilities of the Space Troops to automatically undock the satellite from a platform, to remotely control its flight, to use on-board equipment (including means of observation), and to process and transmit acquired data to the ground were confirmed...

...military expert Valeriy Mukhin told Izvestiya that inspection satellites are an important component of the orbiting forces of any space power. “In the event of a global conflict it is extremely important to destroy the enemy’s satellites in order to deprive him of communications, navigation, and the capability to conduct reconnaissance. Thus, the idea of creating such interceptors appeared,” noted the specialist... According to Valeriy Mukhin the main mission of the orbiting “inspectors” is to establish the purpose of satellites placed in orbit by a potential enemy. “Based on the external appearance of an object, its construction, and the disposition of its equipment, one can make assumptions about its purpose,” explained the expert. “In addition, an inspection satellite can easily combine the inspection function with the functions of an interceptor: it can approach, inspect, launch a missile, and depart.”

Mukhin stressed that satellite interceptors will be needed by Russia only in the event of a conflict, and there is ample work for the inspector satellites during peacetime. “The ability of such a satellite to actively maneuver between orbits is essential, and this is precisely what is now being developed by the military during the testing...Our possession of such a system will be a serious deterrence factor for potential enemies. They will know that the Russian Federation can check whether or not the stated functionality of their satellites corresponds to reality.”...

(continued)



Continued: Russia Successfully Tests Satellite 'Mothership' with Two Interceptors

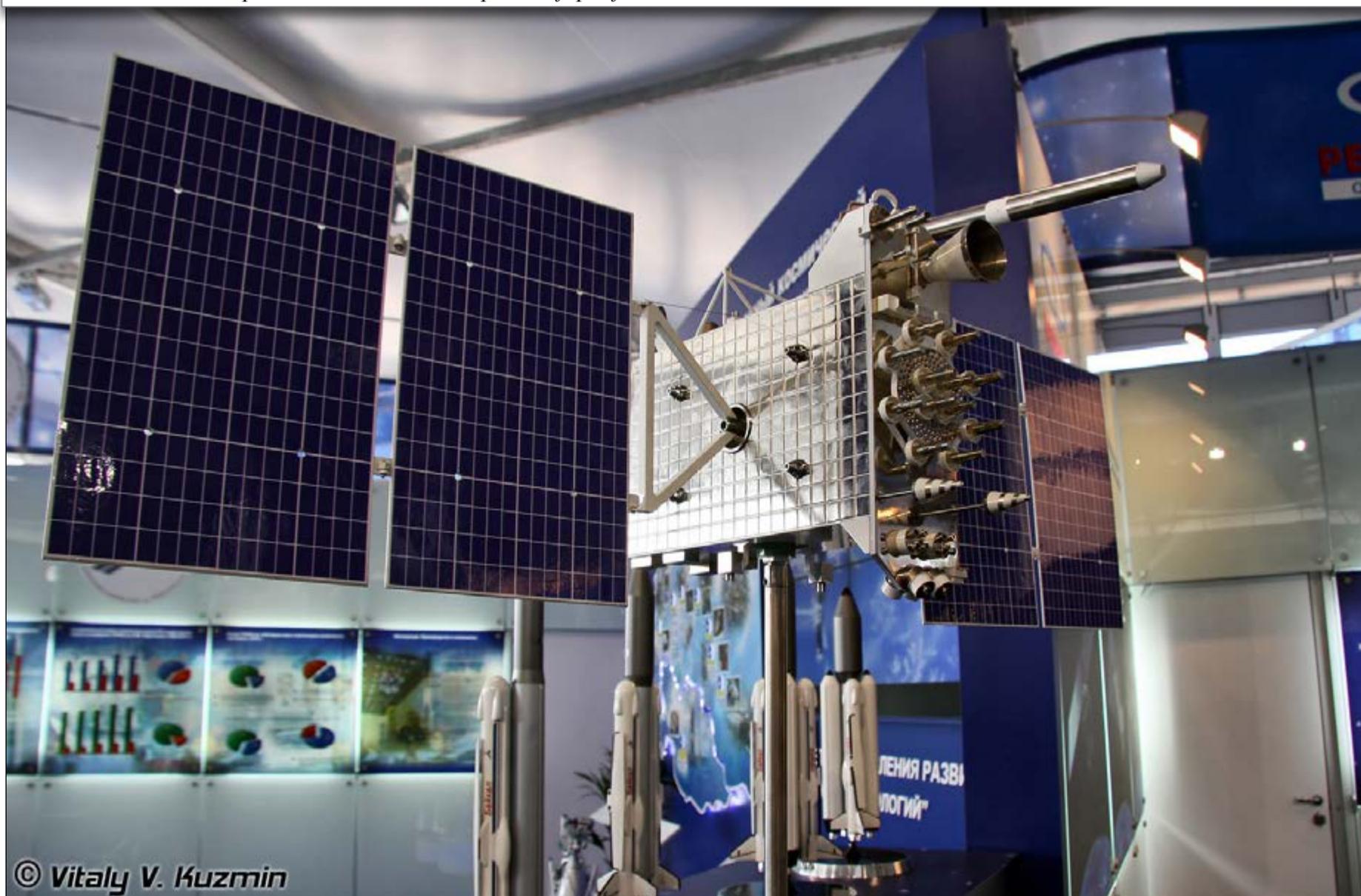
“...[satellite] inspections can be conducted for peaceful purposes -- external inspection of objects, refueling and repair of satellites -- and for military purposes for a certain effect on spacecraft of a potential or actual enemy.”

Source: “American Space Surveillance Assets Are Keeping an Eye on Russian Inspector Satellite,” *Interfax-AVN*, 1 November 2017.

..The Russian Defense Ministry announced on 30 October 2017, that it is conducting an experiment in outer space to examine a domestic satellite by a small spacecraft previously launched from this satellite. “An inspector spacecraft has separated from the small spacecraft today in a continuation of the experiment,” the announcement stated. The spacecraft’s inspection capability is understood to mean its ability to maneuver in space to converge with designated space objects. Inspections can be conducted for peaceful purposes -- external inspection of objects, refueling and repair of satellites -- and for military purposes for a certain effect on spacecraft of a potential or actual enemy...

It pointed out that a spacecraft platform developed for the RF Defense Ministry had been launched from Plesetsk Cosmodrome on 23 June 2017. This satellite “is a platform on which different payload options can be accommodated,” the military reported. The Defense Ministry announced on 23 August 2017 that an “inspector satellite” had separated on that day from the spacecraft platform launched in military department interests from Plesetsk Cosmodrome on 23 June 2017. “A small spacecraft designed to inspect the condition of a domestic satellite separated from this platform today. Subsequently it is planned to conduct a scientific experiment of having the small spacecraft examine the satellite’s external appearance,” the Defense Ministry report disseminated on that day stated...

...the Kosmos-2521 spacecraft [with an orbital inclination of 97.88 degrees, apogee of 664 kilometers, and perigee of 554 kilometers] separated from the Kosmos-2519 satellite platform. It returned to Kosmos-2519 on 26 October. There was no clarification as to whether or not they had docked or were flying in the immediate proximity of each other. A new object had been noticed immediately after this -- NORAD catalog number 42986, international number 2017-037E. According to the international cataloger, the spacecraft platform has the number 2017-037A, the Volga insertion stage 2017-037B, inspector spacecraft number 1 2017-037D, and inspector spacecraft number 2 2017-037E... Thus, there were two inspector satellites aboard spacecraft platform Kosmos-2519.



© Vitaly V. Kuzmin

Navigation satellite GLONASS-K.

Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin Blog, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/MAKS-2011/i-3n/km7n/X2>, CC 4.0.



Lack of Investment in Railways Increases Economic and Strategic Vulnerabilities

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpts from an article in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* discusses that at the height of Soviet power between 1940-1970, Soviet planners envisioned large scale projects spanning the Caucasus, Lower Volga region, northwest, and Siberia. These projects were deemed to be economically and strategically vital, but have been abandoned or postponed indefinitely. The author keenly points out that the Arctic is considered a key region for economic and military reasons, but two rail projects (Northern Latitudinal Railway and Trans-Siberian) that support the region have not been resourced. In addition, Russia has not resourced rail infrastructure projects in vital areas of the Western and Southern Military Districts. These rail projects would support a number of contingencies to include conflicts on the Western front (Ukraine/NATO), conflict with Georgia to the south, and the ability to rapidly respond to a variety of insurgency scenarios in the North Caucasus. The author makes it clear that by not resourcing these railway projects, Russia's military and economic security is being negatively impacted.

The importance of rail transport for the Russian economy and military cannot be underestimated. Unlike the US military, the Russian military regularly leverages rail assets to deploy and sustain forces. This sustainment would not only involve the movement of materials from depots to the front, but would also likely involve the transport of materials directly to brigade and division logistic support areas, in tactical situations. This may seem unrealistic to US logisticians, but not so for the Russian military in general, and Russian logisticians in particular. The Russian Armed Forces will likely fight most conflicts near her borders, and in the former Soviet Union that has a well-developed rail infrastructure. In order to effectively leverage this infrastructure, the Russian Armed Forces have dedicated military assets (Railroad Troops) to support all aspects of military rail operations (rail operations usually have some role in most major operations). As can be seen in the accompanying interview of Lieutenant General Anatoliy Lbov, the Southern Military District deputy commander in charge of logistic support, rail is key for not only logistically supporting the Army, but also getting the Army to the fight. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The ever more complex military-political situation in the foreign countries bordering on Russia is increasing the relevance and urgency of railroad projects in the Caucasus, in the Lower Volga region, in the northwest, and in Siberia. As it is, the need is already high in the context of the economic development of those territories and interregional economic ties.”



Exercise on erecting a floating railway bridge across the Volga (Yaroslavl Region).
Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=44043@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0

(continued)



Continued: Lack of Investment in Railways Increases Economic and Strategic Vulnerabilities

Source: Aleksey Chichkin, “Министерство путей разобщения: Строительство железных дорог стратегического значения переносится на неопределенный срок (The Ministry of Ways of Disconnection: The Construction of Strategic Railroads Is Being Postponed Indefinitely),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 18 October 2017. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/39384>

The ever more complex military-political situation in the foreign countries bordering on Russia is increasing the relevance and urgency of railroad projects in the Caucasus, in the Lower Volga region, in the northwest, and in Siberia. As it is, the need is already high in the context of the economic development of those territories and interregional economic ties. But the majority of such projects, elaborated from the late 1940s through the early 1970s, continue to be postponed indefinitely... It is superfluous to demonstrate the strategic importance of mainline steel track and port-rail corridors for the strengthening of the country's defense capability and, accordingly, ensuring its military-political security. But Russia's transport system is still riddled with substantial deficiencies. Suffice it to recall at least a few of the mothballed projects.

This construction [of the Northern Latitudinal Railway (SShKh)] began in 2014 and continued, albeit with interruptions, in 2015. But then it was essentially halted, largely for financial reasons. Despite the fact that the Northern Latitudinal Railway constructed back in the late 1940s/early 1950s was characterized even then as the overland complement of the Northern Sea Route...

The Trans-Polar Trans-Siberian was under construction -- including the stretch to Igarka-Noril'sk -- from 1947, but it was shelved in early April 1953. Even though, let me emphasize, back at the turn of the 1940s/1950s experts had foreseen the main line's military-strategic importance, as also the inadequate transport support for the development not only of northern Siberia and the Far East but also their links with the country's other regions. The demand for the artery in question is dictated by the implementation of the major Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project on Yamal and by the growth in shipments via the Northern Sea Route...the Chum-Korotchayevo route is planned for no later than 2023. Unless that deadline, too, is pushed back...

Today the need for them [rail projects] is even more urgent in light of the forthcoming and, moreover, sharp increase in traffic in the direction of the Crimea bridge and congestion in the Novorossiysk port-railroad junction. But this is, after all, the stronghold of the Black Sea Fleet. And transport blockages here threaten to have more than just economic consequences...In 2014, implementation of the project was scheduled for the 2015-2017 timeframe, but this was subsequently deferred ostensibly for financial reasons to the period through 2030. Although it is this artery that will enable blockages on entry to and exit from the eastern sector of the Crimea bridge to be averted and will simultaneously increase the handling capacity of the peninsula's entire port-railroad system. Not to mention the fact that this main line is extremely vital for operational interaction between the Black Sea Fleet's Sevastopol' base and the fleet's other facilities in the region. But whereas the bridge will be commissioned within the next year or two, for the Trans-Crimea Railroad the best-case scenario is by 2030...

For economic and geopolitical reasons projects relating to a unified railroad network in the North Caucasus and with regard to that region's additional “bonding” with Povolzh'ye, the Russian Federation's Central European part, and Transcaucasia remain no less urgent and relevant. These projects are: Novorossiysk-Tuapse, southern Adygeya (Khadzhokh)-Sochi, the Azov port of Achuyevo-Slavyansk-na-Kuban', Sal'sk-Divnoye (Rostovskaya Oblast-northern Stavropol'), Cherkessk-Karachayevsk-Sukhum, Alagir-Tskhinval, Elista-Astrakhan', and Budennovsk-Kizlyar. But precise timeframes for the implementation of these projects, first drawn up in the first half of the 1950s/middle of the 1970s, have not yet been officially announced.

Let me recall once again that the Lower Volga region and the North Caucasus are border territories. Therefore, a developed railroad and port network in these territories and the availability of interconnected outlets to other regions of the Russian Federation is a twofold undertaking of a strategic order...

Linking the Lower Volga region borderlands with the North Caucasus is a no less problematic situation. At the moment there are two options here: a Black Sea coast-focused long-distance route via Rostov-na-Donu and a railroad from Astrakhan' to Derbent (and on into Azerbaijan) along the shores of the Caspian. But, first, these main lines do not connect with each other; second, given this configuration vast territories of the North Caucasus are deprived of additional and, moreover, the shortest outlets to Povolzh'ye, the Caspian Sea, and the country's Central European region...

Geostrategic and socioeconomic factors are closely intertwined in the country's railroad-port system. In the Soviet period, it may be said, they were relegated to the background, because the majority of the aforesaid regions were not border areas. But since 1991 there has been a cardinal change in the geopolitical configuration. For this reason the elimination of the deficiencies on the railways cannot be postponed to some remote future.

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(continued)



Continued: Lack of Investment in Railways Increases Economic and Strategic Vulnerabilities

Source: Sergey Belograd, “‘Качественно и в срок’ Материально-техническое обеспечение войск - процесс непрерывный (To a High Standard and on Schedule: The Troops’ Logistic Support Is a Continuous Process),” *Voyenny Vestnik Yuga Rossii*, 22 September 2017.

In the Russian Federation Armed Forces not very long ago, logistic support specialists rounded up the first half-year’s results. In the collectives, the best servicemen and employees received encouragement. Our correspondent conversed with Lieutenant General Anatoliy Lbov, the Southern Military District deputy commander in charge of logistic support, about what the district’s logistic support structures are nowadays.

[Sergey Belograd] Comrade Lieutenant General, please tell us about the district’s logistic support system. Can it be called, as in times past, “rear services”?

[Anatoliy Lbov] The Southern Military District logistic support structures are a constituent part of the Russian Armed Forces’ logistic support system. In 2010, during the reform process, the rear services and the technical component became amalgamated. So that, today, our district’s logistic support is a well-coordinated organism that comprises the logistic support HQ and five directorates with attached formations, military units, and organizations. And they perform all the assigned tasks according to their regular designation -- to a high standard and on schedule, in any situational conditions. What is more, logistic support, in my view, is a constant and continuous process. Every day we engage more than 20,000 personnel in providing the district’s troops with everything they need!

[SB] Anatoliy Vladimirovich, how do you evaluate the results of your men’s work in the first half-year?

[AL] Here it would be, as we say, a crime to complain. All the taskings, missions, and assignments that the state and the RF Defense Ministry leaderships set before us have been fulfilled completely and to a worthy standard. I will say it straight -- the figures are impressive.

The railroad system moved 295 military echelons [a temporary formation for moving forces] (2,639 cars), and conducted 395 transports (3,248 cars). 34,880 personnel were transported...Incidentally, 10,000 service personnel were conveyed by airplane, 4,120 of them by civil aviation. The logistic support brigades’ automotive transportation carried more than 160,000 tons of miscellaneous freight. Vehicle journeys numbered 32,000. The total distance covered by automotive delivery vehicles in the district was more than 24.2 million kilometers! The auxiliary fleet’s ships organized the delivery of more than 1.3 million tons of miscellaneous cargoes to ships at sea...But what I have listed is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the overall work that was accomplished. I deliberately did not touch upon the organization of catering, supplying clothing and personal gear, salvaging ammunition, using the barracks and housing fund, the buildings and engineer networks, veterinary and sanitary supervision and much besides, without which the troops’ vital everyday activities are simply unthinkable.

[SB] The Russian Defense Minister recently appended the Order of Zhukov to the SMD Separate Railroad Brigade’s Combat Banner.

[AL] The formation’s service record comprises: building the Baykal-Amur main line, restoring railroad links in Chechnya and Abkhazia, installing transfer crossings for the sea ports in Temryuk and Novorossiysk cities, clearing up the consequences of flooding in Krymsk city, installing railroad track to the Armed Forces’ “Patriot” Park of Recreation and Rest at Kubinka, and executing other tasks of no lesser importance for the Defense Ministry’s benefit. It was for this very reason that, when awarding the Order of Zhukov to the Railroad Troops, General Sergey Shoygu noted that this award is a well-deserved appreciation of the high-level skills, courage, steadfastness, and professionalism of the brigade personnel and of our district’s logistic support troops in general.



Exercise on erecting a floating railway bridge across the Volga (Yaroslavl Region).

Source: Russian Defense Ministry, <http://мультимедиа.минобороны.рф/мультимедиа/photo/gallery.htm?id=44043@cmsPhotoGallery>, CC 4.0.



Moving Armor through Marshes and Mire

OE Watch Commentary: European Russia is famous for its legendary “rasputitsa” [распутица]-literally the time of bad roads. This occurs during the spring thaw and the August rains when cross-country mobility becomes close to impossible. Napoleon and Hitler both had bad experiences with this natural mobility obstacle. Russians design their vehicles to function under these conditions by incorporating low ground pressure, wide tracks or tires, raised ground clearance and occasionally auxiliary tracks or tires. Still, there is only so much that designers can do against mud, mire, marsh and swamp-and Russia has much of each. To deal with this challenge, Russia is considering adding a temporary road system [комплекс временных дорог- KVD] to their engineer kit. As the accompanying article from *Izvestiya* discusses, the system entails “a machine that in five minutes can roll out or roll up again a 100-meter road made of metal panels so that armor can pass over a peat bog up to two meters deep.”

This is not the first such system in their inventory, but much of the earlier systems used wooden rolls or pierced steel plates (PSP). This rugged aluminum roadway seems to be “on the right track.” It can be quickly laid down and retrieved and stands up to tracked vehicles. A video claims that the track is 50 meters long and 4.6 meters wide. The system weighs eight tons and the track can handle up to 60 tons. Interested readers can see how it works at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQEUnlMAVws>. **End OE**

Watch Commentary (Grau)



“Russia’s advanced T-14 Armata tanks, T-15 heavy infantry fighting vehicles, and other military hardware will be able to overcome sandy banks and swampy and boggy terrain without stopping. This capability will be provided by the multirole, mechanized, and rapid-deployment KVD temporary road system, a machine that in five minutes can roll out or roll up again a 100-meter road made of metal panels so that armor can pass over a peat bog up to two meters deep.”

Source: Dmitriy Litovkin, Aleksey Ramm. “Iron Carpet To Be Laid for the Armata. Defense Ministry To Get Roll-Up Roads for Vehicles To Cross Soft Ground and Swamp,” *Izvestiya*, 11 October 2017. <http://iz.ru>

Russia’s advanced T-14 Armata tanks, T-15 heavy infantry fighting vehicles, and other military hardware will be able to overcome sandy banks and swampy and boggy terrain without stopping. This capability will be provided by the multirole, mechanized, and rapid-deployment KVD temporary road system, a machine that in five minutes can roll out or roll up again a 100-meter road made of metal panels so that armor can pass over a peat bog up to two meters deep.

The KVD is built on the chassis of the KamAZ-63501 quad-axle all-terrain truck. On its back is a winch with a roll of specially-processed, polymer-coated aluminum panels, which an electrical motor rolls out as the vehicle proceeds and rolls back up in exactly the same way after the column of heavy vehicles has passed. If 100 meters is not enough, the road can be extended without limit using additional sections. These sections are joined to each other with special locks.

The aluminum road takes tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and other vehicles weighing up to 60 tons. It does not matter what is underneath: wet sand, quagmire, or Arctic bog. During testing, a column of heavy vehicles went straight across a swamp that was two meters deep. The road withstood 160 crossings by tracked vehicles and remained intact.

The KVD was created by TekhPromImport ZAO [closed joint-stock company] and was first shown at the Army-2017 exhibition and forum in Kubinka near Moscow as part of the Engineering Troops display. The Defense Ministry ...plans to employ the KVD as part of the latest PP-2005M pontoon sets, which have been in service with the Russian Army since 2014.

TekhPromImport Technical Director Rashid Nurmukhamedov stated that “The machine has already undergone preliminary tests at Defense Ministry training grounds. In November we start the final tests, after which the decision will be made as to whether it enters service. We hope this will happen before the end of the year.”

Sergey Suvorov, a tank and armored vehicle expert...stated that this kind of equipment is essential for moving across soft terrain. “The first thing that comes to mind is the Soviet Army’s Operation Bagration during the Great Patriotic War. The main aim was for tank columns to move into the rear of the German Army. Back then they simply abandoned vehicles that got stuck in mud and carried on with the offensive, but that will not happen with the KVD. This will also be particularly relevant when laying pontoon bridges across rivers.”

Suvorov noted that these “road-laying machines” will make working with pontoons much easier. “The current pontoon fleet is based on KamAZ trucks. These trucks have to drive up to a bank and drop off a floating bridge section which weighs many tons into the water. But also, and this is the most important part, lift it out again without getting stuck in the mire on the bank that heavy armor inevitably leaves behind.”

More than 30 armies in the world currently have mechanized rapid-deployment temporary road systems. The main producer of this technology is the German company FAUN. The Trackway system that they developed also uses a spooling mechanism with coiled aluminum panels. It can be deployed in under 10 minutes. A similar system can also be used to rapidly lay a runway for a field airstrip.



Russian Military Says It Will Get Drone-Killer UAVs

OE Watch Commentary: Recent warfare has placed increasing importance on the development and use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Drones provide an alternative to traditional technologies, are less costly, and result in fewer casualties as they can be operated remotely. Most drones are used for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and some are equipped with large-scale arms used for counterterrorism strikes. According to an article in *Izvestiya*, a pro-Kremlin online Russian daily, Russia has developed drones capable of smaller-scale, more targeted attacks, specifically for downing other drones. The authors dubbed this new UAV a “drone-hunter.”

The Russian Defense Ministry told *Izvestiya* that the new drone, capable of attacks on enemy UAVs as well as ground targets, “is already being tested.” The drone was first exhibited during the summer of 2017 “in the restricted part of the... exhibition-forum ‘Army-2017.’” Due to the secretive nature of its development, only the basic features of the “drone-hunter” are publicly known. It launches vertically without the use of a catapult, allowing for launch with minimal equipment and space. It is also small enough “to be carried by a small military unit consisting of a few soldiers, and also to transport it by motor vehicle.” This differs substantially from other armed drones which are much larger, allowing for greater maneuverability both on land and in the air, increasing the range of possible uses and operations.

The authors report that the drone fires ammunition which explodes prior to impact, striking “enemy drones with fragments.” It is also equipped with “an opto-electronic system, which works day and night in any weather” to detect the target, and can operate both automatically and manually, adding to the versatility of the UAV. **End OE Watch Commentary (Johnson)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Dmitriy Litovkin, “Минобороны получит убийцу квадрокоптеров (The Ministry of Defense Receives Quadcopter Killers),” *Izvestiya Online*, 23 October 2017. <https://iz.ru/657290/aleksei-ramm-dmitrii-litovkin/minoborony-poluchit-ubiitcu-kvadrokopterov>

The Russian military will get a fighter of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). It is a small flying drone, equipped with a firing weapon system and special ammunition. The new drone can find in the air and destroy various UAVs, including miniature ones. Also, a drone-hunter can fire on targets on the ground - for example, personnel, shelters or enemy motor vehicles....

...As “Izvestiya” was told by the Russian Defense Ministry, the drone-hunter is already being tested. Based on the results, a decision will be made on the acceptance of the product for service. The main drone’s task is to search and destroy the enemy’s UAV, primarily quadcopters. The newly designed product was presented for the first time at the end of the summer of this year. The drone-hunter was exhibited in the restricted part of the exposition of the exhibition-forum “Army-2017”.

Little is known about this new product. This is a small flying machine. Unlike most UAVs, it is launched into the air without a catapult, but starts vertically. The size of the drone-hunter allows it to be carried by a small military unit consisting of a few soldiers, and also to transport it by motor vehicle. Because of that, drone can be quickly pre-positioned to protect troops from enemy drones. The main “caliber” of a hunter-drone is a small arms weapons system with special ammunition. The ammunition explodes near the target and hits the enemy drones with fragments. If necessary, it can also open fire on ground targets including personnel and equipment. The hunter-drone detects the target using an opto-electronic system, which works day and night in any weather.

This [drone] hunter can patrol and destroy targets in both automatic and manual modes. In the first instance, the drone is given a patrol area or route. After detecting targets, it asks the “land” for permission to open fire. In manual mode, the operator independently controls the hunter and seeks targets....

“The drone-hunter is already being tested...The drone’s main task is to search and destroy the enemy’s UAV, primarily quadcopters.”



Kenya Defense Force Cpl Ezekiel, assigned to the KDF Military Intelligence Battalion, launches an AeroVironment RQ-11 Raven.
Source: By Staff Sgt. Tiffany DeNault, Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa Image, <http://www.hoa.aficom.mil/image/20142/combined-joint-task-force-horn-of-africa-image>, Public Domain.



Russia's National Guard Expanding Mission

OE Watch Commentary: When the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardiya) was established less than two years ago, it was widely reported that this new security organization would focus on domestic security (terrorism, organized crime, transport security, border control, etc...). It now appears that its mission may be expanding. According to the first excerpt from the main Russian Government information agency, *TASS*, Rosgvardiya's mandate has now expanded to "perform tasks outside" of Russia. As there has been evidence that Rosgvardiya forces have been deployed to Syria (Chechen security units are allegedly subordinate to Rosgvardiya), this change may merely indicate that the legislation has caught up with reality.



Emblem of the Russian National Guard.

Source: Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Guard_of_Russia#/media/File:National_Guard_of_Russia_patch.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

The second excerpt (also from *TASS*) points out that Rosgvardiya has already been assigned a mission which is strictly speaking "outside" of Russia: "to ensure security of the Crimean bridge." This new bridge, which is scheduled to open to auto traffic next year, will provide a physical link between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula. As the excerpt points out, "Rosgvardiya will set up a maritime brigade to ensure security of the Crimean bridge." With "ownership" of Crimea remaining a highly contested issue, the Kremlin leadership has placed a high priority on guarding the security of this vital link.

Rosgvardiya is estimated to be 400,000 personnel and the force continues to be equipped with the latest armaments. As the third excerpt from the centrist *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye* reports, there are now plans for Rosgvardiya to create "rapid reaction forces in every federal district." As the Rosgvardiya representative points out, "these forces will be capable of quickly responding to an urgent situation, whether in peacetime or war." While domestic security will remain the primary focus of Rosgvardiya, the evidence suggests that this force will also be engaged in protecting Russian interests abroad. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: "Росгвардия сможет выполнять возложенные на нее задачи не только в РФ, но и за рубежом (Rosgvardiya Will Be Able To Perform Tasks Not Only in Russia but Also Abroad)," *TASS*, 27 June 2017. <http://tass.ru/politika/4369080>

Rosgvardiya will be able to ensure the security of Russia not only inside the country but also abroad, the agency's first deputy director Sergey Melikov announced.

"By decision of the president, the National Guard Troops, unlike the Internal Troops, will now have the possibility to perform tasks outside our country. Such tasks can be assigned to the troops. Hence, responsibility not only for the internal security of our country, but also for security that will ensure peace for our citizens, as the president said, on distant frontiers," Melikov stated at an official reception of graduate officers.

"Today, together we must create a structure that will really reliably protect and preserve the peace of our citizens, be a guarantor of the constitutional rights of our people, be a guarantor of peace and stability in our country and worldwide," Melikov stressed....

Source: "Russia's National Guard to form maritime brigade," *TASS*, 25 October 2017. <http://tass.com/defense/972458>

Russia's National Guard, also known as Rosgvardiya, will set up a maritime brigade to ensure security of the Crimean bridge, its director Viktor Zolotov said on Wednesday.

"For solving the tasks before Rosgvardiya on ensuring security of the bridge passage through the Kerch Strait in the Southern District of forces under creation we will have a new formation, the maritime brigade," Zolotov told the upper house of parliament, the Federation Council.

The 19-km (12-mile) Crimean bridge is being built under the federal program "Social and Economic Development of The Crimean Region and the City of Sevastopol by 2020" with budget financing only. It will be open to automobile crossings in December 2018 and rail traffic in December 2019.

"Rosgvardiya will be able to ensure the security of Russia not only inside the country but also abroad..."

Source: Oleg Vladykin, "В Росгвардии будет кому реагировать на обострения обстановки (Rosgvardiya will respond to those who exacerbate the situation)," *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 27 October 2017. http://nvo.ng.ru/nvoevents/2017-10-27/2_971_news.html

...Fundamentally important decisions have been made for the further development of Rosgvardiya. First of all, we are talking about the establishment of rapid reaction forces in every federal district. "In the next three years, the main efforts will be focused on creating in the federal districts groupings of troops, capable of quickly responding to an urgent situation, whether in peacetime or war..."

When a River Runs Through It: Riverine Operations in Contemporary Conflict

By LTC (R) Lester Grau, LTC (R) Leroy Denniston

Waterways and population centers will be factors in future war. Frequently they will be collocated and will become operational key terrain. Riverine operations will be a part of future military actions and will be an Army problem. The best way to prepare for a future problem is through study, training, and equipment design and development.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/195094>



Winning Over Hearts and Minds

OE Watch Commentary: The Kremlin leadership continues to strengthen and impress with its international soft-power initiatives. In October, the Kremlin hosted the annual Valdai Conference which invites influential Russian experts, scholars, and pundits from around the world to discuss pressing global problems. In the same month, it also accommodated nearly 29,000 young guests from over 180 different countries during the 19th World Festival of Youth and Students in Sochi. Besides proving to the West that Russia cannot be isolated, these events provide effective forums for the Kremlin to propagate its narrative and influence the hearts and minds of foreign visitors.

President Putin spoke at considerable length during the Valdai Conference, reminding the audience of Russia's many grievances against the West, and the US in particular. As the excerpted transcript of Putin's remarks from the Kremlin's presidential website demonstrate, he claimed that the US systematically weakened Russia's nuclear weapons inventory during the 1990s, while it "limited itself to much more modest reductions of its [own] nuclear arsenal." He went on to state that a "critical mass of problems is building up in global security," suggesting that this is caused by US decisions to "pull out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty" or failing to comply with "the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and international security."

During the same week as the Valdai Conference, Putin made repeated visits to the nearby World Festival of Youth and Students, where he impressed upon the young audience Russia's commitment to the slogan of the festival, "For peace, solidarity and social justice, we struggle against imperialism. Honoring our past, we build the future!" While Putin was less bellicose toward the US there, he did warn his young guests on the dangers of genetic engineering. According to the second excerpt (also from the Kremlin's website), President Putin warned that such technology could be exploited to create "a soldier, an individual who can fight without fear or compassion, mercy or pain." While not specifically pointing at the US, according to Putin, such developments "may be more terrifying than a nuclear bomb."

Alongside modernizing its traditional military forces, over the past several years, Russia has continued to strengthen its global soft-power arsenal. Events like Valdai and the Sochi Youth Festival provide the Kremlin leadership with platforms to win over the hearts and minds of both influential pundits and future leaders from around the world. A key theme within the Kremlin's soft-power arsenal has been to portray the West (and the US in particular) in a negative light. With its extensive control over the major Russian media, the Kremlin has already ensured that its domestic audience has mastered this lesson. It now appears equally determined to spread this message among foreign audiences. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," *Kremlin Website*, 19 October 2017. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>

... The Americans have made – and please pay attention here, this is not secret information, simply few are aware of it – 620 verification visits to Russia to check our compliance with the agreements. They visited the holiest of holiest of the Russian nuclear weapons complex, namely, the enterprises engaged in developing nuclear warheads and ammunition, and weapons-grade plutonium and uranium. The United States gained access to all top-secret facilities in Russia. Also, the agreement was almost unilateral in nature....

... Each step on the Russian side was closely monitored by American specialists, at a time when the United States limited itself to much more modest reductions of its nuclear arsenal, and did so on a purely goodwill basis.

...A critical mass of problems is building up in global security. As is known, in 2002 the United States pulled out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. And despite being initiators of the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and international security, they initiated that agreement themselves, they are failing to meet their commitments. They remain as of today the only and largest holder of this form of weapon of mass destruction. Moreover, the USA has pushed back the deadline for eliminating their chemical weapons from 2007 to as far as 2023. It does not look proper for a nation that claims to be a champion of non-proliferation and control....

Source: "Сессия: Молодёжь-2030. Образ будущего (Youth 2030 The Image of the Future Panel Session)," *Kremlin Website*, 21 October 2017. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55890>

The 19th World Festival of Youth and Students is held in Russia on October 14 to 22. On the first day, an international student carnival was held in Moscow, whereas the main events are hosted by the Olympic Park in Sochi between October 15 and 22. More than 29,000 people from over 180 countries have participated in the festival.... The motto of the festival: "For peace, solidarity and social justice, we struggle against imperialism. Honoring our past, we build the future!"

Vladimir Putin: Good afternoon, friends, ladies and gentlemen....

...Genetic engineering will undoubtedly open up incredible opportunities in pharmacology, new medicines, altering the human genome if a person suffers from genetic diseases. All right, that is good. But there is another part to this process. What does it mean? It means that humans acquire the capability to get into the genetic code, which was created by nature or, as religious people say, by Our Lord. What practical consequences can this entail? It means – we can already imagine it – not so much theoretically, it is already possible to create a person with the desired features. This may be a mathematical genius, this may be an outstanding musician but this can also be a soldier, an individual who can fight without fear or compassion, mercy or pain.

You are aware that humankind may, and most probably will enter a very complicated and very demanding period of its existence and development. And what I have just said may be more terrifying than a nuclear bomb....

“... Each step on the Russian side was closely monitored by American specialists [to check compliance with agreements on reductions of nuclear arsenal], at a time when the United States limited itself to much more modest reductions of its nuclear arsenal, and did so on a purely goodwill basis.”



Russian Narrative on Syria

OE Watch Commentary: When the Kremlin intervened in the Syrian conflict in September 2015, it conveniently labeled all those who were fighting against the Assad regime as “terrorists.” Although both Russia and the West found a common enemy in destroying forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Kremlin regarded the more nuanced approach of Western forces, whereby they supported moderate anti-Assad forces, as naïve and short-sighted. With the last of the ISIS forces in Syria now nearly eliminated, the different objectives of the Russian and Western-backed forces have come into stark contrast. In the excerpted passages from the Russian government’s main newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, a senior Kremlin (and former military) official, Viktor Bondarev, spells out the current Russian perspective on Syria.

Bondarev begins by asserting that if all goes “according to plan, by year’s end Syria will be totally cleared of the terrorists.” He claims that Russian forces have helped to destroy the ISIS hydrocarbon-based economy within Syria which has “led to the serious problem of ...replenishing their military-technical and human resources.” Bondarev asserts, however, that even with this loss of hydrocarbon assets, ISIS bandits will continue to receive “assistance from the American coalition,” and that this “is no longer a secret.” The notion that Washington both created and continues to support ISIS forces remains a popular and oft-repeated theme in Kremlin-supported media. In the article, Bondarev provides “documentary confirmation” which purports to demonstrate “help for the terrorists from the United States and its allies.”

Bondarev goes on to claim that Assad’s removal “is among the American State Department’s foreign policy priorities” and that the US “adheres to the principle of “the end justifies the means,” whereby to achieve their objectives, the US is willing to arm Syrian terrorists. He darkly suggests that there are few prospects for “positive changes in Russia-US cooperation on Syria” as exemplified by the recent argument over which side was responsible for the use of chemical weapons. He confidently concludes that Russia is not responsible for “stirring up this information war” over the use of chemical weapons in Syria, but is rather intent upon conducting “systemic, including preventative, work to combat international terrorism all over the globe.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“But is there hope of positive changes in Russia-US cooperation on Syria? To be frank, not much...”

Source: “Viktor Bondarev, Chairman of the Federation Council Defense and Security Council, former Commander in Chief of the Russian Aerospace Forces, “Сирия в ожидании свободы. Терроризм только военными методами не истребить (Syria Looking Forward to Freedom. Terrorism Cannot Be Destroyed by Military Methods Alone),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 2 November 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/11/02/viktor-bondarev-terrorizm-tolko-voennymi-metodami-ne-istrebit.html>

...As of today, less than 5 percent of the country’s territory is under the control of Islamic State... The Russian Armed Forces are currently implementing the concluding phase of the struggle that began with the liberation of Ar Raqqa -- Islamic State’s unofficial capital. This is an important, pivotal moment, not just militarily and politically but also psychologically. If the operation is conducted according to plan, by year’s end Syria will be totally cleared of the terrorists....

...According to Russian Defense Ministry figures, as of 1 November at least 200 oil and gas deposits under Islamic State control, more than 180 oil refineries, more than 120 fuel-pumping stations, and about 4,000 gasoline tankers have been destroyed. All this was achieved to a significant extent by Russian aviation. Another important aspect is that we have managed to undermine Islamic State’s economy, which depends directly on the sale of hydrocarbons.... This financial loss led to the serious problem that the fighters are currently facing with regard to replenishing their military-technical and human resources....

...After all, under a pretense of fighting Islamic State and the Al-Nusrah Front, the United States together with its satellites has been trying for a long time to destroy Bashar al-Assad’s regime, destroying in the process not only government troops but also civilians.

...The assistance that the American coalition has given to the Islamic State bandits in Syria is no longer a secret.... There is documentary confirmation of such help for the terrorists from the United States and its allies.... Here is another incontrovertible argument indicating American aid to the terrorists. When Russian aviation began the operation to liberate Dayr az Zawr in September, the US-led international coalition sharply decreased the intensity of strikes against Islamic State in Iraq. It was at this time that major terrorist forces were transferred to Dayr az Zawr from Iraqi border regions....

...The United States peremptorily declares that Bashar al-Assad must go. His overthrow is among the American State Department’s foreign policy priorities. Meanwhile, it is well known that the United States adheres to the principle of “the end justifies the means.” The US has repeatedly demonstrated a readiness to cooperate with one “enemy” (in their view) in order to destroy another. Apart from military, logistical, and medical help, the US provides the fighters with assistance of a strategic nature....

...Of course, we should not foster any illusions about a sharp reorientation of the United States onto the track of genuinely fighting the terrorists. But is there hope of positive changes in Russia-US cooperation on Syria? To be frank, not much.... The US is again waging war in the information space....

...Russia has studied the report on chemical attacks published by the States the other day. What can be said about it? The investigation was one-sided, conducted from an angle that suited Washington. All the crimes are blamed on government troops headed by Bashar al-Assad. The assessments and conclusions show double standards. The document does not even consider the Russian assessment of events....

But, as they say, “the show goes on.” For our part, we are not stirring up this information war but concentrating our efforts on completing the operation to eliminate terrorist groups in the Middle East and to conduct systemic, including preventative, work to combat international terrorism all over the globe.



Restricting Social Media in the Military

OE Watch Commentary: Like people in most other countries, Russians are increasingly connected to the Internet. As the brief excerpt from the Russian media-monitoring site, *Mediascope* points out, by early 2017, “87 million people, which accounted for 71% of the total population” have regular access to the Internet. While the Kremlin leadership has exerted considerable control over major national media, it has only begun to impose greater government restrictions over the Internet.

The second excerpt from the main Russian Government information agency, *TASS*, describes new restrictions on posting personal information for those serving in the Russian military. According to the excerpt, “contract servicemen in the Russian Army will be banned from posting information on the Internet which could reveal where they are deployed and other details of their service activity.”

This legislation is hardly surprising for those who monitor Russian social media sites. Social media information posted by Russian military personnel began to disappear shortly after Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine in mid-2014. Despite protestations from the Ministry of Defense, both domestic and foreign monitors of Russian social media sites had been able to chronicle and document Russian military involvement in Ukraine. Revelations regarding specific Russian military units and personnel involved in the fighting (to include the downing of Malaysian flight MH-17 in July 2014) helped to enforce these social media restrictions. The excerpt obliquely refers to these disclosures, stating “that social media resources are often used “for geopolitical objectives, military-political objectives at variance with international law, and also terrorist, extremist, criminal, and other illegal objectives.”

As recent events have suggested, the Kremlin leadership understands the power of unrestrained social media access. Indeed, the *TASS* excerpt asserts that such information can “be used by the special services of individual states and also by various terrorist and extremist organizations to exert influence by information and psychological means aimed at destabilizing the domestic political and social situation.” **End OE Watch**

Commentary (Finch)

Source: “Аудитория пользователей интернета в России в 2017 году составила 87 млн. Человек (The audience of Internet users in Russia in 2017 was 87 million people), *Mediascope*, 21 April 2017. <http://mediascope.net/press/news/744498/>

According to Mediascope , the Internet audience in October 2016 - March 2017 reached 87 million people, which accounted for 71% of the total population of the country. For the year, the Russian Internet audience, according to Mediascope data, increased by 2%.

Source: “Минобороны запретит военнослужащим выкладывать селфи и геолокацию в соцсетях (Defense Ministry To Ban Servicemen From Posting Selfies and Geolocation on Social Media), *TASS*, 4 October 2017. <http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/4618154>

Contract servicemen in the Russian Army will be banned from posting information on the Internet which could reveal where they are deployed and other details of their service activity. The relevant draft law has been posted on the draft normative acts portal.

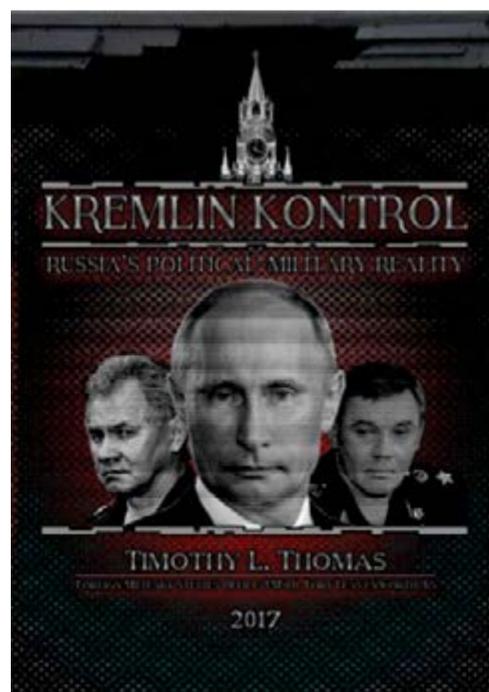
“Servicemen serving under contract are banned from posting information (including photographic and video materials, geolocation data, and other information) on the Internet information and telecommunications network about themselves and other servicemen making it possible to discover which department they belong to and information about their service activity or the service activity of other servicemen and the activity of military units, the text of the draft law prepared by the Defense Ministry says.

It is observed that the draft law extends among others to contract servicemen who are foreign citizens.

The draft law’s explanatory note stresses that social media resources are often used “to geopolitical objectives, military-political objectives at variance with international law, and also terrorist, extremist, criminal, and other illegal objectives.

In such cases information about the location and activity of other servicemen could be used by the special services of individual states and also by various terrorist and extremist organizations “to exert influence by information and psychological means aimed at destabilizing the domestic political and social situation.”

The planned date for the draft normative legal act to enter into force is January 2018....



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>



Arctic Sea Monster

OE Watch Commentary: Much has been written over the past several years regarding how Russia is building up and strengthening its military presence in the Arctic. However, given the harsh environmental conditions in the region, combined with the lack of transport links, maintaining and resupplying forces in the Arctic have presented considerable challenges. According to the excerpted entry from the pro-Kremlin source, *Izvestiya Online*, Russian military planners are now hoping to exploit the “wing-in-ground effect vehicle (ekranoplan)” developed during Soviet times “to deliver cargoes to remote bases” in the Arctic.

While the proposed designer for this project (Alekseyev Design Bureau) already produces smaller types of ekranoplans, the scale of the new project (“a length of 93 meters... a wingspan of 71 meters,” with a weight “on the order of 600 tons”) will rival the giant prototypes developed during the Soviet period. According to the article, they have already named the proposed project “Spasatel (Rescuer).” Should this project be fully funded and constructed, it “will be able to transport up to 500 men with weapons at a speed of 550 kilometers an hour... with a range of several thousand kilometers.” It will also be “able to land not merely on water, but also on a level, hard surface.” The article asserts that “the Spasatel will greatly surpass conventional assault ships” when it comes to mobility and that “wing-in-ground effect vehicles have no fear of mine barriers and enemy torpedoes, and because of their low flight altitude they will be hard to detect with radar.”

There is no question that modernizing Russia’s military remains a top Kremlin priority. While the headline from this article might suggest that Russia is well on its way toward constructing this “Arctic Monster,” the details point out that they have yet to even construct “a full-scale mockup,” and that if all goes well, flight testing won’t begin until 2022 at the earliest. In the interim, Russia will continue to strengthen its military presence in the Arctic; effectively maintaining and resupplying these forces, however, may limit their plans. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: S. Valchenko, N. Surkov and A. Ramm, “Россия построит ‘арктического монстра’ (Russia to Build ‘Arctic Monster’),” *Izvestiya Online*, 27 October 2017. <https://iz.ru/659793/sergei-valchenko-nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/rossiya-postroit-arkticheskogo-monstra>

A super-heavy transport-assault wing-in-ground effect vehicle [ekranoplan] is being developed for the military. It will be able to land not only on water like its predecessor, but also on land. In size the craft will be comparable to the famous “Caspian Sea Monster” from Soviet times. There are plans to use the craft in the Arctic and the Pacific Ocean for rescue operations and to deliver cargoes to remote bases....

...AO [Joint Stock Company] “TsKB po SPK [Central Design Bureau for Hydrofoil Vessels] imeni R.Ye. Alekseyev” is engaged in the development of the wing-in-ground effect vehicle.

Izvestiya was told by this company that this work concerns the creation of a base platform with the working name of “Spasatel [Rescuer].” At a length of 93 meters and having a wingspan of 71 meters, the aerial vessel will weigh on the order of 600 tons.... It is planned that the craft will take to the air in 2022-2023 and it will complete testing in 2025.

It is proposed that the flight range of the Spasatel will be several thousand kilometers, and the craft will be able to land not merely on water, but also on a level, hard surface. To be able to do this it will be equipped with a wheel chassis and a highly mechanized wing....

...The new wing-in-ground effect vehicle will be equipped with a ramp to facilitate loading and off-loading of soldiers and equipment. It will be able to transport up to 500 men with weapons at a speed of 550 kilometers an hour. In its mobility the Spasatel will greatly surpass conventional assault ships. Moreover, wing-in-ground effect vehicles have no fear of mine barriers and enemy torpedoes, and because of their low flight altitude they will be hard to detect with radar.

“A super-heavy transport-assault wing-in-ground effect vehicle [ekranoplan] is being developed for the military.”



(Soviet-Era) Ekranoplan A-90 Orlyonok.

Source: Sergey Rodovichenko, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ekranoplan_A-90_Orlyonok.jpg, CC2.0



Arctic Aviation Practices Attack on Amphibious Landing

OE Watch Commentary: The duration of night and day is not a constant unless one lives on the equator. The duration of night and day vary greatly over the poles. The midnight sun and polar darkness can stretch to 24 hours. Arctic attack aviation needs to be able to function effectively under either condition- and try to avoid enemy return fire. The accompanying passage from the Russian Defense Ministry discusses a recent exercise during which the Northern Fleet Air Force and Air Defense Combined Formation Composite Air Regiment carried out flights in hours of darkness and practiced destroying a naval detachment preparing to land an amphibious assault force on an Arctic beach. As the passage discusses, the pilots used illuminating munitions capable of affecting night vision devices. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: “Northern Fleet Pilots Prevent a Landing by a Simulated Enemy on the Arctic Coast,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 5 October 2017. <http://www.mil.ru>

Crews of Su-24 aircraft of the Northern Fleet Air Force and Air Defense Combined Formation [obyedineniye] Composite Air Regiment practiced bombing on Lumbovskiy Range in Murmanskaya Oblast. The pilots were assigned the mission of destroying a simulated naval detachment preparing to land an amphibious assault force on an austere Arctic beach.

Bombing strikes were directed against both naval and shore targets simulating a concentration of armored vehicles on shore and landing ships and fire support ships in adjacent waters where the amphibious assault force landing was conducted. The bombing was with practice munitions. In carrying out flights in hours of darkness, the pilots used illuminating munitions capable of affecting night vision devices. A total of up to eight Su-24 bomber crews were involved in the exercise.

“Crews of Su-24 aircraft of the Northern Fleet Air Force and Air Defense Combined Formation [obyedineniye] Composite Air Regiment practiced bombing on Lumbovskiy Range in Murmanskaya Oblast. The pilots were assigned the mission of destroying a simulated naval detachment preparing to land an amphibious assault force on an austere Arctic beach.”



Su-24 RF-92249, 47 Red.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin Blog, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Lipetsk-Aviation-Center/I-dHCwnC3/A>, CC 4.0.

© Vitaly V. Kuzmin



Catalonia: Police Rebellion Deflates

OE Watch Commentary: The recent separatist kerfuffle in Catalonia seemed dire, but perhaps more so than it actually was, in part because the Catalanian police (referred to colloquially as the Mossos) had apparently risen up against Spanish rule. When Catalanian separatist leadership failed to renounce their independence declarations, the Spanish government, after some meandering, asserted itself by withdrawing portions of Catalanian governmental autonomy and taking over some Catalanian regional government functions directly. Perhaps to the surprise of the Spanish government, resistance from within the Mossos appears to have been anemic at best, at least according to reports such as the accompanying reference. The reference maintains that the removal of the two top Mossos cops, Josep Lluís Trapero and Pere Soler was key to the ease with which suppression of the rebellion within the Mossos proceeded. According to the reference, the rebellion depended on approval and protection from the top. With the removal of the two top cops, the official protection of separatist groups within the police has disappeared, though such groups are still present. Continued service within the Mossos is now to be conditioned on an oath of absolute loyalty to Spain. Also, according to the reference, prominent among other controls is the centralized monitoring of all internal electronic communications. In any case, taming of the single largest organized armed separatist entity by the Spanish crown seems to have unfolded with remarkable ease and speed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Carlos Cuesta, “Cataluña: se desinfla la rebeldía de los Mossos (Catalonia: The Rebellion of the Mossos [Catalonian Police] deflates),” *OK Diario (Madrid)*, 4 November 2017. <https://okdiario.com/espana/cataluna/2017/11/04/mossos-control-interior-confirma-informes-filtrados-datos-desinfla-rebeldia-1482271/>

Control. *Daily internal controls and the monitoring of communications by the intervening [of] Catalanian CTTI [Catalonian Technological Central] have satisfied the Minister of Interior...*

This relates to conclusions made from early data obtained by the Ministry and that back [the finding] that the withdrawal of the upper leadership of the autonomous police, Josep Lluís Trapero and Pere Soler, has been key to toppling a separatist structure maintained and protected from above....

The third control, in spite of tending more towards telematics, supposes a whole dissuasive mechanism for the rebellious behavior of the Mossos. And it is that by way of the Catalanian Technological Central (CTTI) it is possible to follow all of the communications of the Catalanian police agents...

“...the withdrawal of the upper leadership of the autonomous police... has been key to toppling a separatist structure maintained and protected from above.”



Catalonian Squad Police (Mossos d'Esquadra) (2009 photo).

Source: Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mossos_d%27Esquadra_unitat_de_Transit_tot_terreny_amb_trailer_de_moto.jpg, Public Domain.