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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



EURASIA

- 3 The Role of the S-350 Vityaz in Russian Air Defense
- 5 Russia's Increasing Bridging Capabilities: Military and Civil Motives
- 8 Russia's Spetsnaz to Get New "Flying Tank" Special Operations Helicopter
- 9 The 3BM44 "Lekalo" Fin-Stabilized Subcaliber Projectile
- 10 Russian Nuclear Submarines Testing Rockets to Fire through Arctic Ice
- 11 Russian Coast Guard to Strengthen Presence in the Arctic
- 12 Russia Prepares Ambitious Economic Strategy for Arctic Region
- 14 Russia, China and the Coronavirus
- 15 Russia to Provide Special Legal Status for ERA Technopolis
- 16 Military Perspectives and Some Critique on Russia's New Government and Economy
- 17 Letters to Great-Grandfathers at the Front: Developing Military Patriotism in Russian Society
- 18 "Borderization" Continues in Georgia
- 19 A Resolution to Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Problems?
- 20 The Geopolitics of TurkStream and the Complexities of Bulgaria's Foreign Policy
- 22 Huawei in Europe: Debating Europe's Position in a New Technological Cold War

INDO-PACIFIC

- 24 The Strategic Implications of Chinese-Iranian-Russian Naval Drills in the Indian Ocean
- 26 Considering "The Ground Battlefield Under Informatized Conditions"

- 28 The "Blade of Victory": A Chinese Perspective on Drone Swarms
- 29 China Summons the PLA to Prevent and Contain the Coronavirus
- 31 Abu Sayyaf Kidnapping Indonesians at Sea
- 32 Indonesia to Bolster Nationalism to Deradicalize Returning ISIS Members
- 33 The Indian Military's Concerns with Chinese 5G

MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

- 34 Russia Facilitates Dialogue between Turkey and Syria
- 36 Russian Special Operations in Syria
- 37 Turkey's Cooperation with Ukraine: A Message to Russia?
- 39 TurkStream's Role in Energy Security and Turkish-Russian Relations
- 40 Russia's Outreach to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq
- 42 Libya Conflict: Oil as the Latest Weapon
- 44 Egypt Proposes Joint African Military Counterterrorism Force
- 46 Speculation on Egyptian Cross-Border Military Deployment
- 48 Mauritania and the UAE's Expanding Influence in the West African Sahel
- 50 Shifting Dynamics in Yemen as Houthis Advance East of Sana'a
- 52 Turkey to Build Fifth-Generation Stealth Fighter Jet
- 54 Israeli Defense Forces to Increase Integration, Agility and Lethality

- 56 Iran: Increasing Domestic Production of Rare Earth Elements
- 57 Counterfeit Bank Notes Seized in Iran
- 58 Solar Power Plant Opens in Tehran Province

AFRICA

- 59 Shiny Metals for Shiny Arms: Russia and Mozambique's Trade Agreement
- 60 Kenya Weighs Whether to Keep Forces in Somalia Against Al-Shabaab
- 61 Burkina Faso: Fertile Soil for Homegrown Terrorists
- 62 Burkina Faso: Sahelian Jihadists Conduct Massacre
- 63 Burkina Faso to Arm and Train Civilians to Counter Terrorist Groups
- 64 Al-Qaeda Loyalists Defect to ISIS in the Sahel
- 65 Boko Haram Threatens to Cut Borno State from Nigeria
- 66 Mali Army Returns to Kidal after Six Year Absence

LATIN AMERICA

- 68 Russian Foreign Minister Comments on the US in Latin America
- 69 Russia-Cuba Relations Continue Revival
- 70 Juan Guaidó and Cubazuela
- 72 ELN Gaining Strength in Colombia and Venezuela
- 73 ELN and FARC Involvement in Colombia's Protest Marches
- 75 Coca Spraying in Colombia
- 76 El Salvador's Constitutional Crisis
- 77 Panama Lifts Weapons Moratorium
- 78 Social Networking Enables Kidnappers in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

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ON THE COVER:

Burkina Faso soldiers during a military exercise

Source: Spc. Britany Slessman/AFRICOM/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flintlock_2017_small_unit_tactics_training_in_Burkina_Faso_170301-A-ZF167-075.jpg, Public Domain

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The Role of the S-350 Vityaz in Russian Air Defense

OE Watch Commentary: In terms of organization, The Russian Federation's air defense system is primarily split between the Ground Forces and the Aerospace Defense Forces (VKS). The air defense systems of the Ground Forces are generally designed to provide air defense for the footprints of the echelons to which they are assigned or attached. At the brigade/division level, these may include systems such as the 9K310 Igla (SA-18 Grouse), ZSU-23-4M4 Shilka, 9K35 Strela-10 (SA-13 Gopher), 2K22 Tunguska (SA-19 Grison), 9K33 Osa (SA-8 Gecko), 9K330 Tor (SA-15 Gauntlet). At the Combined Arms Army/Tank Army/Army Corps-level, air defense is provided by systems such as the 9K37 Buk (SA-11 Gadfly). At the Military District/Joint Strategic Command-level, there are S-300V4 (SA-23 Gladiator\Giant) units that are taskable air defense assets that provide primarily ballistic missile defense for a given area or Combined Arms Army/Tank Army/Army Corps.



50P6E TEL for S-350 Vityaz system.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2019-Static-part-3/i-9SZqhr3/A>, CC BY-NC-ND-4.0

The Aerospace Defense Forces (VKS) are responsible for national air defense, the first line of which is fighter aviation (Su-27s, Su-30s, Su-35s, Mig-29s, etc.), and then wide area air defense systems such as the S-300PM/PM2 Favorit (SA-10d/e), S-400 Triumf (SA-21 Growler), and the forthcoming S-500 Prometey. The VKS also operate point defense systems, such as the Pantsir-S1 (SA-22 Greyhound), to defend the aforementioned wide area air defense systems, and other strategically valuable targets. In addition, the VKS have a few Ground Forces systems including the 9K37 Buk (SA-11 Gadfly), and S-300V4 (SA-23 Gladiator\Giant). Whether in the Ground Forces or VKS, newer and older variants of these systems may be encountered as the Russian modernization process does not require the upgrade of all systems to a given standard, so it is not uncommon to see several variants of a given weapon system in the Russian inventory at any given time.

In terms of range, Russian air defense systems are classified as 'close range (up to 10 km),' 'short range (up to 30 km),' 'medium range (up to 100 km),' and 'long range (over 100 km).' Close range systems include those such as the 9K310 Igla (SA-18 Grouse), ZSU-23-4M4 Shilka, 9K35 Strela-10 (SA-13 Gopher). Short range systems include the 2K22 Tunguska (SA-19 Grison), 9K33 Osa (SA-8 Gecko), and 9K330 Tor (SA-15 Gauntlet). Medium range systems include the 9K37 Buk (SA-11 Gadfly), and long range systems include the S-300V4 (SA-23 Gladiator\Giant), S-300PM/PM2 Favorit (SA-10d/e), S-400 Triumf (SA-21 Growler), and the forthcoming S-500 Prometey. (Although the S-400 and S-500 have advertised ranges of up to 400km, it is likely that a hit at this range would require ideal conditions.)

The accompanying excerpted article from *TASS* explains that the new S-350 Vityaz air defense system will be fully integrated with the S-400 and air defense network as a whole. And since the S-350 fires three types of missiles (9M96E2 (120km), 9M96E (60km), and 9M100 (10km)), it will provide good coverage of the close, short, and medium ranges, filling the niche of several other air defense systems in the inventory, and at a reportedly very reasonable price. As the article notes, "the [S-350 "Vityaz" Air Defense Missile System] mobile launcher with 12 missiles is capable of easily shooting down an unmanned aerial vehicle, an aircraft, a helicopter, or a cruise missile. The "Vityaz" systems will become a deterrent factor in the region." **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“It is also important that one can deploy our “Triumf”, “Buk”, “Tor”, “Pantsir”, “Vityaz”, and “Derivatsiya” systems not only on various chassis but also on ships. In the process, all of these systems become interbranch while adding additional equipment. Furthermore, they can operate in a single combat command and control system.”



Continued: The Role of the S-350 Vityaz in Russian Air Defense

“[The] S-400 complex can not only use “foreign” commands for the guidance of its missiles but is itself capable of commanding and controlling a network of S-300s, “Pantsirs”, “Tors”, and other air defense missile systems, having merged under its foundation dozens of launchers with hundreds of missiles. All of this makes our complexes not simply launchers with missiles but “blocks” in a single global airspace monitoring system, of which foreign developers essentially cannot boast for the time being”

Source: Dmitriy Litovkin, “‘Витязи’ воздушной обороны: Чем не могут похвастаться зарубежные разработчики системы ПВО (The ‘Vityazi’ of Air Defense: What Foreign Air Defense System Developers Can’t Boast),” *TASS Online*, 23 January 2020. <https://tass.ru/opinions/7588391>

The ‘Vityazi’ of Air Defense: What Foreign Air Defense System Developers Can’t Boast

The S-350 “Vityaz” Air Defense Missile System (ZRS) is going on combat alert in the Leningrad Oblast. The mobile launcher with 12 missiles is capable of easily shooting down an unmanned aerial vehicle, an aircraft, a helicopter, or a cruise missile. The “Vityaz” systems will become a deterrent factor in the region – now not a single aircraft will be able to remain unnoticed for the Russian Air Defense (PVO) forces. Furthermore, one can assume that the coverage of the “Iskander-M” operational-tactical missile complexes will become the air defense missile system’s duty...

The S-400 Triumph can combat such difficult targets as the AWACS early radar warning aircraft and the E-8 JSTARS ground forces command and control and surveillance aircraft. The latter provides not only reconnaissance but also the guidance of precision-guided weapon systems. Therefore, it is considered to be one of the main targets for the PVO systems.

In comparison with the “Triumf”, the S-350 is, of course, a “small” system. They developed it as the replacement for the S-300PS air defense missile complexes, which were accepted into the inventory at the beginning of the 1980s and they had completely exhausted their potential by 2010. The development of this complex was caused by the analysis of the experience of the combat employment of the Air Defense Missile Troops in Vietnam and in the Middle East, where their mobility and capability to move out from under a strike “right under the enemy’s nose”, and to rapidly prepare for combat at a new launch position facilitated their survival to a significant extent.

In this background, the S-300PS’s “successor” is the absolute hero: First of all, the “Vityaz” has a smaller size and, second, carries 12 versus four missiles at the same time, and is set up for combat and is torn down in a total of five minutes. In the process, the new items permit them to combat at ranges and distances practically within the entire range of airborne targets, just like their even older comrades. Aerospace Forces Air Defense Missile Troops Deputy Chief Colonel Yuriy Muravkin in a *Krasnaya Zvezda* Newspaper interview reported that the VKS border and coastal air defense regiments will be the first to obtain the S-350. From which one can arrive at the conclusion that the “Vityaz” will become an operational system of coverage on possible axes of a strike already prior to when the “Triumf” will become involved in this mission.

It is also important that one can deploy our “Triumf”, “Buk”, “Tor”, “Pantsir”, “Vityaz”, and “Derivatsiya” systems not only on various chassis but also on ships. In the process, all of these systems become interbranch while adding additional equipment. Furthermore, they can operate in a single combat command and control system. In the designers’ words, the S-400 can be used as a target designator not only using its own radar but also while receiving information from without: from the Air Defense and Missile Defense command and control posts, for example, such as satellites and early radar warning aircraft of the latest “Rezonans-N” radars.

The technical capabilities of this radar permit the detection and issuance of target designations on aerodynamic airborne targets at ranges of up to 600 kilometers, and against ballistic targets – up to 1,200 kilometers. Ministry of Defense spokesmen point out that in conditions of electronic countermeasures and natural interference, it can detect ballistic objects of any complexity, and also cruise missiles, hypersonic targets and aircraft, which were developed based on “Stealth” technology. In so doing, any S-400 complex can not only use “foreign” commands for the guidance of its missiles but is itself capable of commanding and controlling a network of S-300s, “Pantsirs”, “Tors”, and other air defense missile systems, having merged under its foundation dozens of launchers with hundreds of missiles. All of this makes our complexes not simply launchers with missiles but “blocks” in a single global airspace monitoring system, of which foreign developers essentially cannot boast for the time being.



Russia's Increasing Bridging Capabilities: Military and Civil Motives

OE Watch Commentary: The wide plains of Russia with wide rivers prone to overflowing their banks, have made wet gap crossing a high priority for the Russian military for both military and civil reasons. The Russian military routinely practices wet gap crossings, such as in the recent Tsentr-2019 exercises that featured a 2.8 km wet gap crossing, conducted by six pontoon bridge/ferry systems and 14 PTS-2 tracked amphibious transports. This force permitted the crossing of more than 300 motor vehicles per hour.

In addition to purely military activities, this capability also supports the Engineer and Railroad Troops in actively engaging in humanitarian relief activities. For example, last summer, large scale flooding isolated the city of Tulun in the Irkutsk Oblast, and the military supplied the population and rescuers with foodstuffs, medications, drinking water and other necessary materials. They were also involved with clearing obstructions, placing culverts, and the restoration of dams and roads.

One of the most high-profiled Russian bridging efforts occurred not in Russia, but in Syria in 2019. In about two days, a joint Russian-Syrian force erected a 210-meter long bridge across the Euphrates River, near Deir ez-Zor in northeastern Syria, capable of servicing 8,000 cars a day. The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* explains that Russia is procuring a new pontoon bridge/ferry system capable of transporting 120 tons, or about 40 motor vehicles, or a tank and several BTRs and/or BMPs a day. The second excerpted article, from *Krasnaya Zvezda*, discusses the importance of a relatively new engineer/bridge unit in the Northern Fleet. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Ferry Operations.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <https://function.mil.ru/function/mto/news/more.htm?id=12249839@egNews>, CC BY 4.0

“It is easy to destroy bridges using precision-guided weapons, which the enemy also makes the first priority. In that situation, ferries and pontoon crossings will begin to play an important role.”

-Military Expert Vladislav Shurygin

“We erect bridges across rivers, we lay roads there, where there aren't any, and thereby support the efficient movement of motor and armored vehicles to the forming up area or the conduct of the events of combat training activity. So, one can entirely objectively assess our unit's tactical and strategic significance.”

-Captain Andrey Sokolov



Continued: Russia's Increasing Bridging Capabilities: Military and Civil Motives



Ferry Operations.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, <https://function.mil.ru/function/mto/news/more.htm?id=12249839@egNews>, CC BY 4.0

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, “С тяжелым паром: новый транспорт переправит танки при любой погоде (With a Heavy Ferry: The New Transport Will Ferry Tanks Across in Any Weather),” *Izvestia Online*, 3 February 2020. <https://iz.ru/966756/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/s-tiazhelym-parom-novyi-transport-perepravit-tanki-pri-liuboi-pogode>

With a Heavy Ferry: The New Transport Will Ferry Tanks Across in Any Weather

In the foreseeable future, the Ministry of Defense will be able to count on the assistance of “unsinkable rescuers” to transport equipment and to eliminate the aftermath of catastrophes and emergency situations. Military personnel will use super-heavy ferries for these purposes. The innovation, which will arrive in the Engineer and Railroad Troops, will be able to transport armored vehicles weighing tens of tonnes, including tanks. In so doing, the waterborne platforms can handle strong winds, currents, and waves, the experts point out.

With its own weight of 720 tons, the ferry will transport up to 120 tons at one time, in other words, approximately 40 motor vehicles or a tank and several BTRs and/or BMPs a Military Department spokesman told Izvestiya. The waterborne platform is a unique erector set. In the travel position, its deck, which is equipped with a built-in bridge, is dismantled into several elements. There are also towing-motor components and also several sections, from which the sides, stern, and bow portions are assembled, which are equipped with special ramps for vehicles to drive on and drive off. All of the parts of the pontoon fleet are based on domestically manufactured all-terrain truck vehicles – this will permit the transportation of sections even in conditions of the lack of good roads. Having arrived at the location, the ferry is assembled directly by the personnel. Additional equipment is not required – the waterborne platform’s parts unfold themselves directly in the water. It only remains for the personnel to secure them in the needed manner using special junction devices and arresting devices. The dimensions of individual assemblies are calculated so that one can easily transport the ferry on railroads to long distances...

Any pontoon fleets – are the classic example of dual-use equipment, Military Expert Vladislav Shurygin is confident. “You can’t get by without it during the course of contemporary combat operations”, the Expert told Izvestiya. “It is easy to destroy bridges using precision-guided weapons, which the enemy also makes the first priority. In that situation, ferries and pontoon crossings will begin to play an important role – they will be used to maintain transport links at the proper level. However, one can do this covertly, for example, at night. Furthermore, forward units will be able to use the ferries and amphibious tugs to force rivers and other water obstacles”...



Continued: Russia's Increasing Bridging Capabilities: Military and Civil Motives



PTS-2 Tracked Amphibious Transport with a Ural-43206.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2017-Demonstration-p2/i-s4rbZ9q>, CC BY NC-ND- 4.0

Source: Marina Shcherbakova, “Если пехоте не пройти (If the Infantry Can't Pass),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 5 February 2020. <http://redstar.ru/esli-pehote-ne-projti>

If the Infantry Can't Pass

The Northern Fleet Bridge Company – is a comparatively young subunit, which was formed in November 2009...”It is sufficient to look at a map of Murmansk Oblast in order to become convinced how rich the region is with rivers and lakes. The bodies of water are serious obstacles for the movement of ground forces along the uninhabited portion of the Kola Peninsula and dictate their requirements for the organization of the combat training of Northern Fleet servicemen. There aren't that many alternate routes, which for example, during the course of the conduct of an exercise impedes the deployment of troops to the needed area in the specified time. And then the Bridge Company gets involved in the matter”, Captain Andrey Sokolov explains. “We erect bridges across rivers, we lay roads there, where there aren't any, and thereby support the efficient movement of motor and armored vehicles to the forming up area or the conduct of the events of combat training activity. So, one can entirely objectively assess our unit's tactical and strategic significance”.

The Bridge Company was involved in installing a double-track 50-meter crossing with a cargo capacity of 50 tons across the Srednyaya River, along which the movement of military vehicles was subsequently carried out, in the special logistics support forces exercise, which was conducted in August of last year. The erection of metal bridges takes approximately two days. The personnel's actions are worked out until they become second nature. Each specialist knows his direction of work.

“First of all, terrain reconnaissance occurs, we study the river, we use instruments to measure the depth and width of the channel, the speed and direction of the current and we determine the location of the proximate erection of the bridge in accordance with the standards. Later KamAZ vehicles, which are loaded with assembled metal sections, which consist of groups of supports, bridge spans, and spare parts, drive up to the bank. We unload everything on the assembly ground and begin the gradual process of assembly, determine the axis, and install the supports and the spans. This process requires the knowledge of the structures' performance characteristics, serious attention, and physical endurance, not to mention already observance of safety requirements”, Captain Andrey Sokolov explains.

Wooden bridges, as a rule, remain at their location after erection. They are needed in those cases when they need to equip a crossing as soon as possible. The standard for the erection of metal bridges takes longer based upon time but, as the specialists say, it is easier to erect them from the technological point of view – they are erected and dismantled like an erector set. The dismantlement process is no less time-consuming and painstaking and even more energy-consuming in some places.

“As a rule, the length of the bridges that are erected by us total from 118 to 128 meters, but there was a 138-meter bridge in our experience”, Andrey Sokolov says. This longest bridge, which was erected across the Kola River by the Bridge Company's manpower in 2017...

The temporary crossing across the river was erected from a small highway prefabricated bridge set in several days. It was capable of supported vehicles with a weight of up to 50 tons, which was also verified in practice: a column of six loaded KamAZ vehicles that were escorted by two BTR-80s passed along the bridge. The total weight of the vehicles totaled more than 100 tons.



Russia's Spetsnaz to Get New "Flying Tank" Special Operations Helicopter

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying passage from *Izvestia*, "Russia's Spetsnaz are to get a true 'flying tank' this year – a unique combat helicopter" that will transport the ground force, engage enemy aircraft, prep the landing zone, insert the ground force and then remain to provide immediate air cover. This heavily armed and armored 'flying tank' will be able to carry up to four extended-range Hermes [Hermes] missiles, up to eight supersonic Ataka missiles, or up to two tons of aviation bombs. It can even do Medevac after the fight. According to the passage, tests of the first prototypes of the new combat transport helicopter (with the designation Mi-8AMTSh-VN) are planned for the fall of 2020.

In discussing the new 'flying tank,' Colonel Valeriy Yuryev, deputy chair of the Russian Union of Paratroopers said, "The modern helicopter should have sufficient firepower, plenty of ammunition, and good transportation performance. Desirably, it would land a team and then, while the commandos are approaching their assigned location, start engaging targets. What we need is a kind of flying tank. That is more effective than having infantry fighting vehicles or tanks supporting the commandos – you see the situation better from the air. But an aircraft like that needs a fairly powerful engine."

The article notes that the Mil plant began to develop a helicopter for the Special Operations Forces in 2017. Then, in May 2018, the military authorized research and development on the project.

Flying a lift ship and flying a gunship are fundamentally similar, but there are also unique skills involved with each. Producing the aircraft seems complicated enough, but providing ample proficient pilots could be the real challenge. It will require a lot of flight and simulator hours to master all the aspects of this war bird. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The legendary Mi-8 is going to be turned into a heavily armed and armored ‘flying tank.’ ”

Source: Anton Lavrov, Roman Kretsul, Aleksei Ramm, "Spetsnaz To Get 'Flying Tank' - Combat Transport Helicopter Will not Only Carry Troops but Also Provide Supporting Fire", *Izvestia*, 15 January 2020. <https://iz.ru/955833/anton-lavrov-roman-kretsul-aleksei-ramm/voina-i-mi-spetcnaz-poluchit-letaiushchii-tank>

Spetsnaz to get 'Flying Tank' - Combat Transport Helicopter will not only transport troops but also provide supporting fire

Russia's spetsnaz are to get a true "flying tank" this year – a unique combat helicopter with the designation Mi-8AMTSh-VN. Tests are scheduled for the fall. This innovative machine will transport spetsnaz and provide them with supporting fire. In its most heavily-armed version, it will carry up to four extended-range Hermes [Hermes] missiles, up to eight supersonic Ataka missiles, or up to two tons of aviation bombs. This payload will enable the helicopter to engage ground, maritime, and aerial targets at a range of up to 20 kilometers. Modern avionics, electro-optical systems, radar, and thermal imagers will ensure all-weather day and night operation. Special-purpose subunits have long needed a machine like this...

Tests of the first prototypes of the new combat transport helicopter are planned for the fall of 2020. They are likely to take place at the Army Aviation Flight Personnel Combat Training and Retraining Center at Torzhok...

In 2017, on its own initiative, the Mil plant began to develop a helicopter for the Special Operations Forces. In May 2018, the military authorized research and development on the project under the codename Sapsan [Peregrine Falcon]. More than 800 million rubles have been earmarked for the project. The military signed a contract for the first 10 aircraft with Mil [officially the Russian Helicopters Joint Stock Company] at the Army forum last summer.

The prototype, armed with rockets and bombs, should be completed early in 2020. A second prototype, carrying the full arsenal of guided missiles, is scheduled for delivery toward the end of the year.

The legendary Mi-8 is going to be turned into a heavily armed and armored "flying tank." With an increased payload, it will be noticeably heavier. Consequently, it will have a more powerful version of the engine currently on the Mi-8AMTSh.

The Sapsan will outgun even the existing assault helicopters. "Product 305" will be one of its weapon systems. Reportedly this is the codename for the Hermes-A advanced missile, with an extended range of up to 20 kilometers. That is twice as far as any other helicopter-borne antitank guided missile currently in service with the Aerospace Forces. Fitting these weapons to the upgraded Ka-52M and Mi-28NM helicopters is still in the planning stage.

Colonel Valeriy Yuryev, deputy chair of the Russian Union of Paratroopers, stated that a "multirole helicopter combining a wide range of combat and assault landing capabilities is vital for special operations and spetsnaz subunits. In Afghanistan, Mi-8s would deliver troops to their destination and depart. Cover would usually be provided by a pair of Mi-24 helicopters flying a race-track pattern. The modern helicopter should have sufficient firepower, plenty of ammunition, and good transportation performance. Desirably, it would land a team and then, while the commandos are approaching their assigned location, start engaging targets. What we need is a kind of flying tank. That is more effective than having infantry fighting vehicles or tanks supporting the commandos – you see the situation better from the air. But an aircraft like that needs a fairly powerful engine..."

Apart from the long-range Hermes, the new Sapsan will be able to use the 9M120 Ataka antitank guided missile usually found on assault helicopters, with a shaped-charge, high explosive fragmentation, or thermobaric warhead. These have a range of about six kilometers.

Apart from guided missiles, the Mi-8AMTSh-VN will carry the standard complement of free-flight rocket pods, heavy machine guns, and underslung cannon and grenade launcher pods. It will be able to use aviation bombs weighing from 50 to 500 kilograms [110 to 1100 pounds].

In its most heavily-armed version, the helicopter will carry up to four long-range Hermes missiles, up to eight Atakas, or up to 2 tons of bombs. One option is to have mounting points for four advanced Verba close-quarter air-to-air missiles.

The Sapsan's cargo cabin will have quick-release detachable armor to protect against small arms fire. The serial-production Mi-8AMTSh has protection only for the pilots, rear machine gunner, and vital systems, but in the new version the commandos will also have armor protection.

The helicopter's ability to operate at any time of day or night and in any weather comes from the GOES-321MK advanced electro-optical surveillance station with thermal imaging. This is currently fitted to the Mi-35 assault helicopter. The Mi-35 OPS-24N-1L target sighting system with laser missile guidance will enable the new helicopter to use all of its impressive complement of guided missiles.

All the electronic warfare equipment will be brought together by the IBKV-17VP onboard system. The cockpit on this modernized Mi-8, as appropriate for a modern helicopter, is fully glazed with four large multipurpose indicator lights. The instruments have been adapted for use with night sight devices.

An L370V35MS electro-optical jamming station derived from the Vitebsk family is likely to be fitted, to protect against portable SAMs. Optional equipment includes a device to receive and process data from drones, a radar station, and a radar detector.



The 3BM44 “Lekalo” Fin-Stabilized Subcaliber Projectile

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses the Russian purchase of 2,000 new 3BM44 “Lekalo” [3BM44 «Лекало»] fin-stabilized subcaliber projectiles. The Lekalo can reportedly penetrate up to 650 mm of Rolled Homogeneous Armor (RHA), and destroy a M1A2 Abrams at a range of 3-5 km. The Lekalo is capable of being fired by all current Russian tanks such as the T-72BM3, T-80BVM, and T-90M, as they all use canons derived from the 2A46/D-81 family of 125 mm smoothbore guns. The Lekalo will replace the 3BM42 “Mango” [3BM42 «Манго»], Russia’s second generation of fin-stabilized subcaliber projectiles that were fielded to destroy tanks with multilayer composite armor that began to appear in the 1970s-1980s. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



T-80BVM tank.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2018-Demonstration-part-1/i-6Rhwf22>, CC BY NC-ND-4.0

“They have begun to augment the arsenals of Russian tank crews with “super projectiles.” Beginning this year, the Ministry of Defense is purchasing the latest 3BM44 “Lekalo” subcaliber armor-piercing items. By the end of the year, 2,000 of them will arrive in the troops. With those munitions, our tanks will easily be able to destroy the most state-of-the-art armored vehicle at a distance [ranging] from several meters to 3-5 kilometers...”

Source: Anton Lavrov, Roman Kretsul, and Aleksey Ramm, “Минобороны закупит новейшие боеприпасы «Лекало» пробьет защиту любого современного танка (The Ministry of Defense Will Purchase the Latest Munitions: The ‘Lekalo’ Will Penetrate the Armor of Any Modern Tank),” *Izvestia* Online, 17 January 2020. <https://iz.ru/964201/anton-lavrov-roman-kretsul-aleksei-ramm/snariad-vne-ocheredi-minoborony-zakupit-noveishie-boepripsy>

The Ministry of Defense Will Purchase the Latest Munitions: The ‘Lekalo’ Will Penetrate the Armor of Any Modern Tank

They have begun to augment the arsenals of Russian tank crews with “super projectiles”. Beginning this year, the Ministry of Defense is purchasing the latest 3BM44 “Lekalo” [3BM44 «Лекало»] subcaliber armor-piercing items. By the end of the year, 2,000 of them will arrive in the troops. With those munitions, our tanks will easily be able to destroy the most state-of-the-art armored vehicle at a distance of from several meters to 3-5 kilometers...

Since the 1990s, the leading Western countries have increased the thickness of the armor on their main battle tanks. Foreign work on the modernization of the vehicles was especially stepped up after their employment in the conflicts in the Middle East. Foreign vehicles received supplemental armor and reactive armor complexes. The efforts were focused on increasing the survivability from guided antitank missiles and other shaped-charge munitions. Increasing the protection from subcaliber armor-piercing projectiles is a more difficult task.

*“The ‘Lekalo’ is suitable for any 125-millimeter gun of all tanks that are in the inventory today. And “Lekalo” is beyond the competition among those universal munitions”, Military Expert Aleksey Khlopotov told *Izvestiya*. “If its predecessor – the ‘Mango’ projectile – penetrates 520 millimeters of solid armor from a distance of two kilometers, then the indicator for the new model totals 650 millimeters. This is adequate to destroy the American M1A2 Abrams of the state-of-the-art modifications...The use of a new high tensile core made of a tungsten alloy permitted the increase of the “Lekalo’s” characteristics as compared to the “Mango”.*

The 3BM44 that is being purchased uses a lengthened, more powerful 4Zh63 powder charge and an improved core, which also give the munition an advantage over its predecessor...

“Uralvagonzavod” Corporation previously reported that an entire family of new munitions, which consists of an even more powerful subcaliber armor-piercing projectile, is being developed to arm the “Armata” tanks. But due to its increased dimensions, it will be impossible to use it in the current generation of tanks. The “Lekalo” is needed for the serious increase of the capabilities of the most mass-produced Russian tanks, which remain the foundation of the country’s tank fleet for the time being...

Besides the T-90 and T-80, the Russian T-72 will be able to employ the new munitions. During their modernization to the T-72B3 level, the tanks obtained an improved gun from the T-90 and a modernized automatic loader. Those changes permit them to use the purchased the lengthened armor-piercing projectiles, while providing a significant advantage as compared to the tank’s earlier version.



Russian Nuclear Submarines Testing Rockets to Fire through Arctic Ice

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian navy's strategic submarine force is split between the North Sea and Pacific Fleets. The North Sea Fleet submarines can cruise beneath the pack ice to avoid detection. The problem is that strategic systems need to be able to launch on command. This sometimes requires that the submarine surface through the pack ice to fire. If the pack ice is too thick, it could damage the submarine and prevent the launch. To address this challenge, the Russians are developing hole-busting subsurface rockets to create a firing space of open water so that the submarine may fire while submerged and then move back under the pack ice to escape detection and retaliation. As the excerpted passage from *Izvestia* describes, "The 'steel sharks' will use rocket-propelled projectiles to break open Arctic ice. The rockets, which destroy pack ice, have been developed for the latest nuclear submarines and are being tested right now. They create an ice hole, from where the submarines will be able to conduct a strike." Apparently, the new munitions are undergoing tests for the Russian Navy's Project 955 "Borey" and Project 885 "Yasen" nuclear submarines.

As the passage discusses, these special munitions support the launch of strategic missiles while submerged. This creates the advantage of being able to avoid detection, as "satellites, aircraft, and helicopters cannot see the submarines and it is impossible to use sonar buoys to search for the submarines based upon noise. In the Arctic, the buoys simply cannot penetrate the ice." The article also quotes a Russian military expert as saying that this "makes the Russian strategic missile submarines' retaliatory strike against the aggressor country inevitable." **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The new rockets... will significantly expand the capabilities of Russian nuclear submarines...”

Source: Aleksei Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy "Under the Ice Ceiling: Submarines Will Use a Rocket to Punch out an Ice Hole. The New Munitions will destroy any Pack Ice," *Izvestia*, 24 January 2020. <https://iz.ru/965164/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/v-potolok-ledianoj-podlodki-robiut-polyniu-dlia-vsplytiia-raketoj>

Under the Ice Ceiling: Submarines Will Use a Rocket to Punch out an Ice Hole. The New Munitions will destroy any Pack Ice

The "steel sharks" will use rocket-propelled projectiles to break open Arctic ice. The rockets, which destroy pack ice, have been developed for the latest nuclear submarines and are being tested right now. They create an ice hole, from where the submarines will be able to conduct a strike. Under-ice navigation, and surfacing are the most difficult elements in the ship's pre-launch efforts. An error during the execution of these maneuvers could result in the boat being damaged or locked in the ice. The new rockets-"crackers" will significantly expand the capabilities of Russian nuclear submarines...

The new munitions are undergoing tests for the Russian Navy's Project 955 "Borey" and Project 885 "Yasen" nuclear submarines...These unguided rocket-propelled projectiles ... punch a hole through the pack ice at the required location. These special munitions support the launch of strategic missiles while submerged and also in the surface recovery of floating rescue capsules, which the crews use for evacuation during an accident. The submarines will be able to fire rockets from both under-ice position and also on the surface...

The first tests of the rocket projectiles were conducted during the summer of 2014. At that time, they launched the rockets without explosives in the warhead using only the propulsion charge. They initially considered warhead explosives superfluous...

However, Rear-Admiral Vsevolod Khmyrov, a Hero of Russia and a former Nuclear Submarine Captain, stated "All of these nuclear submarines must operate in any situation and not depend on the conditions of the environment. Upon receipt of the command to launch, they are obliged to execute it as soon as possible. Ice should not be an impediment. Making ice holes is a tactical technique which permits the missile launch on time. A submarine can use the hull to punch through the ice but, in the process, risks getting damaged. Therefore, if time permits, the missile submarines usually look for already existing ice holes or sail out beyond the edge of the ice".

Military Expert Dmitriy Boltanov states "Under-ice navigation in the Arctic – is a dangerous affair but it provides ... undisputed advantages. Satellites, aircraft, and helicopters cannot see the submarines and it is impossible to use sonar buoys to search for the submarines based upon noise. In the Arctic, the buoys simply cannot penetrate the ice. For this reason, it is practically impossible to detect a submarine under the winter ice, which makes the Russian strategic missile submarines' retaliatory strike against the aggressor country inevitable"....

Standard torpedoes were used to punch holes in the ice in the Soviet Navy. However, they were not as effective as expected.... Special means were needed to do this.... A unique race, like the space race, occurred between the USSR and the US in the Arctic 60 years ago – the two countries' sailors strove to be the first to pass under the ice to the North Pole and to surface there. In 1962, the Soviet Submarine K-3 "Leninskiy Komsomol" was close to success. However, it didn't manage to surface at the Pole itself due to the ice that was up to five meters thick. The next year, the Project 627A Submarine K-181 "Kit" traveled more than 1,000 nautical miles under the winter ice and surfaced at the North Pole on 29 September 1963. The sailors raised the state and naval flags in honor of this important event.



Russian Coast Guard to Strengthen Presence in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The FSB (Federal Security Service- Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации) is the successor organization to the infamous KGB of Soviet days. The border guards and coast guard are part of the FSB. FSB patrolling of Arctic waters was limited to the time of year when their cutters could move in fairly open waters. This meant that most of the coast guard patrols centered on the White Sea. According to the accompanying passage from the *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, the FSB is now getting its own icebreaker fleet, with two icebreaking patrol vessels being constructed. As the passage notes, these new vessels will be used for “marine resource and border protection, as well as ship escort and towing.” In addition, they “will be capable of carrying the Kalibr and Uran cruise missile systems” and support the Northern Fleet in emergencies. The Russian Coast Guard regularly works with the Northern Fleet. The extended season for Coast Guard patrols will support Russian efforts to improve and extend the sea traffic on the Northern Sea Route. (Also see: “Russian Coast Guard Expanding in Arctic,” *OE Watch*, November 2018) **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The Russian Border Guard Service, a department under the FSB, is strengthening its presence in the ice-covered waters of the Arctic. Construction of a first icebreaking patrol vessel of Project 23550 was launched in April 2017 and a second in November 2019.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “FSB gets more icebreaking vessels for Arctic Patrol,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 31 January 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2020/01/fsb-gets-more-icebreaking-vessels-arctic-patrol>

FSB gets more icebreaking vessels for Arctic Patrol

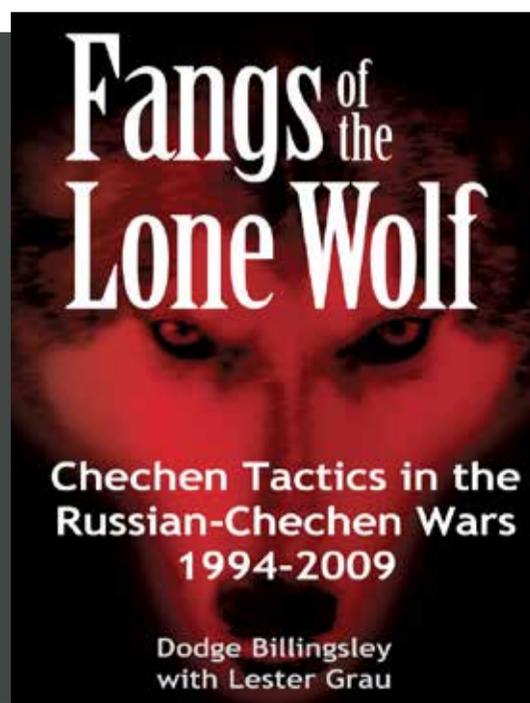
The Russian Border Guard Service, a department under the FSB, is strengthening its presence in the ice-covered waters of the Arctic. Construction of a first icebreaking patrol vessel of Project 23550 was launched in April 2017 and a second in November 2019.

Both ships are built by the Admiralty Yard in St.Petersburg and due to be ready for service in late 2023 and 2024 respectively. Construction of the second of the ships, the “Nikolay Zubov,” was launched during the visit of President Vladimir Putin to the yard last fall.

A third ship of the kind is now under planning. However, this ship is likely to be built by the nearby Vyborg Yard. A construction contract will be signed in March and have a cost frame of 18 billion rubles (€255 million)... The ship will have ice-class Arc5 and be able to break through up to 1.7 meters-thick ice.

The Vyborg Yard specializes in civilian ships and has reportedly never before built a naval vessel. The yard has more than 70 years of experience ... building icebreakers and various ice-class ship, as well as trawlers and oil drilling rigs.

The Russian Coast Guard will be able to use the new 114 meter-long ships for marine resource and border protection, as well as ship escort and towing. The ships will be capable of carrying the Kalibr and Uran cruise missile systems.



Fangs of the Lone Wolf is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination of the raw data of combat in a foreign land, and is aimed to advance the professional military study of conflict.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195587/download>



Russia Prepares Ambitious Economic Strategy for Arctic Region

by Sergey Sukhankin

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-prepares-ambitious-economic-strategy-for-arctic-region/>

OE Watch Commentary: On 30 January, the Russian government approved a number of acts concerned with rendering new economic benefits and subsidies to businesses or investors willing to engage in projects in the country's High North. The adopted proposals were jointly prepared by the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East. Taken together, this initiative provides a steady foundation for the introduction of Russia's Arctic strategy until 2035.

Russia's Arctic strategy until 2035 is premised on the following documents: The Federal Law on a Special Economic Regime of the Arctic, The Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Until 2035, The Strategy on the Development of the Arctic Zone Until 2035, and The Foundations of State Policy in the Arctic. This legal framework covers Murmansk Oblast, Chukotka, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Nenets Autonomous Okrug as well as portions of five other federal subjects—Arkhangelsk Oblast, Sakha Republic (Yakutia), Krasnoyarsk Krai, the Republic of Karelia and the Republic of Komi.

As a means to attract foreign financial capital to the above-mentioned Arctic territories, Russia has outlined four main groups/types of projects under consideration for various government benefits:

- The extraction of hydrocarbons located offshore, on Russia's continental shelf, with a severance tax (imposed on the removal of natural resources) set at 5 percent for oil and 1 percent for natural gas over the next 15 years, starting from the inception of industrial extraction. It is also rumored that the Russian state might be willing to provide additional benefits for "surveys, assessments and exploration for hydrocarbons" in this area;
- The extraction of hydrocarbons on the continent, with an emphasis on liquefied natural gas (LNG) and gas-chemistry (gazokhimiya). New investors are expected to be promised a severance tax of zero percent in the next 12 years upon starting industrial extraction;
- The production of LNG (as well as other projects related to the gazokhimiya industry). Investors will have to pay the severance tax in full only after 17 years of industrial production;
- Other projects (prospective benefits will largely depend on what will be extracted and the scope of the project). Aside from non-hydrocarbon-related branches (including minerals), this group will include various infrastructure projects (such as seaports and pipelines).

The head of the Ministry for Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic, Alexander Kozlov (appointed in 2020), has stated that the key idea behind the proposed benefits and stimuli for investors is premised on Moscow's strong determination to break the post-1991 trend in the region. Specifically, he argued that the Arctic zone, whose actual share of Russian GDP is close to 10 percent and receives 10 percent of total foreign direct investment (FDI), suffers from chronic under-population, containing less than 1.5 percent of the total Russian population. Furthermore, he argued that all major components of the Human Development Index (HDI), including education, healthcare, employment and economic wellbeing, are lower in the High North than the Russian average. As a result, he stated, "For the past 15 years, the local population has decreased by 0.3 million." Sergey Veller, the president of the Union of Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs of Murmansk Oblast, expressed similar concern and argued that the only way to stop further depopulation of the Russian Arctic is to increase its attractiveness through new economic opportunities and job creation.

These and other concerns are all reflected in the above-mentioned government planning documents. The main expectations pinned to the initiative are premised on the prospect of creating over 21 new large regional mega-projects (including the Indiga Port, in Nenets Autonomous Okrug), exploration of large deposits of platinum and other metals in Krasnoyarsk Krai and Murmansk Oblast, and the creation of a full-cycle lumber/timber-producing complex in Arkhangelsk Oblast. These and hundreds of smaller commercial initiatives (to become fully operable within the next 15 years) are expected to result in the creation of 200,000 additional jobs in the region and "make the Arctic attractive to Russian youth and young specialists."

That said, it is important to underscore that Russia's main economic interests the Arctic region actually boil down to just two elements. First is production of liquefied natural gas, which, "in the upcoming 15 years, could turn Russia into one of the largest players on the global LNG market." This will be achieved primarily through Yamal LNG (located in Sabetta, on the Yamal Peninsula) and Arctic LNG 2 (Gyda Peninsula). Second, Russia is making huge investments in the so-called Northern Sea Route, intended not only to give Russia access to Arctic natural resources, but also to provide a maritime corridor for Chinese goods traveling to the European Union. Russia aims to solidify its role as the main transportation artery between the two—both on land and by sea.

(Continued)



Continued: Russia Prepares Ambitious Economic Strategy for Arctic Region

Importantly, in line with the above-mentioned legal documents and proposals, some specific suggestions have already been voiced. Namely, it has been argued that a subsidized mortgage program (2 percent annual rate) should be created to aid all who are willing to move to the Arctic region. Additionally, Minvostokrazvitya proposed creating a new state corporation, “Rosshelf,” specifically tasked with the exploration and extraction of hydrocarbons in the High North and the Far East. This corporation would be given exclusive rights to “represent Russia’s interests” and “exploit [Russian] resources and grant the right to participate in projects [to] private investors.”

Two important inferences should be drawn from these developments related to the Russian Arctic. First, for the first time, an initiative of this scope and ambition has been jointly drafted by three powerful institutions, with one of them being made directly responsible for the region. Second, the Arctic Strategy has outlined Russia’s most important national interests in the High North. And aside from its economic aspects, this Strategy clearly points to a necessity to defend Russian sovereignty and territorial integrity in this remote but resource-rich region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Sukhankin)**

Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

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

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





Russia, China and the Coronavirus

OE Watch Commentary: Just as in other countries, over the past month, the Russian media has been filled with stories dealing with the possible spread of the coronavirus from China. Russian concerns are well grounded. Not only does Russia share a 2,600-mile border with China, but travel between the two countries has increased dramatically over the past decade. Some 2.3 million Chinese travelled to Russia in 2019, while approximately 100,000 Russians visited China. While it is too early to determine the overall impact the coronavirus will have on China, Russia and elsewhere, the two accompanying excerpts provide a Russian perspective on the issue, discussing the possible implications within the Chinese defense industry and how Russia is prepared to defend against this virus.

The first excerpt from the Russian military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer*, describes how Chinese “authorities are seriously responding to the threat,” and how they “have thrown significant medical forces into the fight against it.” The author asserts that this virus will affect “the 11 million residents of Wuhan,” which is “China’s largest industrial center” and where, because of the virus, “many enterprises are shutting down.” The author points out that the affected “province is one of the main clusters of the defense industry of China,” which produce many necessary “electronics and components for military equipment, in particular radars and software.” As the title of the article suggests, the author posits that this virus will have a negative impact on China’s “many defense industries.”

The second excerpt from the centrist *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* notes that Russians have started being evacuated from China “by planes of the Aerospace Forces (VKS) of Russia... by order of the President.” As such, it concludes that “the problem of combating the deadly virus is seen in the Kremlin almost as a combat mission.” It describes how this virus could affect Russia, pointing out that some are comparing it with “the Spanish flu pandemic” which a century ago “devastated the world’s population by at least 50 million people.” The author remarks that today, such losses would amount to “a third of the population of the Russian Federation.” Fortunately, “there is no panic about this yet,” because Russia possesses “quite strong military medicine,” ...and “the Russian army has experience in combating especially dangerous infections.” The article describes how “in the summer of 2016, in the fight against the anthrax epidemic on the Yamal Peninsula, the RKhBZ [Radiological, Chemical, and Biological Defense Troops] took part. In 2012, they fought anthrax in the Altai Territory.”

Politically, economically and militarily, relations today between Russia and China are strong. However, should the coronavirus spread widely from China into Russia, these relations will likely undergo a special test. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...In Russia, there is no panic about this yet. This is due to the fact that, in the country after the collapse of the USSR, there remained quite strong military medicine...”



President Putin meets with Russian health officials to discuss measures to counter the spread of coronavirus in Russia, 29 January 2020.
Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62691>, CCA 4.0 Intl

Source: Maxim Kazanin, “Коронавирус поразил китайские ракеты (Coronavirus hit Chinese missiles),” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer*, 4 February 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/55015>

A new type of pneumonia caused by the 2019-nCoV coronavirus has begun to gain strength in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province. The authorities are seriously responding to the threat and have thrown significant medical forces into the fight against it - doctors from all provinces are sent to the focus of infection by civilian aircraft. According to open data, 6200 doctors are involved. According to official reports of the Ministry of Defense of the PRC, 450 military doctors also work in Wuhan. It is likely that the medical contingent will increase.

Chinese and foreign companies are among the eleven million Wuhan, China’s largest industrial center, are shutting down enterprises. Hubei Province is one of the main clusters of the defense industry of China. Here are several key research departments of CETC Corporation (China Electronics Technology Group Corporation), which produce electronics and components for military equipment, in particular radars and software, the 710th and 729th research and development institutes of the China Shipbuilding Industrial Corporation, and other large defense industry organizations. In neighboring cities, there are enterprises of the rocket and space industry, which produce CR, ASR, and LV.

The logical question is: how will the defense industry complex of Wuhan work, where there are many defense industries, since the city is closed and there is no need to deliver components or send finished products. It’s difficult to answer from the start - transport options are either closed or seriously limited.

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Российскую армию бросили на борьбу с коронавирусом (Russian army thrown to fight against coronavirus),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 February 2020. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2020-02-02/1_7783_medicine.html

...On Monday, the evacuation of Russians from China by planes of the Aerospace Forces (VKS) of Russia begins. According to the press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Peskov, this is done “by order of the president” for the delivery of “Russian citizens from areas of China most affected by the coronavirus” to their homeland. The phrase “by order” is noteworthy. So, there is reason to believe that the problem of combating the deadly virus is seen in the Kremlin almost as a combat mission.

...The possible spread of the coronavirus type 2019-nCoV in Russia is compared by the media with the Spanish flu pandemic. This type of flu in 1918-1919 devastated the world’s population by at least 50 million people. For comparison: this is a third of the population of the Russian Federation....

...In Russia, there is no panic about this yet. This is due to the fact that in the country after the collapse of the USSR, there remained quite strong military medicine, as well as radiation, chemical and biological defense troops (RBM), which are able to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including biological.

...As NG has already written... the Russian army has experience in combating especially dangerous infections. So, in the summer of 2016, in the fight against the anthrax epidemic on the Yamal Peninsula, the RKhBZ troops took part. In 2012, they fought anthrax in the Altai Territory.



Russia to Provide Special Legal Status for ERA Technopolis

OE Watch Commentary: According to its official website, Russia's ERA Military Innovation Technopolis is officially up and running (<https://www.era-tehnopolis.ru/>). As previously reported ("Update on Technopolis-ERA," *OE Watch*, September 2019), this new technical complex revolves around the concept of merging talented, young military scientists with their counterparts from academia and industry. By providing them with top-notch research facilities, the goal is to harness their intellectual prowess and creativity to develop cutting-edge technologies to strengthen the country's defense and high-tech potential.

One can imagine the uncertainty surrounding the patent rights and ownership of products jointly developed by individuals working for the state, military and private industry. The brief excerpt from *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, describes a recent meeting among ERA officials where they discussed "developing a law on the legal status of participants in the military innovation technopolis." The article quotes an ERA official who suggests that the proposed "law will be called upon to provide unhindered access to scientific and innovative infrastructure, as well as to the results of scientific... and technical activities created with raising budget funds." This may be an indirect reference as to how state, military and private companies will share both in the investment and possible profits from products developed in this joint venture. The proposed law also "provides for special legal regulation of relations between governing bodies and participants at the technopolis during their performance of scientific, ... technical and innovative activities."

When the ERA technopolis was still being constructed, skeptical Russian observers questioned whether private technology companies would want to get involved when it wasn't entirely clear how they could protect their investments. This article suggests that these types of worries are now being addressed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Vladimir Putin visited ERA Military Innovation Technopark, November 2018.
Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59179>, CC by SA 4.0

“Era has created 18 research laboratories in Technopolis. They are equipped with advanced equipment that allows for research in eight scientific areas.”

Source: “Минобороны РФ хочет наделить особым правовым статусом участников технополиса Эра (The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation wants to confer special legal status on the Era technopolis),” *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, 7 February 2020. http://nvo.ng.ru/nvoevents/2020-02-07/100_200207news2.html

The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation is developing a law on the legal status of participants in the military innovation technopolis “Era,” thanks to which it plans to create promising conditions for the work of private and state enterprises. This was announced on Friday by Major General Andrei Goncharov, head of the Main Department for Research and Technological Support of Advanced Technologies of the Ministry of Defense, during a meeting of the Era Council.

“The law will be called upon to provide unhindered access to scientific and innovative infrastructure, as well as to the results of scientific, scientific and technical activities created with raising budget funds,” Goncharov said.

...The draft law was developed by a working group with the participation of the Ministry of Defense and other interested departments and organizations. Its text is currently undergoing interdepartmental coordination; it is planned to submit a draft document to the government in November 2020.

The draft law provides for special legal regulation of relations between governing bodies and participants in a technopolis during their performance of scientific, scientific, technical and innovative activities. In addition, it regulates the activities of state authorities in the territory of the technopolis....

Era has created 18 research laboratories in Technopolis. They are equipped with advanced equipment that allows for research in eight scientific areas. These are robotics, information security, IT systems and automated control systems, energy supply technologies, technical vision, computer science and computer engineering, biotechnological systems and technologies, nanotechnologies and nanomaterials.



Military Perspectives and Some Critique on Russia's New Government and Economy

OE Watch Commentary: The big news in Russia over the past month were the changes in government and a proposed plan to amend the country's constitution. Given that the Medvedev government had become quite unpopular, there are now hopes that a new prime minister and other key ministers will be able to jumpstart the economy. The excerpted passages from two recent articles in the military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer (VPK)*, shed some light on how those in uniform assess these personnel adjustments and the country's economic situation.

The first article insists that trends in the Russian economy, outside of the “few ‘advanced’ regions like Moscow... are close to catastrophic.” The author points out that “it is only thanks to the rich and super-rich residents of Moscow and million-plus cities,” which help to level out the average falling household incomes. To correct this imbalance, the author advocates “forced industrialization of the country and the introduction of a progressive taxation scale” which will allow the state “to gently redistribute income from rich and super-rich people in favor of the bulk of fellow citizens.” The article ominously concludes that “the economy is rapidly transforming into politics, and if we do not create new national industries,” and change the tax structure, “the situation in the country will be destabilized.”

The second article is by the popular military journalist, Victor Baranets, who begins by praising the Defense Minister for retaining his position in the new government and for having helped the Russian armed forces reach the goal of “70 percent in terms of new weapons.” He then offers a challenge to the new government, hoping that it will be able to “solve the most important social (pension) problem of the military. And finally end the damned reduction factor (54%).” Baranets is referring to a 2012 law which pegged military pensions at 54% of their value. While there have been modest increases over the past 8 years, they have hardly kept up with inflation. Baranets concludes with a “demand,” stating that the government must “stop this mockery of servicemen who put their health on the line in defense of the Fatherland.”

Over the past decade, the current Kremlin leadership has placed military modernization and improved combat readiness as key objectives. To reach these ambitious goals, they have squeezed other domestic social programs, to include military pensions. These articles suggest that those in uniform (particularly retirees) hope that this change in key government personnel will signal a change in the Kremlin's spending priorities. **End**

OE Watch Commentary (Finch)

“... I, who belong to the military class, am extremely interested to find out how he and the government will solve the most important social (pension) problem of the military....”

Source: Yuri Крупнов, Кабинет освободили от плохих танцоров. Что дальше? (The cabinet was freed from bad dancers. What's next?), *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer*, 28 January 2020. vpk-news.ru/articles/54912

Changing the economic course is not part of the tasks of the new government formed by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. However, he has to solve several serious problems, and if this is not done, it is pointless to talk about a breakthrough in the country's development.

The point is that today the economy, even in a few “advanced” regions like Moscow, is stagnating, and even in the Far East and in the Non-Chernozem Region — our fundamental macro-regions, trends are close to catastrophic.

Obviously, household incomes are really falling. And if in the whole country, according to statistics, they keep, relatively speaking, at zero, it is only thanks to the rich and super-rich residents of Moscow and million-plus cities. That is, they show us the “average temperature in the hospital.” In other regions of Russia, people vote with their feet - they leave their native places of residence in large cities or for permanent residence abroad....

To solve the problem, in my opinion, there are only two interconnected instruments: forced industrialization of the country and the introduction of a progressive taxation scale that will allow you to gently redistribute income from rich and super-rich people in favor of the bulk of fellow citizens. Obviously, the government of Dmitry Medvedev could not cope with the solution of the problem....

...This is the initial logic, and the sooner everyone understands and assimilates it, the sooner not only the economy will change for the better, but also the general political situation. Before our very eyes, the economy is rapidly transforming into politics, and if we do not create new national industries, the situation in the country will be destabilized.

Source: Victor Baranets, “Хорошая связка для нового оружия (A good bundle for new weapons),” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer*, 28 January 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/54909>

When the cabinet was changed, the power block remained virtually the same. It was expected. Why?

Without creating security on the external side of the country, it is impossible to calmly engage in the economy within it. It is quite obvious that under the Minister of Defense Sergey Shoigu, the army has significantly changed for the better. But the reforms in the Armed Forces have not ended, they are continuing. Sergey Kuzhugotovich has a lot of ambitious and correct plans. Therefore, to remove him, as well as other well-established security officials, from work in this strategic direction would be inappropriate.

Unlike Anatoly Serdyukov's predecessor, Sergei Shoigu managed to establish an excellent interaction between the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation and the military-industrial complex, and ended the confusion in pricing for military products.... Recall: when Sergei Shoigu came to the Ministry of Defense, we had only 10-15 percent of new weapons. And today, we have reached 70 percent in terms of this indicator....

[The new Prime Minister] Mishustin said that the phrase “No money” will never be heard again. If so, then I, who belong to the military class, am extremely interested to find out how he and the government will solve the most important social (pension) problem of the military. And when in the end the damned reduction factor (54%) will be canceled....

...So here you are, dear gentlemen, the first request from the army and even our demand: stop this mockery of servicemen who put their health on the line in defense of the Fatherland.



Letters to Great-Grandfathers at the Front: Developing Military Patriotism in Russian Society

OE Watch Commentary: The current Kremlin leadership continues to maintain a wide-ranging, multi-dimensional project to honor the tremendous sacrifices in the country's victory in the Great Patriotic War (WW II). They are particularly focusing on the younger generation by funding youth groups like Yunarmiya (Young Army) and sponsoring new films and television series about the war.

Russian schools are also doing their share. According to a January article in the pro-Kremlin publication *Izvestia*, Moscow high school students are writing "Letters to Great Grandfathers on the Front." These letters are being written in "open lessons," meaning they are open to parents, administrators, and government officials in conjunction with preparations for the 75-year Anniversary of Victory Day (9 May). The article quotes a Moscow official who explains that these letters "can be published on the mass federal project, 'Letters of Victory' if they are uploaded with scanned letters and photos from family archives attached."



Soldiers marching in the 2019 Victory Day parade.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moscow_Victory_Day_Parade_(2019)_35.jpg CCA 4.0 intl

The article describes how the "Letters of Victory" portal publishes letters from "soldiers and officers, workers in the rear, orderlies and doctors, military war journalists and other participants in The Great Patriotic War." Since the portal was launched on 3 December 2019, over 200,000 letters have been uploaded, and the plan is to gather a million. The article asserts, "these living testimonies of the participants will allow us to see and understand all the devastating disasters of the war through the eyes of a variety of people who turned out to be its victims, heroes and victors." This is important in the context of the development of contemporary military patriotism in Russian society. **End OE Watch Commentary (Byrne)**

"...Moscow high school students are writing "Letters to Great-Grandfathers on the Front" in association with the 75-year anniversary of Victory..."

Source: "Московские школьники напишут «письма прадеду на фронт (Students Will Write "Letters to my Great-grandfather on the Front" for the 75-year Anniversary of Victory Day)," *Izvestia*, 20 January 2020. <https://iz.ru/966379/2020-01-20/moskovskie-shkolniki-napishut-pisma-pradedu-na-front-k-75-letiiu-pobedy>

High school students in Moscow schools will write "letters to their great-grandfather at the front" in an open lesson dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Victory.

Ivan Shubin, the head of the capital's department of media and advertising, described the project... Each student, if desired, will be able to share his letter with the rest by publishing it on the portal of the large-scale federal project, "Letters of Victory." To do this, you will need to scan it and attach a photo from the family archive.

According to Shubin, the portal publishes letters from soldiers and officers, home front workers, nurses and doctors, military journalists and other participants of the Great Patriotic War.

The official noted that since the launch of the project on December 3, 2019, more than 200 thousand letters have already been published. In total, it is planned to collect up to 1 million documents.

"These living testimonies of the participants will allow us to see and understand all the devastating disasters of the war through the eyes of a variety of people who turned out to be its victims, heroes and victors," said Shubin....



“Borderization” Continues in Georgia

OE Watch Commentary: In August 2019, the Georgian government established a police checkpoint near the village of Chorchana as part of an effort to counter what it has called the “borderization” of its territory by forces from the occupied region of South Ossetia (see: “A Change in the ‘Borderization’ Process for Georgia?” *OE Watch*, October 2019). The checkpoint initially appeared to have some effect and helped the Georgian government with public relations at a time when many in the country did not believe enough was being done to counter “borderization.” As the accompanying excerpted articles report, Georgia’s border with the occupied South Ossetia region continues to shift and the reported incidents provide an update on how this is taking place.

The articles, from Georgia’s English-language news website *Civil.ge*, report on two recent incidents in which occupying forces erected “illegal installations” on Georgian government controlled territory. The first incident took place on 14 January near the village of Chorchana of the Khashuri Municipality, at the dividing line with the Tskhinvali Region. The second incident took place on 20 January in the village of Gugutiantkari of the Gori Municipality. The villages of Chorchana and Gugutiantkari are in two different districts that do not border each other, but are notable since both made headlines in August 2019 – Chorchana because of the police checkpoint and Gugutiantkari since part of it became divided after occupation forces installed fencing. There is no mention of how far away the “illegal installations” are from the police checkpoint at Chorchana.

The first article reports on the “illegal installations” near Chorchana without specifying the type of barrier. The second article on the report of borderization in Gugutiantkari includes a statement from Georgia’s State Security Service that “barbed wires are being replaced with so-called border fencing.” The second article also mentions that the State Security Service is reacting to the situation “without specifying the measures taken.” While it is unknown what measures the Georgian government might take in response to the latest incidents, the articles show that borderization continues despite previous efforts to counter it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

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A Georgian villager is left beyond the barbwire installed by the Russian troops along the South Ossetia-Georgia contact line in September 2013.

Source: VOA via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Barbwires_in_South_Ossetia,_Georgia,_September_2013.jpg, Public domain

“Barbed wires are being replaced with so-called border fencing, which is... part of [the] so-called ‘borderization’ [process].”

Source: “Security Service Reports on Illegal ‘Borderization’ on Tbilisi-Controlled Territory,” *Civil.ge*, 14 January 2020. <https://civil.ge/archives/334487>

The State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) informed Civil.ge today that the occupying forces erected “illegal installations” on Tbilisi-controlled territory near Chorchana village of Khashuri Municipality, at the dividing line with Tskhinvali Region...

“The issue of provocative actions of the occupying forces in the forest near the villages of Chorchana and Tsaghvli of Khashuri Municipality has been strongly put forward both at the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings, as well as the rounds of Geneva International Discussions (GIDs),” the Security Service added...

In September, amid increasing tensions over the Georgian police checkpoint, occupation forces erected signs to mark “the border” in the Chorchana-Tsnelisi area. The EU monitors then confirmed that these pushed the line of occupation 1.3 kilometres into the Tbilisi-administered area.

Source: “Georgia Security Service: Occupying Forces Continue Fencing on Tbilisi-Controlled Territory,” *Civil.ge*, 21 January 2020. <https://civil.ge/archives/335173>

The State Security Service of Georgia (SSG) informed Civil Georgia (Civil.ge) on January 20 that the forces of Russian occupation “continue provocative actions” along the dividing line between Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and Georgia proper.

According to the SSG, “they have erected illegal installations on the Georgian central government-controlled territory in Gugutiantkari village of Gori Municipality.”

“Barbed wires are being replaced with so-called border fencing, which is the part of so-called ‘borderization’ [process],” the SSG said.

...A day earlier, on January 19, Davit Katsarava, leader of the “Strength in Unity” anti-occupation vigilante group, spread reports via his Facebook page, saying that occupying forces have marked trees across Chorchana-Perevi area – allegedly readying for another round of “borderization” activities...Katsarava further claimed that occupying forces moved the dividing line few hundreds meters deeper into Tbilisi-administered territory near the village of Perevi in Sachkhere Municipality.

The SSG told Civil.ge that they are now “thoroughly inspecting” the mentioned area, and noted that the Government “is reacting adequately to illegal markings and each alleged case of ‘borderization’”, without specifying the measures taken.



A Resolution to Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Problems?

OE Watch Commentary: A number of violent incidents have taken place on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border near Tajikistan's exclave of Vorukh over the past several years, including two recent ones in December 2019 and January 2020. As the accompanying excerpted article reports, the most recent incidents appear to have pushed the governments into taking action. Following the latest conflict, official delegations from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan held negotiations to fully demarcate their borders and reduce the violence.

The article, from Tajikistan's *Asia-Plus*, reports that the Kyrgyz government "offered Tajikistan an exchange of two sections of the border – these sections are Aryk-Asty of the Ak-Sai village, Batken District, and Samarkandyk, in the village of Samarkandyk." The article also mentions the efforts of a working group, which used "134 topographical maps" and

"looked at 120 kilometers of the border and came to the conclusion that 114 kilometers are the same in all the maps." The article does not mention it, but both governments requested maps from Soviet era archives in Moscow a few years ago and the large number of maps used by the working group could have come from that collection. The article also mentions that "only 60 percent" of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is demarcated and there are "around 70 sections that are not specified, on which there are several settlements."

The article also reports on the creation of "the topographical working group of the Kyrgyz Republic," which worked out the "exchange of land with Tajikistan." Lastly, Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Prime Minister stated that "consultations will be carried out with each resident who lives on these sites" before an official exchange of land takes place. He also mentioned that "there will be no exchange if there is no consent of local resident." While it could be a few months until the Kyrgyz government finalizes a decision on whether or not to exchange the two sections of the border, the most recent incidents might be the catalyst for the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments to finally demarcate sections of the border around Vorukh. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Enclaves in Kyrgyzstan.

Source: Enclaves_in_Kyrgyzstan_RU.svg via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Enclaves_in_Kyrgyzstan_EN.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

“The working groups looked at 120 kilometers of the border and came to the conclusion that 114 kilometers are the same in all the maps.”

Source: “Кыргызстан назвал два села, территорией которых поменяется с Таджикистаном (Kyrgyzstan named two villages, of which whose territory will be exchanged with Tajikistan),” *Asia-Plus*, 21 January 2020. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/politics/20200121/kirgizstan-nazval-dva-sela-territoriei-kotorih-pomenyaetsya-s-tadzhikistanom>

Kyrgyzstan offered Tajikistan an exchange of two sections of the border – these sections are Aryk-Asty of the Ak-Sai village, Batken District, and Samarkandyk, in the village of Samarkandyk. Deputy Prime Minister Zhenish Razakov announced this on January 21 at a meeting of the parliamentary committee on international affairs, defense and security...

Based on the results of 6 previous meetings, 134 topographical maps were prepared. The working groups looked at 120 kilometers of the border and came to the conclusion that 114 kilometers are the same in all the maps.

The length of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border is more than 970 km, only 60 percent of which is demarcated. Between the two countries, there remains around 70 sections that are not specified, on which there are several settlements. An undefined border causes conflicts in these border settlements – because of land, water and illegal border crossing issues.

Following the latest conflict, official delegations from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan held negotiations, after which a protocol was adopted. On January 15, of the points of the protocol started work – the topographical working group of the Kyrgyz Republic started to work out issues on the exchange of land with Tajikistan. The delegations agreed to identify areas of the border and prepare a proposal by March 1, 2020...

The deputy prime minister said that prior to the exchange, consultations will be carried out with each resident who lives on these sites... “There will be no exchange if there is no consent of local residents,” he added...



The Geopolitics of TurkStream and the Complexities of Bulgaria's Foreign Policy

OE Watch Commentary: The January 2020 launching of the TurkStream natural gas dual pipeline (one for the Turkish market and the second to continue overland to SE Europe) not only streamlines the shipment of fuel to regional customers, such as NATO ally Bulgaria, but also has significant geopolitical implications. For Russia, it represents an important step in its continuing efforts to bypass Ukrainian territory in the provision of natural gas for its other European customers. Russia has long sought to bypass Ukrainian territory in this regard, increasing Moscow's leverage over Kyiv. As the first accompanying article from Bulgarian newspaper *Dnevnik* notes, not only will Ukraine make far less money from transit fees, but Russia will be able to selectively limit the flow of its natural gas to Ukraine without affecting its other European customers. A geopolitical by-product within this context seems to be a tightening of mutual dependence among Russia, Turkey, and Bulgaria, as TurkStream's second, overland line will continue from Turkish to Bulgarian territory, and then to other SE European customers.



Then-European Council President Donald Tusk and Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, January 2018.
Source: EU2018BG Bulgarian Presidency via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boyko_Borisov_welcomes_Donald_Tusk_\(39632855571\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Boyko_Borisov_welcomes_Donald_Tusk_(39632855571).jpg), CC BY 2.0

For Bulgaria, a NATO ally and EU member state that still retains pragmatic, if not amicable relations with Moscow, the TurkStream launch highlighted the inherent challenges in balancing western and eastern influences, as noted in the second accompanying reference. While a straightforward desire to receive needed Russian natural gas without having to pay transit fees to Ukraine and Romania may justify this financial decision by Bulgaria and its pro-EU governing coalition, the optics of TurkStream's January 2020 launch ceremony, however, seemed to hint at more than purely economic deal making: in addition to the expected participation of Russian President Putin and Turkish President Erdoğan, the two other national-level European leaders on stage were Bulgarian Prime Minister Borisov and Serbian President Vucic. (Also see: "TurkStream's Role in Energy Security and Turkish-Russian Relations," in this issue of *OE Watch*) **End OE Watch Commentary (Sarafian)**

“Regarding foreign policy, we Bulgarians have always learned from the Byzantines... in the east we say one thing, in the west we say another...”

“It is a ‘project with no economic sense, but with a large political element.’”



Continued: The Geopolitics of TurkStream and the Complexities of Bulgaria's Foreign Policy

Source: “Киев оцени на \$450 млн. годишно загубите от пускането на ‘Турски поток (Kiev estimates \$ 450 million annually from Turkish Stream launch),” *Dnevnik*, 9 January 2020. https://www.dnevnik.bg/sviat/2020/01/09/4014280_kiev_oceni_na_450 mln_godishno_zagubite_ot_puskaneto/

“The commissioning of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, which bypasses Ukraine’s transmission system, will bring annual losses of up to \$ 450 million to the country... stated Sergey Makogon, head of GTS Operator of Ukraine [Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine LLC – the newly formed company that operates Ukraine’s gas transmission system].”

“It is a ‘project with no economic sense, but with a large political element,’ he [Sergey Makogon] added”

“ ‘Bulgaria, Turkey and other countries in the region no longer receive gas through Ukraine,’ he [Sergey Makogon] noted”

Source: “Защо България казва едно на Русия, а друго на САЩ (Why Bulgaria says one thing to Russia and the other to the USA),” *Dnevnik*, 9 January 2020. https://www.dnevnik.bg/analizi/2020/01/09/4014333_zashto_bulgariia_kazva_edno_na_rusiia_a_drugo_na_sasht/

“Regarding foreign policy, we Bulgarians have always learned from the Byzantines... in the east we say one thing, in the west we say another...”

Source: ““Борисов е поканен на среща с Путин и Ердоган в Истанбул за откриването на ‘Турски поток (Borisov invited to meet with Putin and Erdoğan in Istanbul to open Turkish Stream),” *Dnevnik*, 4 January 2020. https://www.dnevnik.bg/politika/2020/01/04/4012285_borisov_e_pokanen_na_sreshta_s_putin_i_erdogan_v/

“The Bulgarian Prime Minister has been invited to the launching of TurkStream by President Erdogan [of Turkey].”

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Huawei in Europe: Debating Europe's Position in a New Technological Cold War

OE Watch Commentary: A lot has been written about the risk to Western security if the United Kingdom moves forward with a decision to use the Chinese technology company Huawei for its 5G telecommunication network infrastructure. As the first accompanying passage reports, on 28 January, the UK government said it would also allow a restricted role for Huawei in shaping the 5G network in Britain. Germany and other countries have also been grappling with the issue, concerned that banning Huawei may add years of delays and billions in costs to their 5G network launch. In light of these debates, the following day, the European Commission announced that member states should allow Huawei to operate within the bloc, “but with strict regulations to protect national security.” As the passage notes, “the [European] commission’s compromise recommendation provides cover for European capitals to resist Washington’s demands.” This represents Europe’s challenging position in the divergence between China and the United States on the issue of 5G.



Kevin Tao, President of Huawei, Western Europe, talking about 5G; “Digitising Europe Summit”; Gasometer, Berlin; December 2014.

Source: Vodafone Institut via Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vodafone-institute/15368562844>, CC BY-ND 2.0

As the second passage notes, the EU “unveiled security guidelines for ‘high-risk’ suppliers in the opening up of fifth-generation, or 5G, telecoms network across the bloc.” As the passage demonstrates, Europe appears to be in an awkward position, stuck between making an economic decision favoring Huawei’s 5G expansion in Europe while also trying to heed the position of the United States, which has been “lobbying allies, including those in Europe, not to use Huawei.” As the third passage from the *Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB)*, a leading European think-tank notes, “China’s re-emergence as a global power divides those who perceive it as a risk from those who see it as an opportunity.... The European Union is ...[a] place divisions are opening up over what China’s empowerment means.” The author writes that the union has “not yet defined a common position and the debate will intensify in 2020.”

CIDOB has published several papers on the topic of a changing world order, raising the question of where Europe falls within a new and growing geopolitical and technological battle between the US and China. As the passage discusses, 2020 will be the year of 5G, when “classical geopolitical concepts are adapted to a competition that does not focus so much on competition for territory but for virtual spaces.” The author points out that the main competition will be between China and the United States, causing a “resurgence of old Cold War reflexes.” He writes that one of the main battlegrounds in 2020 will be “the extension of 5G technology, an area in which China leads. The United States leads the countries that see it as a security threat. This technological bipolarity will create new dependencies and spheres of influence.”

As far as what can be done to reduce tensions, he notes that a “multilateral initiative to replicate in the technological field what has been done in terms of trade, disarmament and the fight against climate change is desirable.” However, while such a global regime may take shape at some point within this decade, he claims that in 2020, “unilateralism and competition will continue to prevail.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“In terms of competition between states, the main tension will continue to be between China and the United States. ... What we see is the... resurgence of old Cold War reflexes. ... This technological bipolarity will create new dependencies and spheres of influence.”



Continued: Huawei in Europe: Debating Europe's Position in a New Technological Cold War

Source: "EU rules out Huawei ban- but maps out strict rules on 5G," *Deutsche Welle*, 29 January 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-rules-out-huawei-ban-but-maps-out-strict-rules-on-5g/a-52184309>

The EU has said member states should allow Chinese telecoms giant Huawei to operate within the bloc — but with strict regulations to protect national security. The US has urged allies not to use the technology. The European Union on Wednesday unveiled security guidelines for "high-risk" suppliers in the opening up of fifth-generation, or 5G, telecoms network across the bloc.

The European Commission did not mention Huawei by name, and it did not recommend a ban on any company in shaping future networks. However, it said strict rules should be applied where certain suppliers were concerned. Recommendations include blocking high-risk equipment suppliers from "critical and sensitive" parts of the network, including the core, which keeps track of data and authenticates smartphones on the network.

There was already an expectation that the European Commission would recommend a tightly-regulated role for networks such as Huawei in developing the EU's 5G network...

The US has said it believes the company is a potential threat to cybersecurity — and it fears that the firm could be used to conduct cyber espionage on the part of the Chinese government. It is lobbying allies, including those in Europe, not to use Huawei...

The operators Deutsche Telekom, Vodafone, and Telefonica are all Huawei clients — and they warn that replacing equipment could cost billions of euros. Huawei leads the global telecoms equipment industry, having a 28% share of the market share worldwide. Nokia is second at 16%, and Ericsson third at 13%...

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel — who favors a level playing field for all providers — has faced resistance from within her own party from lawmakers who back US calls for Huawei to be banned outright.

Any ban on Huawei would ultimately be left for individual member states to impose, but the commission's compromise recommendation provides cover for European capitals to resist Washington's demands.

On Tuesday, the UK's government said it would also allow a restricted role for Huawei in shaping the 5G network in Britain.

Source: "Huawei in Germany: Merkel says its risky to ban any 5G provider," *Al Jazeera*, 23 January 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/ajimpact/huawei-germany-merkel-risky-ban-5g-provider-200123202320425.html>

German operators worry banning Huawei may add years of delays and billions in costs to Germany's 5G network launch.

... Merkel's government has been wrangling for weeks over how strict security requirements for Germany's 5G roll-out should be, and whether they should effectively shut out Chinese technology giant Huawei from the network.

Source: Eduard Soler i Lecha, "The world in 2020: ten issues that will shape the global agenda," *Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB)*, December 2019. https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/notes_internacionals/n1_220/the_world_in_2020_ten_issues_that_will_shape_the_global_agenda

Technology as a new frontier of power

2020 will be the year of 5G and the decade begins in which we will see great advances in the fields of artificial intelligence and quantum computing, which may radically alter the economic system, security policies and power relations. ... Classical geopolitical concepts and visions are recovered, although they are adapted to a competition that does not focus so much on competition for territory but for virtual spaces. This year, but also beyond, three types of tensions will become even more visible: between states, between states and corporations, and between digital activists and repressive forces.

In terms of competition between states, the main tension will continue to be between China and the United States. At the business level, what we see is the consolidation of a kind of technological G2 and the resurgence of old Cold War reflexes. In 2020, one of the main battlegrounds will be the extension of 5G technology, an area in which China leads. The United States leads the countries that see it as a security threat. This technological bipolarity will create new dependencies and spheres of influence. But it will also cause reactions among those who are lagging behind and are still confident of recovering positions and perhaps allying with each other. The recent EU rapprochement with Japan in terms of connectivity is a step in that direction. India will also attempt to enter the fray, especially in quantum computing. To reduce tensions, the conception of a multilateral initiative to replicate in the technological field what has been done in terms of trade, disarmament and the fight against climate change is desirable. Perhaps the idea of a global technological regime will end up taking shape at some point in this decade but this year unilateralism and competition will continue to prevail.

To say that data is the new oil has become a commonplace: it is the most valuable resource, competition for access to it is fierce, and whoever monopolises most establishes a position of strength over the rest of the players in the system. The difference being that it is not usually states that control this resource, nourished by the data of their citizens, but large digital empires that end up knowing populations better than their governments and that have developed an extraordinary ability to escape their control. Although China is the exception.

...

China: forced to choose?

China's re-emergence as a global power divides those who perceive it as a risk from those who see it as an opportunity. The former are concerned about losing relative power and the new dependencies and vassal states. The latter may be attracted by diversifying relations with global powers and many see Beijing as a reliable partner, a committed investor, a strategic ally or their only option. These differences arise between countries but also within them, where relations with China enter general public debate.

...

The European Union is the other place divisions are opening up over what China's empowerment means. The union has not yet defined a common position and the debate will intensify in 2020. In the institutions and capitals of some states — especially Berlin and Paris — China is beginning to be described as a systemic rival. On the other hand, smaller countries from Portugal and Greece to many central and eastern European countries and Italy see China as an enticing partner, sovereign debt holder and a key investor, especially in relation to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure mega-project.



The Strategic Implications of Chinese-Iranian-Russian Naval Drills in the Indian Ocean

by Syed Fazl-e Haider

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For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/the-strategic-implications-of-chinese-iranian-russian-naval-drills-in-the-indian-ocean/>

OE Watch Commentary: A series of unprecedented joint naval drills between China, Iran, and Russia were held in the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman from December 27–29. The drills took place just as escalating tensions between the United States and Iran reached a crisis point. The exercise signified a deepening relationship between Iran and the PRC in economics, diplomacy, and security affairs. In addition, it provided a symbolic military and political show of support from Russia and China for Iran—and reflected a strategic alignment in the making between the three countries, with an aim to protect their shared strategic interests in the Indian Ocean. Such a powerful trio would be able to exercise greater influence in the Middle East, and could present a challenge to the US-led IMSC maritime coalition force.

China and Russia have both increased military and economic cooperation with Iran in the year and a half since the US government pulled out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, while Iran’s government has repeatedly touted its deepening relations with China and Russia as a show of diplomatic strength, its allies have been less public about the growing relationship. In December, Iranian officials lauded the trilateral exercises—titled “Marine Security Belt”—as proof that Iran can outlast crippling sanctions with aid from its non-Western allies, and declared that the drills signaled a new triple alliance in the Middle East. By contrast, Russian and PRC officials framed the joint exercises as part of routine anti-piracy operations, highlighting their peacekeeping priorities and seeking to depoliticize the drills.

Video and photos of the exercise indicated simple tactical operations, including: live fire drills; an anti-piracy exercise involving Iranian commandos fast-roping onto a surface vessel; a drill to extinguish flames on a burning ship; and a pass-in review of participating naval vessels on the final day. The major naval units participating in the exercise were:

- China: Type-052D (Luyang III)-class guided missile destroyer Xining (DDG-117).
- Russia: Neustrashimy-class frigate Yaroslav Mudry (FF-777) was the lead Russian unit. It was accompanied by two smaller auxiliary vessels—the tanker Elnya and the tugboat Viktor Konetsky—from Russia’s Baltic Fleet.
- Iran: Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) frigate Alborz (FF-72) was the most prominent Iranian surface unit involved in the exercise. Secondary roles were played by the frigate Sahand; the corvette Bayandor; the hovercraft Tondar; and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) vessels Shahid Naserinejad and the catamaran Shahid Nazeri.

Iran and China Report Mixed Messages on the Trilateral Exercises

The Iranian Armed Forces (IAF) flotilla commander in charge of the exercises, Rear Admiral Gholamreza Tahani, said after the drills “the message of this exercise is peace, friendship and lasting security through cooperation and unity...[and] to show that Iran cannot be isolated.” An Iranian state television report heralded the drills as signaling a “new triangle of sea power” in the region, and quoted IAF Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi’s bold declaration: “Today, the era of American free action in the region is over, and [US forces] must leave the region gradually.”

Notably, Rear Admiral Tahani also discussed collective naval security arrangements, asserting that countries that share security, economic, and political interests should cooperate to restore collective security in the region. He described this as particularly important for what he termed the Indian Ocean’s “Golden Triangle” of strategic straits (the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, and the Bab al-Mandeb), saying: “[N]o single country can guarantee the security of the oceans. For this purpose, a collective effort is needed. To secure the ocean, countries are seeking synergy and convergence while holding joint naval exercises in oceanic waters.”

This language contrasted with the more muted tone offered by PRC officials. PRC Ministry of Defense spokesperson Wu Qian said just ahead of the drills, “The joint exercise is a normal military exchange arrangement of the three countries. It is in line with related international laws and practices and has no connection with [the] regional situation.” PRC officials also did not explicitly endorse the “Golden Triangle” concept, but they did endorse the idea of new alignments for collective maritime security. In the same press conference, Spokesperson Wu said, “The naval drills aim to deepen exchange and cooperation among the navies of the three countries, and display their strong will and capability to jointly maintain world peace and maritime security, while actively building a maritime community with a shared future.”

(Continued)



Continued: The Strategic Implications of Chinese-Iranian-Russian Naval Drills in the Indian Ocean

The Deepening Strategic Relationship Between China and Iran

The trilateral drills could be viewed as a step towards Iran's deepening strategic relationship with China, which until now has been predicated primarily on economic ties. After China's secondary sanctions waiver expired in May 2019, it continued to buy Iranian oil in defiance of the United States. In July, the United States sanctioned the Chinese oil processing company Zhuhai Zhenrong and its chief executive Youmin Li, and in late September imposed sanctions on other Chinese nationals and entities accused of flouting secondary sanctions on Iran—including two subsidiaries of the Chinese giant COSCO Shipping Corporation.

China faced a difficult challenge in balancing its Iranian trade alongside contentious economic relations with the United States, and some Chinese companies decreased their business with Iran after sanctions were reimposed rather than risk blowback (total Chinese exports to Iran declined by close to 40 percent at the end of 2019). However, the activities of some of China's largest state-owned enterprises indicated Beijing's intent to continue purchasing Iranian oil. The PRC made promises in the second half of 2019 to dramatically step up its Iranian investments. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Zarif and his PRC counterpart Wang Li reportedly signed memoranda this past August in which Iran granted the state-owned China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) advantageous contracts to develop controlling stakes in some of its largest oil reserves (to include the North and South Azadegan oil fields and the supergiant South Pars gas field), and Chinese dealmakers were able to lock in promises for cheap crude oil and liquid natural gas (LNG) for years to come. Nevertheless, Chinese diplomats have balanced their continuing engagement with Iran alongside the need to manage a complex Sino-American relationship. While China needs Iranian oil to enable Beijing's key political priorities of economic growth and domestic stability, the bilateral dynamic is asymmetric: China supplies nearly a quarter of Iran's foreign trade, while Iranian trade represents only one percent of Chinese imports. China has taken advantage of recent opportunities to invest heavily in strategic projects within Iran, but it has also hedged its bets by engaging with other regional powers, as it does not need Iran in the same way that Iran needs it.

China has also long sought to increase its arms sales to the Middle East, and the current situation provides many opportunities to do so. While it is nowhere close to supplanting the United States or Russia (the region's first and second-largest arms providers, respectively), China has increasingly become an alternative to US arms for many states in the Middle East. During a mid-September visit to Beijing last year, IAF Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Baqeri said "Iran attaches great significance to its relations with the People's Republic of China in all areas. We have long-standing ties in the military sector as well, and hope this visit can be a turning point in the development and reinforcement of [our] relations."

Trilateral Drills Reveal the Possibility of Competing Collective Security Pacts

A continuing program of Chinese-Iranian-Russian collective maritime security cooperation could pose a challenge to existing US-led initiatives in the Gulf Region. In November 2019, the US-led International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC) began stability and peacekeeping operations in the Arabian Gulf, Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, and the Gulf of Oman. IMSC was formed in the wake of a series of suspected Iranian attacks (or seizures) directed against oil tankers—as well as two September 2019 attacks on Saudi oil refineries.

Russia had introduced a separate concept for collective security for the Persian Gulf just months before the formation of the IMSC, proposing an international conference that would lead to the creation of a cooperative security organization in the region. Moscow's proposal included establishing military hotlines for communication, and rejecting the permanent deployment of military forces from states outside the region. Beijing endorsed Moscow's vision two days after it was presented, stating that such a proposal would benefit "peace and stability in the Persian Gulf region [which] are of utmost importance to ensure safety and development of the region and the world as a whole." If the joint military drills by Iran, Russia, and China signal a nascent maritime cooperative entity in the making, it could create another vector for naval competition between the United States and China in the Indian Ocean.

Under the pressure of sanctions since 2018, Iran has refused to back down in the face of rapidly escalating tensions with the United States, its confidence bolstered in large part by continued economic support from China and Russia. In early December, President Rouhani announced Iran's 2020 "budget of resistance," which was predicated on a \$5 billion loan from Russia and Chinese promises to massively increase the total oil output of Iran's energy reserves. Iran has repeatedly and overtly framed its deepening relations with China and Russia as the beginnings of a non-Western alliance system that could challenge the US-led international order. **End OE Watch Commentary (Haider)**



Considering “The Ground Battlefield Under Informatized Conditions”

OE Watch Commentary: Strategies and tactics in warfare change as new technologies emerge. China has been striving to maintain pace with the modern world by developing strategies and tactics that complement these ongoing changes. One discipline that has been undergoing dramatic change is that of close-range combat due to the “informatization” of the battlefield. In the accompanying article, published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, two Chinese scholars discuss a close combat situation where China is the weaker military force, facing a stronger enemy that possesses advanced (informatized) technology. In the scenario, advanced technology allows China’s adversary to detect and acquire targets at long range, execute precise attacks from beyond line of sight, and conceal combat intent, posing a real challenge to Chinese forces trying to close their distance with the enemy to destroy it.



People’s Liberation Army troops demonstrating an attack during a visit by Marine Corps General Joe Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to China on 16 August 2017.

Source: Petty Officer 2nd Class Dominiqu A. Pineiro via the Defense Imagery Management Operations Center, 16 August 2017, Public Domain.
“The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.”
Image can be found here: https://core.wazeedigital.com/video/clip/779DVT4_1JYZNLL01.do
Or: <https://www.defense.gov/observe/photo-gallery/igphoto/2001956826/>

According to the article, there are three phases of “close combat” in the information age. Phase one combines various methods to get close to the enemy in planning. Phase two is the entanglement phase in which the fight is brought to close quarters. Phase three is the annihilation and destruction of enemy forces.

The article describes various measures that, coupled with having an intimate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of both the enemy and friendly sides “as a foundation,” would be effective in closing the distance with the adversary with a reduced chance of detection. These measures include, for example, capitalizing on factors such as weather and geographical elements, which might degrade the capability of enemy reconnaissance devices and weapons platforms. The authors describe scenes in which small groups of soldiers approach from various routes, attacking “quickly and violently,” and networks of air defense firepower attack from varying altitudes and ranges. Another measure suggested is the use of “flexible deception,” such as putting out false intelligence to mislead the enemy.

In phase two (entanglement) of “close combat,” the article explains that non-contact combat constitutes a major threat to the weaker side. The authors argue that in order to be victorious, it is essential to not only get closer, but to also employ a number of measures, be flexible in the employment of tactics, become “closely entangled” with the enemy, create an interlocked pattern of engagement with the enemy, and lessen the threat of attack by the enemy’s long-range firepower. They go on to describe various aggressive, multi-pronged and joint attack approaches, ensuring fighting takes place at close quarters, while also disrupting the enemy’s plans and patterns, and using integrated strength to wipe out key enemy targets while Chinese forces encircle the enemy. It is worth noting that the Chinese concept of “entanglement” is nothing new, but reflects their experience in the Korean War, where they would negate American airpower and artillery by “hugging” the American ground forces. The Americans would not call in artillery and air power on their own positions – except in extremis.

In the third phase (annihilation), the authors explain, the more superior the enemy is in information technology, the more they are likely to resort to asymmetric attack measures. Therefore, “take aim at the weak points of the strong enemy’s informatized platforms and combat arrangements...” Prioritize a selection of targets in the event not all targets can be destroyed. Concentrate superior forces. Finally, conduct both distant and close-in battle simultaneously.

The authors argue that despite the rise of informatized warfare, “close combat” has not gone away and in fact, “combat at short range may even be the main form of combat.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**



Continued: Considering “The Ground Battlefield Under Informatized Conditions”

“The less the enemy is able to fight close combat, the more we [China] should step up our research of the issue of close combat on the informatized battlefield, and thereby firmly grasp the initiative.”

“With the rapid development of new and high technology with information technology as the core, the ground battlefield under informatized conditions is no longer restricted to the battlefield in the geographical sense.”

Source: Ye Huabin and Ai Zhengson, “信息时代如何“近敌”作战 (How to Conduct ‘Close Combat’ in the Information Age),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 16 January 2020. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmmap/content/2020-01/16/content_252327.htm

“Close combat,” as the name says, is combat operations against an enemy conducted at short range. With the rapid development of new and high technology with information technology as the core, the ground battlefield under informatized conditions is no longer restricted to the battlefield in the geographical sense. Profound change has occurred in the intention and extension [semantics; the formal definition and the further range of applicability] of the concept of the battlefield. Thus the methods of closing with the enemy to destroy him face new challenges. To accurately explore and understand how to fight close combat on the land battlefield under informatized conditions is important in terms of both theory and practice.

Of first importance in the conduct of close combat is to solve the problem of how to get close to the enemy...The strong enemy can detect and acquire targets at long range, execute precise attacks from beyond line of sight, conceal his combat intent, and make closing with the enemy to destroy him increasingly difficult. Thus with a full understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy and friendly sides as a foundation, integrate the use of measures of various kinds. First of all is many ways of evasion.... A second element is firepower as cover... A final element is flexible deception.

Combine forces and firepower, get entangled with the enemy and fight at close quarters... faced with a strong enemy, if you hope to be victorious you must not only solve the problems of “getting close,” you must also take various measures, employ tactics flexibly, get closely entangled with the enemy, create an interlocked pattern of engagement with the enemy, and lessen the threat of attack from the strong enemy’s long-range firepower and weapon platforms.

Annihilation and destruction aiding each other, put an end to the enemy in precise release of energy. The more superiority a side has in information technology, the more that side fears an opponent using “asymmetric” attack measures.

...The less the enemy is able to fight close combat, the more we should step up our research of the issue of close combat on the informatized battlefield, and thereby firmly grasp the initiative.



The “Blade of Victory”: A Chinese Perspective on Drone Swarms

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese military strategists and academics have been focusing on artificial intelligence (AI) and how it will reshape the future battlefield. The application of AI’s capabilities to military planning, operations, and decision support even has its own Chinese buzzword: “intelligentized” warfare. The growing number of articles and studies describing different aspects of “intelligentized” warfare are a clear indication of where China is heading. One such article, published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, the Central Military Commission’s official newspaper, offers an in-depth look at the use of drone swarms on the future battlefield. The article focuses on the advantages and potential operations in which drone swarms can be used.

The authors envision drone swarms as the “advance guard” and a force that “will likely become the ‘blade of victory’ in the hands of commanders at all levels on the future battlefield.” Drone swarm operations offer six “exceptional advantages,” according to the article. They have greater autonomy, possess more functional capabilities, are more resilient, have a more rapid response time, are more economical, and are less dependent on logistics and outside support. They can be used to implement multi-domain attacks. The authors explain that a drone swarm platform can even be used to carry a large number of individual drones in a multi-domain attack scenario. Swarm attacks can be carried out across all domains – on land, at sea, in the air, in space, along the electromagnetic spectrum, and in cyberspace. Multi-faceted attacks carried out simultaneously across multiple domains “will destroy the enemy’s cross-domain joint capabilities and achieve combat objectives at a relatively small cost.”

Drone swarms can also be used to conduct tactical deception and interference, reconnaissance, and “smart coordination.” For example, they can act as decoys to trigger enemy radar and air defense weapons to react and therefore expose their positions. This strategy can be likened to one of China’s 36 ancient stratagems, “Beat the grass to startle the snake,” an idiom that suggests taking just enough action to prompt the enemy to act and give away his strategy or position.

Finally, the authors describe ways that drone swarms can carry out reconnaissance to obtain enemy intelligence, and “smart coordination” in which drones “lead in battlefield reconnaissance and the elimination of targets.” However, the authors argue that drone swarm operations cannot operate completely independent of man. In situations deemed more risky to lives, due to their lower cost and versatility, a large number of drones can be used in front-line operations while a manned platform can provide “command and control of the drone swarms from the rear, guiding the swarms to strike targets in complex, high-risk areas.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Drone swarms will likely become the “blade of victory” in the hands of commanders at all levels on the future battlefield.”

Source: Xu Weiwei and Li Huan, “无人机集群作战的主要样式 (The Main Types of Drone Swarm Warfare),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 23 January 2020. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-01/23/content_252842.htm

The Main Types of Drone Swarm Warfare

...Drone swarm operations are emerging as an important form of intelligentized warfare. In the future, drone operations will become the “advance guard” in a battle between two armies. Drone swarms will likely become the “blade of victory” in the hands of commanders at all levels on the future battlefield.

...From their inception, drone swarm operations have always had many exceptional advantages over conventional operations. (1) ...Drone swarms can be flexibly organized into different units. They can adapt to different environments, possess different functions, and perform different tasks... (2) ... After equipping drones with different combat modules, a drone swarm formation can have multiple functions, such as reconnaissance and surveillance, soft and hard strikes, and combat assessment... (3) ...Drone swarm operations can quickly transmit battlefield information and accurately implement commanders’ intentions... (4) ...An individual drone has several advantages, such as being a small target, the ability to withstand impact, large overload capacity, maintaining flight under silent mode, and effective concealment on the battlefield, etc... (5) ...A drone swarm operation eliminates the limitations of human-operated machines. There is no need to install complex safety systems and protective facilities to ensure safety of personnel... (6) In the course of drone swarm operations, an individual drone’s dependence on logistics and support is low...

...The basic method of multi-domain attacks is to use a drone swarm platform to carry a large number of individual drones. During the battle, the drones are launched or deployed through the platform as battle groups to achieve data sharing, flight control, situational awareness, and intelligentized decision-making, so that the drones can flexibly respond to battlefield contingencies and conduct various combat missions, such as swarm reconnaissance, fighting, and attacks. The domains in which attacks by a swarm operation take place will be across all domains: on land, at sea, in the air, in space, along the electromagnetic spectrum, and in cyberspace. ...

...Based on mission needs, a drone swarm can be flexibly configured with various modules, such as modules for reconnaissance, information processing, and missile firepower, thereby forming a composite formation with reconnaissance, interference, and strike capabilities. Alternatively, several drone swarms can each be configured with reconnaissance and firepower modules, forming a large assault formation that penetrates deep into enemy territory and conducts real-time reconnaissance and strikes on key or high-risk targets, thereby achieving strategic operational goals.



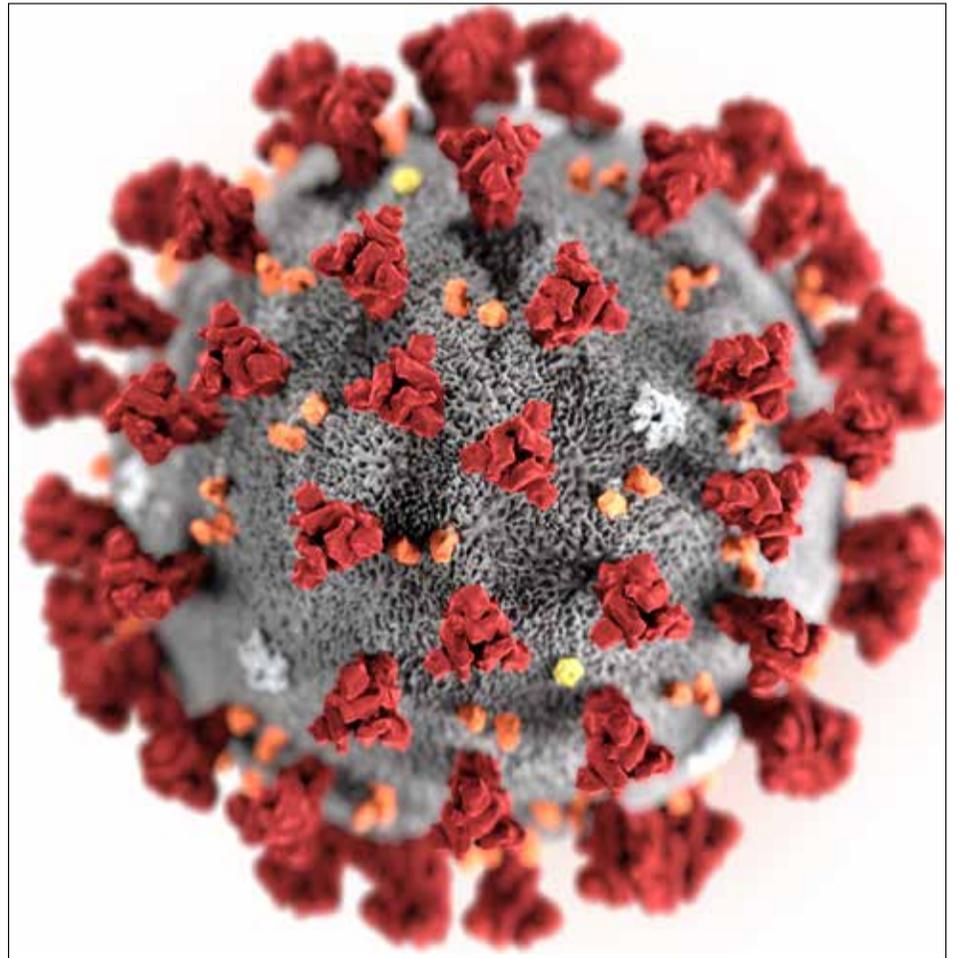
China Summons the PLA to Prevent and Contain the Coronavirus

OE Watch Commentary: The recent coronavirus outbreak in China has led to fears of social instability among the Communist Party, which has summoned the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to retain a sense of security and order among the public. The accompanying passages from Chinese state-run sources highlight recent PLA activities to deal with the outbreak, painting a picture of the PLA having things under control, with one source noting that military vehicles provide “valuable spiritual comfort” to panicked citizens. The final passage from Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* paints a more realistic picture of the situation.

On 12 February, Chinese state-run *China Military Daily* announced new efforts by the PLA to prevent and control the novel coronavirus, officially named COVID-19, in the city of Beijing. According to the article, a new fever clinic was opened at the Sixth Medical Center of the PLA's General Hospital, which can receive up to 100 people per day and isolate 10 patients suffering from symptoms at a time. The fever clinic is divided into a “clean” zone, “semi-polluted” zone, and “polluted” zone in order to properly organize medical staff and patients. In the clean zone, there is a warehouse, pharmacy, and cafeteria. The semi-polluted zone consists of the hallways within the hospital and the nurse station while the polluted zone has bathrooms and patient rooms. The security unit of the hospital now has seven medical teams of over 260 people, which serves as an epidemic prevention and control network.

On 13 February, state-run media outlet *China National Defense News* outlined the efforts of officials to help the families of PLA soldiers providing medical relief. In the Banan District of Chongqing, Wang Enping, a political commissar of the People's Armed Forces Department, visited with family members of military doctors stationed in Wuhan. The Ministry of Armed Affairs arranged to help family members buy daily necessities. Additional assistance was provided for the families including supervision and tutoring for children. Another article published by the state-run *PLA Daily* on 13 February revealed that a PLA unit dedicated to anti-epidemic support traveled to three towns near Wuhan. The article noted that “while waiting in the unknown, many people start to become anxious, restless, and panicked,” but seeing military vehicles passing by their windows is a “valuable spiritual comfort to them.”

Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* noted on 9 February that the coronavirus outbreak prompted the Chinese military's biggest mobilization of medical personnel in decades, and remains a test for their crisis management skills. According to military commentator Song Zhongping, the PLA “has many advantages and medical resources they can draw on, including their military hospitals and military researchers and institutes. This is part of their key mission in non-traditional defense operations.” The outbreak happened merely months after the government of Hubei province organized an epidemic readiness drill in preparation to host the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan. However, as one PLA veteran complains, “The outbreak of the novel coronavirus and the inefficient operation of Hubei government indicate that the crisis management drill was just a show, and now the whole country and the PLA have to clean up the mess.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hartnett)**



Computer render of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Source: CDC/ Alissa Eckert, MS; Dan Higgins, MAM via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2019-nCoV-CDC-23312.png>, Public Domain

“The outbreak of the novel coronavirus and the inefficient operation of Hubei government indicate that the crisis management drill was just a show, and now the whole country and the PLA have to clean up the mess.”



Continued: China Summons the PLA to Prevent and Contain the Coronavirus

Source: Mao Yu, “The new fever clinic of the Sixth Medical Center of the General Hospital of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army was officially put into battle,” *China Military Online*, 12 February 2020. www.mod.gov.cn/action/2020-02/12/content_4860314.htm

A new platform has been developed for the prevention and control of new coronavirus pneumonia. On February 10, the reporter saw at the Sixth Medical Center of the General Hospital of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. Rows of box-shaped “white houses” stood parallel to the emergency outpatient area of the center. The fever clinic signs were particularly eye-catching, and 10 fevers were isolated. The ward was officially opened, and it became another new position in the center’s battle.

It is understood that the new diagnosis area is “three zones and two lines,” that is, divided into clean areas, semi-polluted areas, polluted areas, cleanliness, and pollution lines, including medical care rooms, buffer rooms, waiting rooms, and rescue rooms.

The standard procedures for pre-inspection and sub-inspection, in-patient treatment, inspection and testing, isolation and observation, and sewage treatment are more standardized. The average daily capacity of receiving patients is up to 100 people, which can achieve simultaneous isolation between 10 patients with a fever.

The affiliated security unit has organized 7 medical teams of more than 260 people to enter the combat state, effectively forming an epidemic prevention and control chain network.

Source: Zhang Rui & Qing Ying, “You work in the frontline at the peril of sacrificing yourself, while we watch your back,” *China National Defense News*, 13 February 2020. www.mod.gov.cn/mobilization/2020-02/13/content_4860385.htm

Wang Enping, a political commissar of the People’s Armed Forces Department of the district, said that three of the military medical team members who had gone to Wuhan this time had their home addresses in Banan District. In order to relieve the worries of frontline military doctors fighting the epidemic, relevant military and field departments actively carried out a series of special forms of condolences to solve the problems for the family members of military doctors.

Lu Yi learned by phone that Zhang Cheng’s family lived with a relative who had come from Hubei for the Spring Festival. The family was still in isolation and it was inconvenient to purchase daily necessities, so the Ministry of Armed Affairs arranged for someone to help them buy daily necessities.

The Education Commission coordinated with the school where military babies were located, and assigned teachers to provide one-on-one counselling and supervision to the children’s learning.

Source: Song Tianguo, Hong Peishu, & He Wutao, “Fighting the frontier of the ‘epidemic,’ unblocking the livelihood supply line,” *PLA Daily*, 13 February 2020. www.mod.gov.cn/education/2020-02/13/content_4860370.htm

In the past few days, this special support force, approved by the Central Military Commission to draw up a group, traveled to and from three towns of Wuhan to transport medical supplies for daily life, effectively alleviating the pressure of Wuhan’s transportation and ensuring the normal supply of life for Wuhan citizens.

Indeed, the epidemic clouded over Wuhan, and megacities with tens of millions of people suddenly pressed the ‘pause button.’ What to do if I can’t buy vegetables? What if I can’t get a car? While waiting in the unknown, many people start to become anxious, restless, and panicked.

Many Wuhan citizens nestling in their homes, partaking in one of the “entertainment activities” every day, is lying next to the window and watching the military vehicles passing by. This is a valuable spiritual comfort to them.

Source: Minnie Chan, “China’s military put to the crisis test in coronavirus call-up,” *South China Morning Post*, 9 February 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/print/news/china/military/article/3049672/chinas-military-put-crisis-test-coronavirus-call>

The coronavirus crisis has prompted one of the Chinese military’s biggest mobilizations of medical personnel in decades, putting its crisis management skills to the test.

Hong Kong-based military commentator Song Zhongping said military staff were well equipped to deal with a crisis. “The PLA has many advantages and medical resources they can draw on, including their military hospitals and military researchers and institutes. This is part of their key mission in non-traditional defense operations,” Song said.

The outbreak comes just months after Hubei organized an epidemic readiness drill as part of preparations to host the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan. “The outbreak of the novel coronavirus and the inefficient operation of Hubei government indicate that the crisis management drill was just a show, and now the whole country and the PLA have to clean up the mess,” the Tangshan veteran said.



Abu Sayyaf Kidnapping Indonesians at Sea

OE Watch Commentary: The jihadist group Abu Sayyaf, based in the Philippines, continues to pose a threat to regional security. As the accompanying passage discusses, the group kidnapped eight Indonesian citizens (three fishermen in late 2019 and five others in mid-January 2020) in two recent incidents which were “masterminded by the same figures.”

One of the complications with the most recent kidnapping, according to the article, is that Abu Sayyaf is primarily comprised of militants from the Philippines, but the operation involving the kidnapping of Indonesians took place in Malaysian waters. Thus, Indonesia must cooperate with Malaysian authorities more than authorities from the Philippines. The article points out that one of the steps that Indonesia’s Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs will consider taking to prevent future kidnappings is to recommend Indonesians not fish in Malaysian waters.



Pump boats used by Abu Sayyaf in 2017 Bohol attack.

Source: Armed Forces of the Philippines via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pump_boats_used_by_Abu_Sayyaf_in_2017_Bohol_attack.jpg, Public Domain

The article also reveals the dilemma Indonesia faces when trying to rescue hostages or negotiate with Abu Sayyaf. For example, the three fishermen kidnapped by Abu Sayyaf in late 2019 were all rescued, but there is no guarantee a rescue attempt will succeed again in the more recent case involving five Indonesian fishermen. Alternatively, paying a ransom to Abu Sayyaf could embolden the kidnapers and boost their financial coffers. Nevertheless, according to the article, this is exactly why Indonesia’s Foreign Minister and Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs is planning meetings to discuss with other counterparts how to prevent Abu Sayyaf’s kidnappings of Indonesian fishermen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“One of the recommendations was to agree with the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Indonesian fishermen do not go into Malaysian waters.”

Source: “Mahfud MD Sebut Abu Sayyaf Penculik 5 WNI di Laut Malaysia (Mahfud MD Claims Abu Sayyaf Kidnaps 5 Indonesians in Malaysian Sea).” *Nasional Tempo*, 20 January 2020. <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1297439/mahfud-md-sebut-abu-sayyaf-penculik-5-wni-di-laut-malaysia>

The Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Mahfud MD said the kidnapping of five Indonesian citizens in Malaysian waters last week was Abu Sayyaf. He said the abduction was masterminded by the same figures who abducted three Indonesian citizens at the end of last year. He deplored this incident, and stated, “We managed to free three, but suddenly five were taken again. This is a matter of security at sea, and the sea is not the sea of Indonesia.” Mahfud also said he had thought of several efforts so that this incident would not continue to repeat itself. One of the recommendations was to agree with the request of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Indonesian fishermen do not go into Malaysian waters.

Five fishermen are still missing. They were known to be on a tug boat, which had eight passengers. On January 15, 2020, the ship was reported missing. Two days later, the tug boat was found with only three passengers.



Indonesia to Bolster Nationalism to Deradicalize Returning ISIS Members

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from an Indonesian source sheds light on Indonesia's considerations regarding deradicalizing former members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and preventing future radicalization of today's youths. According to the article, there are as many as "600 Indonesian ex-ISIS members in detention camps in Syria." Apparently, these members "have stated that they want to return to Indonesia after... the total defeat of [ISIS]."

The country's Deputy on Deradicalization notes that these ex-ISIS members had a low sense of nationalism before they adopted the ideology of ISIS, which existed for at least 20 years in Indonesia, where little has been done to combat such ideologies. As a result, he claims that an increased promotion of nationalism can help combat radicalization. He seeks to achieve this by signing a Memoranda of Understanding with the Pancasila Ideology Development Board (BPIP) to prioritize teaching Pancasila to schoolchildren, who in previous years received insufficient Pancasila education. Pancasila refers to Indonesia's five national principles, including belief in God, just and civilized humanity, national unity, democracy, and social justice.

On the political level, this strategy will be implemented through means such as holding flag ceremonies in government ministries every Monday. These ceremonies will also be held in schools and other institutions throughout the country. Whether Indonesia's Deputy on Deradicalization is correct in asserting that nationalism will triumph over ISIS ideology remains to be seen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Pancasila shield, depicting the five symbols representing five principles of Pancasila, the Indonesian ideology.

Source: Gunawan Kartapranata via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pancasila_Perisai.svg, Public Domain

“They have stated that they want to return to Indonesia after their dream of living together with ISIS was completely destroyed.”

Source: “Deputi BNPT: Tak Mudah Deradikalisasi Eks Kombatans ISIS (BNPT Deputy: Not Easy to Deradicalize Ex-ISIS Combatants),” *Nasional Republika*, 20 January 2020. <https://nasional.republika.co.id/berita/q4dvxy377/deputi-bnpt-tak-mudah-deradikalisasi-eks-kombatans-isis>

Deputy for Prevention, Protection and Deradicalization of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) Major General Hendri Paruhuman Lubis said it was not easy to deradicalize former ISIS combatants. “They have been indoctrinated by ISIS ideology and it is not easy to eliminate and restore their ideology as it was before.” At present, according to him, there are around 600 Indonesian ex-ISIS members in detention camps in Syria. They have stated that they want to return to Indonesia after their dream of living together with ISIS was completely destroyed and the total defeat of the terrorist group.

According to him, the narrow belief in nationalism has become one of the causes of the spread of radicalism that has been anti-Pancasila, and has tended to label others as disbelievers in the decade since the last 20 years. “That is why I am today in front of approximately 300 officials of Indonesia to give lectures on the concept of nationalism regarding radicalism,” Hendri said.

Every citizen must have a national outlook so that Indonesia becomes a large, sovereign, just and prosperous nation. “That is why we have signed an MoU with the Pancasila Ideology Development Board (BPIP) so that we prioritize the ideology of Pancasila which has been abandoned by many school children,” he said. He revealed they would start carrying out small activities. One of them is holding a flag ceremony every Monday in ministries, state institutions, and schools.



The Indian Military's Concerns with Chinese 5G

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past few years the Indian Army has been upgrading its weapons and equipment in order to be better prepared for a potential conflict with China. While these efforts have focused on mobile brigades or improved infrastructure for ammunition stores, the accompanying excerpted article reports on an issue that the Indian Army believes could be just as important.

The article, from the English-language news website *The Print*, reports how the army “red-flagged the possibility of Chinese 5G services being introduced in the country,” specifically that “such services could compromise the entire command and communication structure of the Indian military.” The article mentions that the Indian government considered preventing China from entering in a one-year 5G trial period, but that ultimately, the “Narendra Modi government has... allowed all network equipment makers, including China’s Huawei, to participate.” An Indian officer quoted in the article expresses concern that a Chinese company “will be able to beat all competition because of their prices” due to the government’s procurement policy being “based on the lowest bidder concept” as the Indian government moves forward with the technology.

Finally, the article highlights one of the main concerns the army has with Chinese 5G services, specifically that it will allow “access to Indian military communication through some kind of a back-door.” The article reports that the one-year 5G trial that Huawei is involved with started last year and includes the “education, agriculture, waste management and healthcare” sectors, though nothing is mentioned about the armed forces. While it will be several months until the trial ends and any agreement is presumably reached, the article shows how the Indian Army continues to view China as a threat. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



BEL Battlefield Surveillance Radar-Short Range (BFSR-SR) on display at Aero India-2007.

Source: Arun Vishwakarma, Webmaster, www.Bharat-Rakshak.com (en). Uploaded by User:Sniperz11 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BFSR-SR_with_thermal_imager.JPG, CC BY-SA 2.5

“Sources said the main worry is that the Chinese will be able to beat all competition because of their prices.”

Source: Snehesh Alex Philip, “‘Concerned’ Army red-flags possibility of China’s Huawei 5G services entering India,” *The Print*, 15 January 2020. <https://theprint.in/defence/concerned-army-red-flags-possibility-of-chinas-huawei-5g-services-entering-india/349879/>

The Army has red-flagged the possibility of Chinese 5G services being introduced in the country, saying there is a huge security risk and that such services could compromise the entire command and communication structure of the Indian military...

Sources said the Army along with the Navy and the Air Force had given its inputs on the 5G technology to the government like many other agencies and departments.

After due deliberations, the Narendra Modi government has however allowed all network equipment makers, including China’s Huawei, to participate in 5G trials.

...Sources said the main worry is that the Chinese will be able to beat all competition because of their prices.

“The Chinese 5G technology will come the cheapest and they will emerge as the lowest bidder. India’s procurement policy is based on the lowest bidder concept,” another officer told The Print.

...Officers explained that the risk is China, which India is racing to defend itself against with better weapons and infrastructure along the northern and eastern borders, will get access to Indian military communication through some kind of a back-door.

They said the concerns have been expressed by all the three Services — the Army, the Navy and the IAF...China has on its part warned India of economic consequences if Huawei were excluded from 5G development and deployments.

...In June, the Department of Telecommunications had approved a one-year 5G trial period with focus on three big social sectors — education, agriculture, waste management and healthcare.



Russia Facilitates Dialogue between Turkey and Syria

OE Watch Commentary: On 13 January, Turkish and Syrian intelligence chiefs Hakan Fidan and Maj. Gen. Ali Mamlouk met in Moscow, in “the first high-level meeting between the two sides since 2011.” As the accompanying article argues, the meeting between the two “spymasters” to reset Turkish-Syrian relations is the result of on-going Russian pressure to broker a peace deal and normalize relations. As the article notes, both intelligence chiefs are known to be close confidants of their countries’ respective presidents. The Russian-supported al-Assad regime’s desire to take full control of the Syrian city of Idlib, the last rebel stronghold, challenges Turkish-Russian relations, as the Russian-backed Syrian army’s offensive into the city has resulted in deaths among the Turkish forces in the area.



Turkish soldiers conduct patrol on outside Mabij, Syria.

Source: Voice of America via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_soldiers_conduct_patrol_on_outside_Manbij,_Syria.jpg, Public Domain

According to the article, Russia has two reasons to push the sides to resume relations. First, normalization would minimize the military confrontation between the regime and Turkish forces in Syria. It would also pave the way for Turkey to withdraw support from anti-regime armed groups mostly concentrated in Idlib, forcing these groups to compromise. These developments would ultimately help conclude the Syrian conflict. Al-Assad’s regime expects Turkey to respect Syrian sovereignty by withdrawing its troops from Syria and ending support for Syrian opposition groups. Second, Moscow argues that resuming relations is likely to help Syria’s economy, which is “on the brink of collapse due to the war and sanctions” and the economic situation “is threatening the military gains the Syrian government forces have achieved on the battlefield.”

The article points out that it is unlikely that Turkey would withdraw its troops from Syria “without ensuring a mechanism to completely eliminate” the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the People’s Protection Units (YPG). However, it is highly unlikely for Turkey to get assurances from the Syrian regime or Russia on this issue. On the contrary, Russia is trying to secure cultural autonomy for the Kurds “in order to end the American military presence in Syria, particularly around oil fields under the control of Syrian Kurdish groups.” According to the article, Russia developed “two strategies to thwart Turkey’s possible objections to this idea.” The first strategy is to offer Turkey a share in the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria. Turkish construction companies getting a share in the reconstruction of Syria could help elevate stagnant economic growth in Turkey. Also, Turkish companies providing vital supplies to Syria will contribute positively to both countries. The second strategy is to support Turkey in the power struggle over natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey does desperately need a boost for its economy and support in the Eastern Mediterranean over natural gas exploration; however it is not clear if these conditions will suffice in light of Turkey’s threat perception regarding Kurdish transnationalism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“A possible Russian-brokered reconciliation between Ankara and Damascus could change the course of Syrian’s nearly 9-year-old civil war...”



Continued: Russia Facilitates Dialogue between Turkey and Syria

Source: “Syrian crisis dictates peace between Damascus and Ankara” *Al-monitor.com*, 26 January 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/01/turkey-syria-conditions-dictate-peace-fidan-mamlouk-meeting.html>

A possible Russian-brokered reconciliation between Ankara and Damascus could change the course of Syrian’s nearly 9-year-old civil war amid the unprecedented level of clashes in Idlib.

...

The ramped-up Russian efforts finally translated into a high-level direct dialogue between the two sides when Turkey’s intelligence chief Hakan Fidan and his Syrian counterpart Maj. Gen. Ali Mamlouk met in Moscow on Jan. 13. Despite ongoing low-profile contacts, the face-to-face encounter of the two represents the first high-level meeting between the two sides since 2011.

...Russia is pushing for restoration of ties on the basis of the 1998 Adana accord, which envisages enhanced security cooperation against terrorist organizations. The two spymasters are said to have agreed on a nine-point road map to advance the dialogue, including a goal to cooperate against terrorism, according to Turkish reports.

...

The meeting also stood witness to a first: Fidan and Mamlouk reportedly discussed possible cooperation grounds against the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its armed wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG).

...Their capacity as spy chiefs aside, both Mamlouk and Fidan are known as close associates to the leaders of their countries...

...

The Russian side says a “reset” between Turkey and the Syrian regime is a must for two reasons.

First, once the relations between Ankara and Damascus normalize, Turkey-backed armed forces would have no choice but to compromise, lessening the potential for violent conflict; Turkey would have to stop supporting the armed Syrian opposition, thwarting any possible confrontation between the Turkish army and regime forces.

Second, the normalization of political relations could help mitigate the financial problems of the Syrian economy, which is on the brink of collapse due to the war and sanctions. The economic crisis is threatening the military gains the Syrian government forces have achieved on the battlefield. Turkey’s contribution to the reconstruction efforts of the country would also be important.

However, Turkey’s support for the Syrian rebels and the Turkish military presence in the Syrian territories continue to be a deal breaker for the Damascus government.

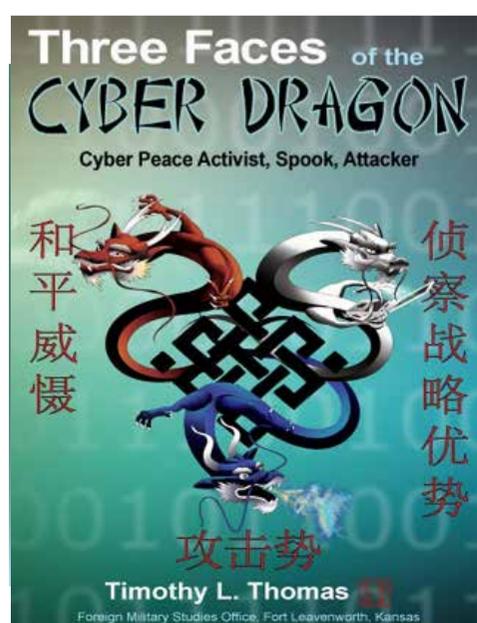
...

The widespread opinion is that Turkey will not agree to withdraw its military presence from the war-torn country without ensuring a mechanism to completely eliminate the PYD and the YPG.

...

Russia deems it necessary that Kurds have at least a cultural autonomy in order to end the American military presence in Syria, particularly around oil fields under the control of Syrian Kurdish groups.

The Russian side is said to be developing two strategies to thwart Turkey’s possible objections to this idea: giving Turkey a share in the reconstruction process in Syria and establishing a cooperation bloc between Syria, Turkey and Russia to support Ankara’s policies in the energy war over hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean.



China’s cyber policy appears to have three vectors —peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner— that 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>



Russian Special Operations in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Information on Russian SOF actions in Syria is sparse, but the high-profile deaths of four Russian snipers in Syria on 1 February, sheds some light on some of their activities. The Russian media has reported that the FSB Spetsnaz Center (TsSN FSB) [Центр специального назначения ФСБ (ЦСН ФСБ)] has personnel in Syria on a rotational basis, actively engaged in combat operations. According to the accompanying excerpted article from *Novaya Gazeta*, at least two, 2-man sniper teams were on an advance party to reconnoiter a potential meeting area for Turkish and Syrian military leaders on the Turkish-Syrian Border, near the City of Kasab. While returning from the mission, Major Ruslan Gimadiyev and Captain Dmitriy Minov, from the TsSN “K” Directorate (unit focusing on the specializing on the Caucasus); and Major Bulat Akhmatyanov and Lieutenant Vsevolod Trofimov from the TsSN “S” Directorate (counterterrorism unit) were killed in an ambush. This rotation was at least the second short-term rotation for the two sniper teams, as the article points out that the teams had provided security for President Putin’s January 2020 visit to Syria. The deaths of these high-profile Russian personnel likely add to Russia’s desire to facilitate direct dialogue between Turkey and Syria (see: “Russia Facilitates Dialogue between Turkey and Syria,” in this issue of *OE Watch*). **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The deceased were specialists of the highest class and they used them for the qualitative reinforcement of Syrian Army subunits, which are conducting local engagements...”

Source: Irek Murtazin, “Их добивали, стреляя в упор: В гибели четырех офицеров спецназа ФСБ в Сирии не обошлось без предательства (They Killed Them, While Shooting Them at Point Blank Range: Betrayal Played a Hand in the Deaths of Four FSB Spetsnaz Officers in Syria),” *Novaya Gazeta* Online, 4 February 2020. <https://iz.ru/648658/aleksei-ramm/my-zdes-v-komandirovke-oni-uzhe-shest-let-voiuut>

They Killed Them, While Shooting Them at Point Blank Range: Betrayal Played a Hand in the Deaths of Four FSB Spetsnaz Officers in Syria

Major Bulat Akhmatyanov’s daughter was born on 3 February. But he will never see her. The FSB Spetsnaz Center officer died in Syria two days before his daughter’s birth – on 1 February. The two older children of 33-year-old Major Akhmatyanov will also remain without a father, as will the families of 42-year-old Major Ruslan Gimadiyev, 35-year-old Captain Dmitriy Minov, and 36-year-old Lieutenant Vsevolod Trofimov with two children each. All of them were serving at the FSB TsSN and also died on 1 February in Syria.

The deceased were serving in the FSB Spetsnaz Center and constituted sniper pairs. Minov and Gimadiyev – in the TsSN “K” Directorate and Akhmatyanov and Trofimov – in the “S” Directorate. The abbreviation “K” – is the designation of the subunit, which specializes in special operations in the Caucasus. S – is the designation of the special operations directorate, which is involved with the elimination and detention of terrorists. The deceased were specialists of the highest class and they used them for the qualitative reinforcement of Syrian Army subunits, which are conducting local engagements – just like allocating a “Kinzhal” complex with nuclear weapons to reinforce a motorized rifle company...

Based upon our sources’ version, a meeting of the highest leaders of Syria and Turkey was being prepared on the Turkish-Syrian Border, near the City of Kasab. And Syria requested assistance from Russia to provide the security of this meeting. Majors Akhmatyanov and Gimadiyev, Captain Minov, and Lieutenant Trofimov were sent to Syria to accomplish this mission. And they ended up in an ambush, when they were returning from reconnoitering the terrain.

The fact that they sent precisely these officers there – was not by chance. In January, this was already their second temporary assignment to Syria. At the beginning of the year, they participated in providing security for the Russian President’s visit to Damascus.

If the information about the ambush, in which the FSB officers found themselves, corresponds to reality, the assumption arises: this was a targeted killing – someone needed to disrupt the Turkish-Syrian talks...



Turkey's Cooperation with Ukraine: A Message to Russia?

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 February, the eighth meeting of the Ukraine-Turkey High Level Strategic Council was held in Kiev under the chairmanship of Turkish and Ukrainian presidents. The sides signed several agreements, including one to expand defense cooperation. The visit coincided with seven Turkish soldiers being killed in Syria by Russian-backed Syrian regime forces and raised questions regarding the future of Russian-Turkish relations. The accompanying passages from Turkish sources discuss the significance of the visit, in light of the most recent challenges in Turkey-Russia relations.

The first excerpted article from Turkish state-owned *Anadolu Ajansı* reports that the Turkish President was reciprocating Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky's visit to Turkey in August 2019. As the article points out, the visit was closely followed and heavily criticized by the Russian media. The article claims that the most important issue discussed in the meeting was the situation in Crimea, and the Turkish President expressed his support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The author cautions that Turkey must manage this delicate issue well because of its relations with

Russia. According to the article, energy was also discussed, though Ukraine and Turkey are now competing to transfer Russian natural gas to European countries. In this context, both countries discussed a free trade agreement even though they are far from signing one. The leaders also discussed the security of the Black Sea and Turkey's desire to purchase helicopters from Ukraine.

The second article from Turkey's left-leaning newspaper *Birgün* provides highlights from both presidents' press conferences. Besides the points highlighted in the first article, President Erdoğan stated that Turkey does not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea and will provide support to protect sovereignty of Ukraine. Additionally, he noted that all parties to the Astana and Sochi agreements should "know their obligations" in a message to Moscow. For his part, President Zelensky highlighted the military and financial cooperation agreement by which Turkey is to provide over 33 million dollars of military aid to Ukraine, a country battling Russian forces in its Donbas Region. This follows a previous agreement signed in the fall of 2019 when Turkish defense company Baykar Makina agreed to export six Bayraktar TB2 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to Ukraine. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Turkey Ukraine Locator.

Source: Turkish Flame via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkey_Ukraine_Locator.png, Public domain

“Turkey needs...a delicate balance... On one hand, Vladimir Zelenskiy expects concrete steps from Turkey. On the other hand, Vladimir Putin had invited President Erdoğan to an opening of a mosque in Crimea.”



Continued: Turkey's Cooperation with Ukraine: A Message to Russia?

Source: Prof. Dr. İlyas Kemaloğlu, "Türkiye-Ukrayna ilişkilerinde hassas denge (Delicate balance in Turkey-Ukraine relations)," *Anadolu Ajansı*, 5 February 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/turkiye-ukrayna-iliskilerinde-hassas-denge-/1724963>

...President Erdoğan's visit to Ukraine was closely followed in Russia... However, the visit coinciding with the killing of seven Turkish soldiers in Idlib which led to the questioning of Turkey-Russia relations gave the visit a different dimension.....

The Crimean issue was undoubtedly the most important topic of bilateral talks. President Erdogan once again said Turkey defends the territorial integrity of Ukraine... While Ankara has been defending the territorial integrity of Ukraine from the beginning, it has tried not to raise this issue in its relations with Russia...

Turkey needs to follow a delicate balance in this regard. On one hand, Vladimir Zelenskiy expects concrete steps from Turkey. On the other hand, Vladimir Putin had invited President Erdoğan to an opening of a mosque in Crimea.

...

Issues such as maintaining security in the Black Sea region... and purchasing helicopters from Ukraine were also among the topics discussed.

...most of the Russian press had very negative comments regarding President Erdoğan's visit to Ukraine.

Source: "Erdoğan'dan İdlib açıklaması: 'Herkes yükümlülüğünü bilsin' (A statement on Idlib from Erdoğan: 'Everyone should know their obligation')," *Birgun.net*, 03 February 2020. <https://www.birgun.net/haber/erdogan-dan-idlib-aciklamasi-herkes-yukumlulugunu-bilsin-286572>

I hope that everybody knows their obligations within the framework of the Astana and Sochi agreements, and we will continue to work in this framework.

...

Referring to Turkey-Ukraine relations Zelenskiy, "thanks to the military-financial cooperation agreement Ukrainian army will get help from its Turkish partners. We are grateful for that" he said.

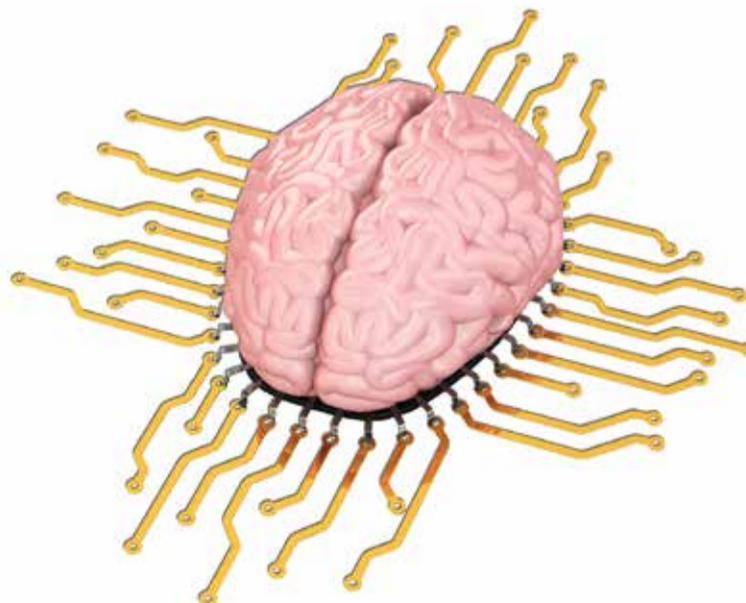
The following agreements were signed between the two countries:

Military Financial Cooperation Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, Cash Assistance Application Protocol between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine...

THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

<https://madsciblog.tradoc.army.mil/>

Mad Scientist Laboratory engages global innovators to report on the Operational Environment (OE), emergent disruptive technologies and their convergent impacts, and the changing character of warfare.





TurkStream's Role in Energy Security and Turkish-Russian Relations



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vladimir Putin at the opening ceremony of TurkStream Pipeline.

Source: kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Recep_Tayyip_Erdo%C4%9Fan_and_Vladimir_Putin_at_the_opening_ceremony_of_TurkStream_Pipeline_2.jpg, CC-BY-4.0

OE Watch Commentary: On 8 January, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin met in Istanbul to inaugurate TurkStream, which will carry natural gas from Russia to Europe via Turkey. TurkStream is a dual natural gas pipeline each with an annual capacity of 15.75 billion cubic meters. One pipeline will supply natural gas to Turkey and the other, scheduled to open later in 2020, will supply Russian natural gas to southern and southeastern Europe. TurkStream begins at Anapa in Russia and delivers gas through the Black Sea basin to Kiyıköy in the Kırklareli province in northwestern Turkey and then to Europe. It will be operated by Turkish and Russian companies BOTAŞ and Gazprom respectively. The accompanying article from Turkey's state-run *Anadolu Ajansı* provides insight into the importance of TurkStream for Turkish energy security and Turkish-Russian relations.

With this project, Russian natural gas will flow through Turkey to Europe for the first time and will likely strengthen Turkey's position in Europe "as a country that contributes to" European energy security. Additionally, the TurkStream project contributes to Turkey's ambition of becoming an energy hub in the region. Russia is the top natural gas supplier to Turkish markets, with Turkey previously receiving Russian gas through BlueStream under the Black Sea and the onshore West Line through Ukraine. However, Turkey faced several challenges with this pipeline. First, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine led to interruption in natural gas transiting from Ukraine through the West Line. Second, the West Line and other natural gas pipelines transiting Ukraine were at the end of their life span and required major repairs, jeopardizing Turkey's energy security. Therefore, TurkStream has eliminated any infrastructure failure issues that could have disrupted natural gas flow to Turkey and strengthened Turkey's energy security.

The article also points out that the TurkStream project "increases the mutual dependency between Ankara and Moscow, positively contributes to the advancement of cooperation for future relations between both countries" in many areas including issues concerning Syria and Libya. The article further argues that this increase in cooperation in the energy sector "will provide significant flexibility to Turkey in foreign policy." The article also states that Turkey strives to reduce its dependence on Russian natural gas by diversifying its suppliers as well as investing in renewable energy to decrease its natural gas consumption. Contrary to many analysts, the author states that TurkStream increases Russia's dependence on Turkey because the pipeline enables Russian gas to flow to Europe by allowing Russia to by-pass Ukraine. Additionally, the author argues that this project will benefit Turkey economically and strengthen its position in Europe, as Hungary, Bulgaria and Serbia will depend on TurkStream for their energy security. (Also see: "The Geopolitics of TurkStream and the Complexities of Bulgaria's Foreign Policy," in this issue of *OE Watch*)

“While TurkStream brings Ankara and Moscow closer, it also presents gains for Turkey concerning Syria and Libya, which are important issues of foreign policy.”

Source: "TurkStream to strengthen Turkey's energy hub position" *Anadolu Ajansı*, 08 January 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-turkstream-to-strengthen-turkey-s-energy-hub-position/1695585#!>

The inauguration of the TurkStream natural gas pipeline project, which will begin carrying natural gas from Russia to Europe via Turkey on Jan. 8, 2020, is considered a further step in Turkish and Russian relations in terms of energy.

The project, which has two lines, each of which has a carrying capacity of 15.75 billion cubic meters of natural gas, is particularly important for southern European countries. It will mark the first time that Russian natural gas will reach Europe via Turkey. The TurkStream project transfers natural gas directly to Turkey, which the country takes from the West Line, and it means a new route for European countries. Thus, Turkey has strengthened its position as a country that contributes to the energy security of Europe.

...
Turkey's claim of being an energy hub has been strengthened by the TurkStream project, which enables the country to directly take the natural gas coming from the West Line. TurkStream, which will be operated by a company established by BOTAŞ and Gazprom, is an important route for meeting the natural gas needs of Europe. The project, which increases the mutual dependency between Ankara and Moscow, positively contributes to the advancement of cooperation for future relations between the countries. Thus, TurkStream is significant for revealing that energy sources strengthen cooperation and ensure economic benefits rather than causing conflicts.

... *Transmitting the annual 14 billion cubic meters of gas from the West Line to Turkey over the first line of TurkStream, without changing terms and conditions of the existing agreements, means reducing this risk. Thus, gas will be directly transmitted from Russia to Turkey without the need for intermediate countries, and the problem of being exposed to potential interruptions caused by third parties will be eliminated. As a result, Turkey's energy security has increased with this project.*

...
While TurkStream brings Ankara and Moscow closer, it also presents gains for Turkey concerning Syria and Libya, which are important issues of foreign policy. The progress and increase in this cooperation will provide significant flexibility to Turkey in foreign policy.



Russia's Outreach to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq

OE Watch Commentary: In the last decade, Russia's presence in the Middle East has increased. One region over which Russia has exerted its influence is the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq (KRG). In 2017, Russian state oil company Rosneft signed a deal to develop the KRG's oil and gas infrastructure in a move that was not just commercial but also sought to expand Russia's political influence in KRG and the Middle East. Russian diplomats have since frequented the region. The accompanying articles from *Kurdistan24.net* provide insight into the recent visit by Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister and President Putin's Special representative for the Middle East and Africa, to the KRG.



Consulate-General of Russia in Erbil.

Source: http://www.rusgencons-erbil.mid.ru/img/ZD2_1.jpg via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Consulate-General_of_Russia_in_Arbil.jpg, CC-BY-3.0

Bogdanov held meetings with the KRG President Nechirvan Barzani, Prime Minister

Masrour Barzani, and President of Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and former President of KRG Masoud Barzani. According to the article, Bogdanov stated that the visit focused on bolstering Russian and KRG relations “especially economic ones.” The Russian diplomat also “discussed the status of Russian energy giants operating in the Kurdistan Region.” While Russia's third largest energy company Gazprom has been operating in various Iraqi regions since 2010 and in the KRG since 2016, Rosneft has taken on major projects to modernize oil and gas infrastructure and design “a new gas pipeline that could substantially boost oil production” in the KRG. Bogdanov also stated Moscow's interest in encouraging culture and knowledge exchange “to further develop investment opportunities between the Russian Federation and the Kurdistan Region.” He also said he had discussed other important issues “including the unfolding situations in Iraq and neighboring Syria” without providing any details.

The second excerpted article discusses three reasons for Bogdanov's visit. It cites the projects of Russian energy companies operating in the KRG, pointing to the presence of Gazprom and Rosneft representatives in the meetings. Second, it notes the goal of advancing economic and political relations between Russia and the KRG. Finally, the author claims that the visit was held to discuss the situation of the Kurds in Syria. Bogdanov held a meeting with the Kurdish National Council (ENKS), a Syrian Kurdish party supported by the KRG. The article states that Russia wants the former President of the KRG, Masoud Barzani, to play a role in bringing Kurdish parties in Syria together as Russia is trying to facilitate a dialogue between them and the al-Assad regime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“While some experts argue that the first reason for Bogdanov's visit to the Kurdistan Region is Rojava, some say that new political and commercial relations are being discussed between Erbil and Moscow...”



Continued: Russia's Outreach to the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq

Source: "Energy, economy lead talks between Kurdistan leaders, Russian official," *Kurdistan24.net*, 30 January 2020. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/economy/7f30b31c-2a65-4756-a97c-7e938565d2f3>

While finishing up an official visit to Erbil, a senior Russian diplomat said that the issue of bolstering ties to the Kurdistan Region, especially economic ones, took center stage in two days of talks with top Kurdish leaders.

...

Bogdanov said during a press conference capping off his visit to Erbil that he had discussed the status of Russian energy giants operating in the Kurdistan Region, covering various topics relevant to the economic and energy sectors.

Erbil and Moscow have deepened bilateral relations over the past few years, notably after the KRG signed an agreement with Russia's state oil company Rosneft to develop the region's oil and gas infrastructure, including the design of a new gas pipeline that could substantially boost oil production in the Kurdistan Region.

Meanwhile, Gazprom Neft, Russia's third-largest oil producer, was the subject of talks as well. Gazprom first began operating in Iraq in 2010 in the southern province of Wasit before launching operations in Kurdistan.

...

He also said Moscow wants to encourage an exchange of culture and knowledge through university professors, doctors, and others "to further develop investment opportunities between the Russian Federation and the Kurdistan Region."

...

On Thursday, Deputy Foreign Minister Bogdanov noted that, during his visit, he had also discussed additional "important issues with the Kurdish leadership," including the unfolding situations in Iraq and neighboring Syria.

Source: Cesim İlhan, "K24 ÖZEL - Bogdanov'un Erbil ziyareti ne anlama geliyor? (K24 SPECIAL - What does Bogdanov's visit to Erbil mean?)" *Kurdistan24.net*, 2 February 2020. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/tr/news/36570645-e95f-4db1-81dc-20ddf7c82be8>

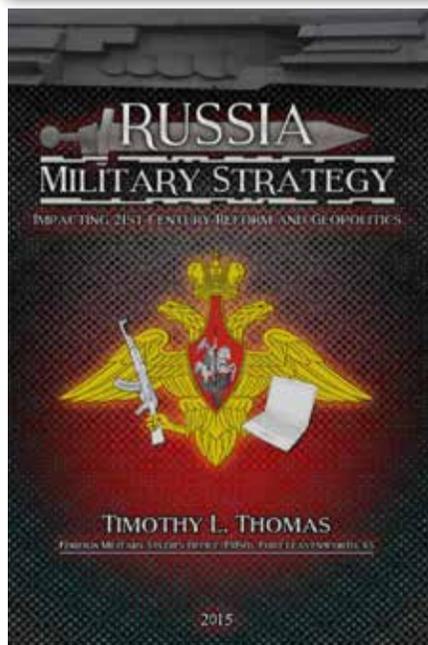
Putin's Special Representative Mikhail Bogdanov coming to the Kurdistan Region without going to Baghdad first indicates new development between Arbil and Moscow as well as Rojava...

The President of Russia Vladimir Putin's Special Representative for the Middle East and Africa and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov came to the Kurdistan Region, without stopping at the capital of Iraq on January 29-30, where he met the President Masoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Region Nechirvan Barzani and the Prime Minister Masrour Barzani.

The meetings included representatives of Gazprom and Rosneft, who continue their activities in the oil and energy sector in the Kurdistan Region.

Rosneft signed a 20-year agreement on oil and energy with the Kurdistan Region in May 2017. Gazprom has been operating in the Kurdistan Region since 2016.

While some experts argue that the first reason for Bogdanov's visit to the Kurdistan Region is Rojava, some say that new political and commercial relations are being discussed between Erbil and Moscow...



RUSSIA MILITARY STRATEGY: IMPACTING 21ST CENTURY REFORM AND GEOPOLITICS by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

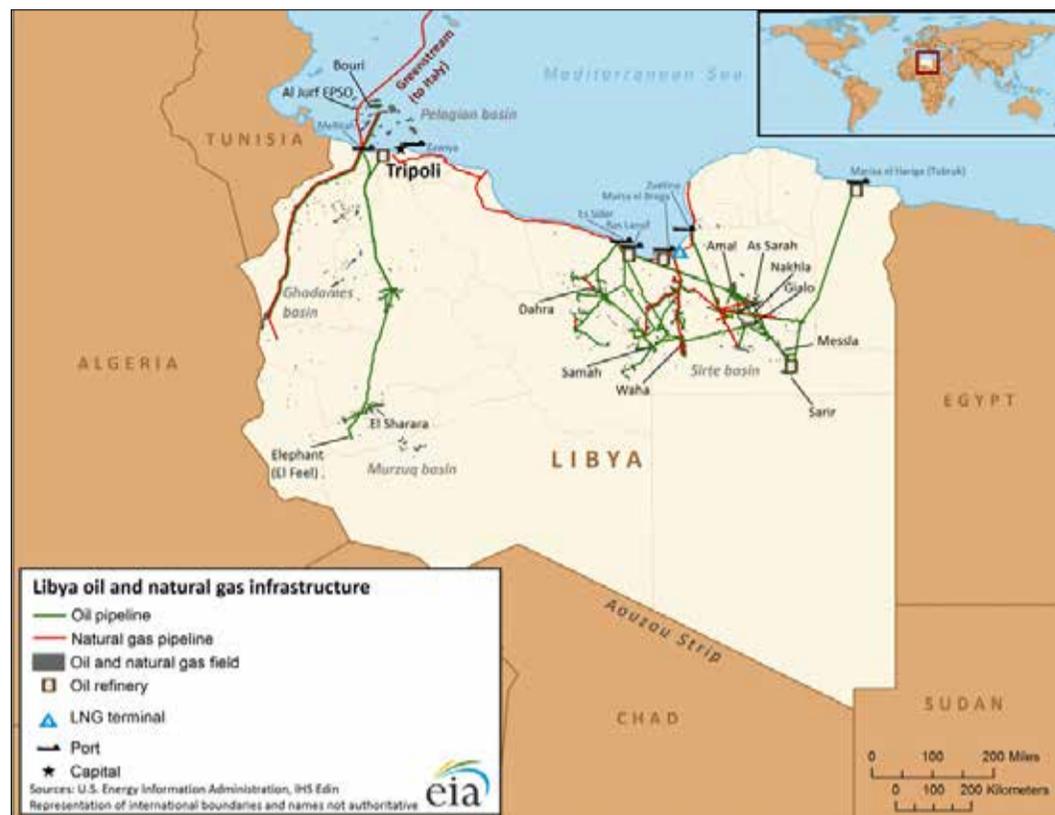
Russian military's main tasks are to maintain the combat readiness of the Armed Forces and to ensure the Russian Federation's defensive capability. Russia's military heritage will assist this process tremendously. Combat readiness includes updated strategic thought, new equipment revelations, and future-war projections. Defensive capability includes not just protecting Russia's territory, but also the security of the nation's national interests and conduct of geopolitics. Capturing the essence of these developments is the goal of this book. In the process a few templates for understanding Russian military thought and actions are offered for further consideration and use.

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Libya Conflict: Oil as the Latest Weapon



Libya Infrastructure Map.

Source: <http://www.eia.gov> via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Libya_infrastructure_map.png, Public domain

OE Watch Commentary: Nine years after an uprising that eventually toppled Muammar Gaddafi after 42 years in power, Libya remains deeply divided between two rival administrations in the west and east of the country. In the west, the UN-supported Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Fayeze al-Sarraj and based in Tripoli, controls the capital and some of western Libya. However, the Parliament, located in Tobruk in the east of the country, is independent of the GNA and works closely with military commander Khalifa Haftar, who controls the Libyan National Army (LNA). The LNA is headquartered in the city of Benghazi and controls much of eastern and southern Libya, and its forces include Libyan army units, local militias and tribesmen. As the first accompanying passages notes, the dynamic of the conflict is also shaped by the support of global players to the rival sides: “the participation of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the side of Haftar... and support from Turkey and Qatar for al-Sarraj’s GNA.” Since April 2019, the GNA has been facing an offensive by the LNA to take the capital. As the accompanying passages discuss, oil is the newest weapon in this conflict.

While Commander Haftar and his Libya National Army (LNA) control the territories that house Libya’s oil fields and refineries, the income from this oil goes into the coffers of the Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli. To protest this, Haftar’s forces recently halted oil exports and shut down all oil terminals, causing the National Oil Corporation (NOC) to declare force majeure. As the second accompanying passage notes, the LNA “is tasked with securing oil facilities. Yet all of the revenues generated from oil production go to the Tripoli-based and UN-recognized NOC.” Haftar claims that the GNA is using this money to obtain mercenaries to fight against its forces. The passage quotes a tribal leader affiliated with the LNA as saying that the closure of oil parts are “designed to dry up the sources of terrorism financing with oil revenues, in reference to preventing the GNA from spending oil revenues on fighters coming from abroad.” The passage explains that the LNA demands a new, “fair and transparent distribution of oil revenues,” in light of accusations that the GNA is “bringing in mercenaries to fight alongside its forces...” As the passage highlights, the LNA’s position is that “oil ports will only open after the GNA is brought down, oil revenues are fairly distributed and a caretaker government is formed.” The passage also points out that the GNA head Fayeze al-Sarraj has refused this demand.

As the passage notes, for its part, “the Tripoli-based NOC indicated in a statement on 25 January, that the closure of oil ports and suspension of oil operations dropped oil production to 320,000 barrels per day, down from 1.2 million barrels per day — a fall of 75%.” According to the third passage from the *Libya Observer*, as of 12 February, the NOC estimated the losses at over \$1.3 billion. In light of this, the NOC apparently issued a statement calling for the LNA to “end the ‘irresponsible and illegal’ closings and to allow it to resume production operations immediately...” (Also see: “Germany’s Wintershall and Libya to Conduct Joint Oil Exploration,” *OE Watch*, February 2020 and “Russia’s Increasing Military Presence in Libya,” *OE Watch*, December 2019) **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Libya’s pro-LNA tribal leaders and notables affirmed... that oil ports will only open after the GNA is brought down, oil revenues are fairly distributed and a caretaker government is formed.”

Source: Ruslan Mamedov, “Russia’s ‘Wait-and-See’ Policies and the Libyan Settlement,” *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 20 December 2019. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/russias-wait-and-see-policies-and-libyan-settlement-24692>

For a long time at the regional level, the participation of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the side of Haftar, as well as support from Turkey and Qatar for al-Sarraj’s GNA, explained the entire dynamic of the conflict.



Continued: Libya Conflict: Oil as the Latest Weapon



Khalifa Haftar.

Source: France24 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khalifa_haftar_libya.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0



Fayez al-Sarraj.

Source: Brigitte N. Brantley via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fayez_al-Sarraj_in_Washington_-_2017_\(3875187521\)_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fayez_al-Sarraj_in_Washington_-_2017_(3875187521)_cropped.jpg), CC BY 2.0

Source: George Mikhail, “Libyan divide deepens as eastern forces shut down oil ports,” *Al Monitor*, 2 February 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/01/libyans-resort-to-oil-to-demand-new-distribution-revenues.html>

The Tripoli-based National Oil Corporation (NOC) declared Jan. 18 force majeure due to the closure of oil ports in eastern Libya, which the Libyan National Army (LNA) controls.

The NOC accused the LNA, led by Field Marshal Khalifa Hifter, and affiliated Petroleum Facilities Guards of giving orders to halt oil exports from Libya’s oil ports of Hariga, Brega, Ras Lanuf, Zueitina and Es Sider in the eastern part of the country.

The force majeure event exempts the NOC from liability in case it fails to fulfill its oil delivery obligations under the contracts.

In response to the US Embassy’s call for work resumption, the NOC replied Jan. 21 that oil operations would only resume when the closed ports in eastern Libya reopen.

...

Speaking to Agence France-Presse, leader of the Zouaya tribe Mayor Senussi Haliq az-Zawi announced Jan. 17 the closure of oil ports, adding “it is designed to dry up the sources of terrorism financing with oil revenues,” in reference to preventing the Government of National Accord (GNA) from spending oil revenues on fighters coming from abroad.

The LNA, represented by the Petroleum Facilities Guard, is tasked with securing oil facilities. Yet all of the revenues generated from oil production go to the Tripoli-based and UN-recognized NOC.

Libya’s oil industry is burdened with an institutional divide. While the Benghazi-based NOC is affiliated with the interim Libyan government, the Tripoli-based NOC is recognized at the international level as an official institution authorized to conclude international oil contracts.

...

While the LNA’s demand consists of a new distribution of oil revenues, GNA head Fayez al-Sarraj rebuffed Hifter’s demand that the reopening of the closed oil ports in eastern Libya be associated with a redistribution of oil revenues.

Libya’s pro-LNA tribal leaders and notables affirmed at their Jan. 24 meeting that oil ports will only open after the GNA is brought down, oil revenues are fairly distributed and a caretaker government is formed.

The Tripoli-based NOC indicated in a statement Jan. 25 that the closure of oil ports and suspension of oil operations dropped oil production to 320,000 barrels per day, down from 1.2 million barrels per day — a fall of 75%.

Youssef al-Aqouri, head of the parliamentary committee following up on the NOC performance, said the closure of some of the ports in eastern Libya is part of a popular movement to demand a fair and transparent distribution of oil revenues. This is added to the demand that the GNA be held accountable for its spending, particularly since it was accused of bringing in mercenaries to fight alongside its forces in cooperation with Turkey, he added.

Source: Sara Alharathy, “NOC: Oil shutdown losses exceed \$1.3 billion,” *Libya Observer*, 12 February 2020. <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/noc-oil-shutdown-losses-exceed-13-billion>

NOC: Oil shutdown losses exceed \$1.3 billion

After 22 days of closing oil facilities, the NOC estimates the losses to over one billion and 300 million dollars.... The NOC indicated in a statement Tuesday that the closure of the Zawiya refinery would create problems related to the distribution and importing of fuel.

“The public treasury will bare additional expenditures for importing more quantities of fuel, in order to compensate for the refinery’s production,” the NOC explained. The NOC renewed its calls to end the “irresponsible and illegal” closings and to allow it to resume production operations immediately, according to the statement.



Egypt Proposes Joint African Military Counterterrorism Force



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Source: Kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abdel_Fattah_el-Sisi.PNG, CC BY 3.0

OE Watch Commentary: On 9 February, during the African Union (AU) summit in Ethiopia, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi proposed to hold an African summit to discuss establishing a joint African military counterterrorism force. The proposal for a military force from within the continent is noteworthy, specifically in light of the recent developments in neighboring Libya, where a local conflict has become internationalized with an increasing number of foreign powers intervening. The accompanying articles from regional sources discuss this idea.

As the first article from the UAE-based *The National* notes, the proposed African summit “to discuss a pan-African counterterrorism force” was Egypt’s latest effort to create an international coalition to fight extremists. The passage highlights some of the possible reasons behind this initiative, noting that “a pan-African force could move against such groups based in Libya, which Egypt blames for cross-border raids on security forces and its Coptic Christian minority in recent years.” In addition, it could help fight against militants in the sub-Saharan region who have been conducting increasing attacks. The passage also notes that Egypt has been dealing with “a years-long insurgency by militants concentrated in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.”

The second article discusses several other reasons. The passage notes that Sisi’s pitch comes at a time when Egypt is seeking to boost its military presence on the African continent. In fact, it points out that the Egyptian proposal “coincided with Cairo hosting the chiefs of staff meeting of the armies of the five Sahel countries — Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso” on 9 February. The article quotes a professor who claims that the proposal was welcomed by African countries in light of “Africa’s need of a military force from within the continent to confront terrorist threats,” and that they were

leaning on Egypt to implement it. A member of the African Affairs Committee points out that “African countries need a military force that does not seek to achieve personal interests and goals within their territories — as is happening in Libya, in which a number of foreign powers intervened under the pretext of fighting terrorism.”

Currently, the proposal has been referred to the African Peace and Security Council and the military and defense committees to discuss the matter further. However, it is unclear how the force would operate and where its funding would come from. Furthermore, the idea has already faced some pushback. As the final passage from *Morocco World News* reports, Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita shot down Sisi’s proposal and emphasized that what was needed was a “common African vision, in which each country contributes, yet with military independence.” (Also see: “Libya Conflict: Oil as the New Weapon,” in this issue of *OE Watch*). **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“African countries need a military force that does not seek to achieve personal interests and goals within their territories — as is happening in Libya, in which a number of foreign powers intervened under the pretext of fighting terrorism.”



Continued: Egypt Proposes Joint African Military Counterterrorism Force

Source: “Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi calls for African anti-terrorism force,” *The National* (UAE), 10 February 2020. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/africa/egyptian-president-abdel-fattah-el-sisi-calls-for-african-anti-terrorism-force-1.977259>

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi has called for a summit to discuss a pan-African counterterrorism force, his latest bid to create an international coalition to fight extremists.

Mr El Sisi addressed leaders at the African Union gathering in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on Sunday, at which he also handed the rotating one-year presidency to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

“Egypt is ready to host this special African summit out of its sense of responsibility and its belief in the importance of such a force in establishing peace and security in Africa,” he said.

Mr El Sisi said the summit should lay down a “comprehensive vision” for counterterrorism and establishing peace and security across the continent.

A pan-African force could move against such groups based in Libya, which Egypt blames for cross-border raids on security forces and its Coptic Christian minority in recent years.

It could also help with the fight against militants in the sub-Sahara region who have staged increasingly frequent and deadly attacks.

Egypt is dealing with a years-long insurgency by militants concentrated in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula.

The insurgency has proved to be resilient, despite the superior firepower and size of the security forces, but the militants have been denied control of large amounts of territory.

Source: George Mikhail, “Why is Egypt seeking African military force?” *Al Monitor*, 18 February 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/02/egypt-sisi-african-union-military-force-terrorism-turkey.html>

During the African Union (AU) Summit in Ethiopia Feb. 9, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi put forward a proposal to hold an African summit aimed at establishing a joint African military force to combat terrorism.

Egypt’s ambassador to Ethiopia and its permanent representative to the AU, Osama Abdel Khalek... said in a TV interview Feb. 9, “A proposal to hold an African summit to discuss the establishment of an African military force was referred to the African Peace and Security Council and the military and defense committees to discuss the matter from all sides.”

Egypt has been recently seeking to boost its presence on the African continent through the military and security axes, and the Egyptian proposal to establish an African force to combat terrorism coincided with Cairo hosting Feb. 9 the chiefs of staff meeting of the armies of the five Sahel countries — Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso.

Tarek Fahmy, a professor of political science at Cairo University, told Al-Monitor, “The African countries welcomed the Egyptian proposal to form an African military force for several reasons, the most important of which is Africa’s need of a military force from within the continent to confront terrorist threats.”

He added, “The African countries are leaning toward Egypt to implement that proposal, given the Egyptian army’s strength and experience in confronting terrorism internally and externally through its participation in international peace-keeping forces, in addition to Cairo’s membership in the African Peace and Security Council. Consequently it has the ability to put forward the proposal and discuss it within the council.” ...

Representative of the parliamentary African Affairs Committee Majed Abu al-Khair told Al-Monitor, “African countries need a military force that does not seek to achieve personal interests and goals within their territories — as is happening in Libya, in which a number of foreign powers intervened under the pretext of fighting terrorism.”

Khair added, “Egypt is eligible to provide support and training in addition to sharing its experiences in confronting terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula with African countries suffering from these terrorist crises.”

Source: “Morocco Rejects Egypt’s ‘Unified African Military’ Proposal,” *Morocco World News*, 11 February 2020. <https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2020/02/293428/morocco-rejects-egypts-unified-african-military-proposal/>

Morocco has shot down Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi’s vision of a unified African military force.

Morocco responded to the proposal yesterday, with Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Bourita arguing that cooperation among African forces in the fight against terrorism is preferable to a continental merger.

Bourita, citing Morocco’s experience in more than 15 UN peacekeeping operations, stressed that it is better to create a “common African vision, in which each country contributes, yet retain military independence.”



Speculation on Egyptian Cross-Border Military Deployment

OE Watch Commentary: Critics of the Egyptian military call it a paper tiger, a bloated bureaucracy spending extravagantly on modern weaponry for political rather than military gain. They point to the seemingly never-ending insurgency in the Sinai as a prime example of the military's shortcomings. Supporters of the Egyptian government see things differently, and the start of 2020 witnessed a surge of nationalist pride and fervor in the Egyptian press, following large-scale military displays ("Qader 2020") and the opening of "the largest military base on the Red Sea" in Berenice (Baranis), just over 150 miles from the Saudi port of Yanbu across the Red Sea. The area has served as a port since at least the Hellenistic period and includes a promontory jutting east toward the Saudi coast, called Ras Banas (Cape Banas); it also has an airport that has been used by the Egyptian Air Force since the presidency of Abdel Nasser in the 1960s.

The first excerpted passage argues that the Berenice base signals a shift in Egypt's strategic priorities, away from Israel and toward viewing Islamist movements and their backers, most notably Turkey, as the key strategic threat. The author argues that the new base will in part serve to make it more difficult to implement the agreement by which Sudan was to lease a Red Sea island to Turkey. An infamous Saudi Arabian insider, who tweets critically from inside the Saudi royal family under the handle @mujtahidd, claims that the Berenice base was in fact planned by UAE leader Mohammed bin Zayed and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Sisi years ago, primarily to base a rapid deployment force that can be mobilized a short distance across the Red Sea to secure Mecca and Medina, in case "there is a failure in Saudi Arabia." Whatever the case may be, Saudi and Emirati involvement in the base was highlighted by the presence of high-level delegations at the inauguration ceremony.

The Berenice base opened shortly after the surprise deployment of Turkish military assets to back the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) in Libya. Turkish actions raised questions on whether Egypt might deploy forces of its own to eastern Libya. In Arabic-language media, a slew of politicians, analysts, anonymous sources and armchair strategists discussed scenarios by which the Egyptian military would respond to Turkish deployments, only in support of the GNA's adversary, the Khalifa Haftar-led Libyan National Army (LNA). Some reports claimed that the UAE sought to entice Egyptian military deployment to Libya "with a huge economic package, in addition to bearing all the costs of the battle there, while providing various other forms of support." As the final accompanying passage notes, though, the Egyptian military establishment "has from the start been opposed to the idea of military participation in the crisis and sought to maintain ties with all parties" in Libya. In a move that has "brought great relief within the military establishment," President Sisi recently reappointed Mahmoud Hegazy, former Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces, to head the Libya file. Still, as the article suggests, there is some degree of disagreement within the Egyptian military about how to proceed in Libya, and continued Emirati encouragement for the Egyptian military to intervene directly may exacerbate these disagreements. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Red Sea Topographical Map.

Source: Eric Gaba via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Red_Sea_topographic_map-en.svg, CC BY-SA

“... There are significant tensions within Egyptian institutions concerned with Libya ...”



Continued: Speculation on Egyptian Cross-Border Military Deployment

Source: ما حقيقة دور قاعدة برنيس العسكرية التي افتتحها السيسي؟ "What is the True Role of the Berenice Military Base Opened by Sisi?" *Arabi21*, 16 January 2019. <https://tinyurl.com/wnf4mzs>

Mahmoud Gamal, a researcher on military affairs at the Egyptian Institute for Political and Strategic Studies, confirmed that the military base is not new as the regime claims, saying: "It is a military base that has merely been developed. It has been around for years, but since mid-2018 Sisi has worked to develop it, like the Mohammed Naguib military base, which Sisi opened in the west of the country as the largest military base in the Middle East, but which was also there before. The Egyptian regime, led by Sisi, is trying to create the appearance of military success by making the people think it is building new military bases. This is not true, what is happening is merely the development of existing rather than the construction of new bases." He pointed out that "the location of those military bases, in the south and west of the country, reveal a transformation of Egyptian military doctrine in recent years, no longer considering Israel the historical enemy. Since 2013, the enemy has become political Islam, so we find it developing military bases, one towards Libya in the west and the other toward Sudan in the south, which was at the time was linked to the Bashir regime before its downfall."

Source: @Mujtahidd, Twitter, 20 January 2020. <https://twitter.com/mujtahidd/status/1219170599597236224>

The newly opened Egyptian Berenice base on the Red Sea has been ready for years, as part of a conspiracy between Sisi and bin Zayed. The real goal is Sisi's control of the two holy mosques, if there is a failure in Saudi Arabia. It hosts a rapid intervention force and a plan is in place for air and sea landing in Jeddah and Yanbu on the way to Mecca and Medina.

The plan was drawn up since Sisi's arrival to power in coordination with Israel and bin Zayed. After the Turks landed on Sawakin Island in Sudan, Emirati-Israeli support doubled. Finally, bin Salman foolishly joined after bin Zayed convinced him to arm the region against Turkish presence and ally with Israel.

Source: فشل إماراتي بإقناع السيسي بتدخل عسكري مباشر في ليبيا "Emirati Failure to Convince Sisi to Intervene Militarily in Libya," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 28 January 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/rux3q5j>

According to the sources, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh linked the Egyptian administration's approval of direct intervention in Libya with a huge economic package, in addition to bearing all the costs of the battle there, while providing various other forms of support. This was clearly rejected by the Egyptians, who stressed that they have provided all forms of logistical and military support for Haftar, across its borders, without directly intervening. The sources indicated that in January, official institutions in Abu Dhabi hosted a number of writers, thinkers and public figures who are influential in Egyptian decision-making, where they met with researchers and Emirati officials at various research centers, one of them affiliated with the UAE Ministry of Defense. Their discussions focused on the pressing need for a decisive end to the Libyan crisis and how this could only be achieved through the Egyptian army, which is the main stakeholder considering Libya is a neighboring country that directly affects Egyptian national security and interests.

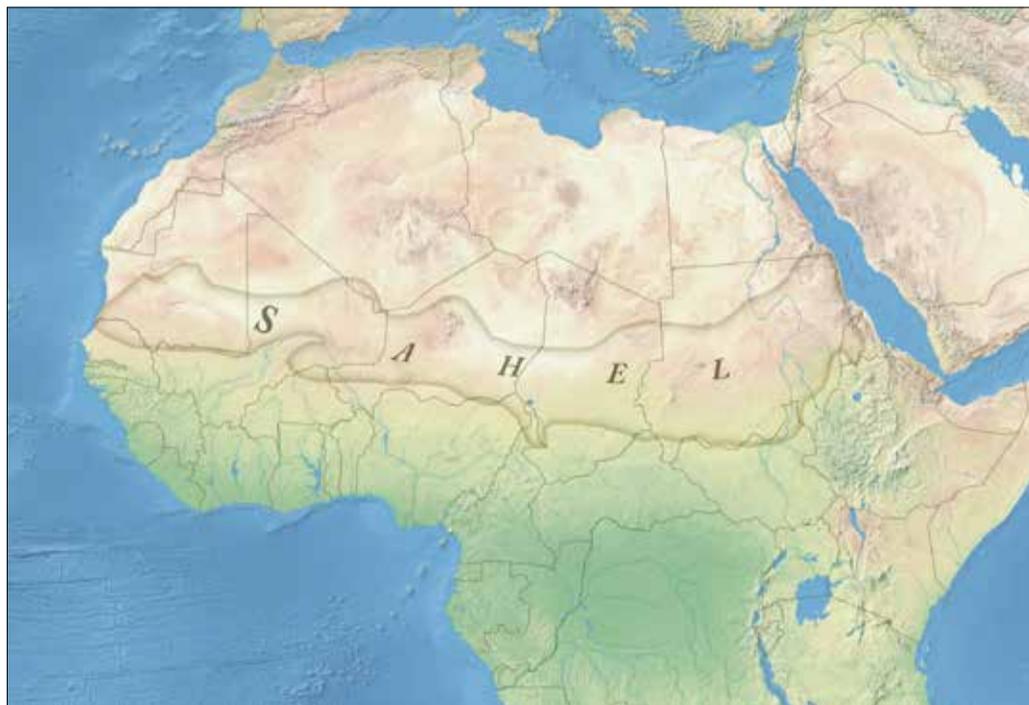
Source: السيسي يعيد حجازي إلى الملف الليبي لمواجهة غضب المؤسسة العسكرية "Sisi Bring Hegazy Back to the Libya File to Calm Anger within the Military," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 8 January 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/vvuv63a>

Private Egyptian sources revealed to al-Araby al-Jadid that Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi brought back former Egyptian Army Chief of Staff, General Mahmoud Hegazy, to supervise the Libyan file. He has been chairing the Egyptian committee focused on this before being removed in the wake of the Al-Wahat massacre in late 2017. According to sources that spoke to al-Araby al-Jadeed, there are significant tensions within Egyptian institutions concerned with Libya. There is a strong faction within the military that rejects any direct military intervention in Libya, and refuses to put the armed forces in a battle that may be a trap for them. The sources added that the media and digital campaign to encourage Egyptian-Turkish military confrontation on Libyan soil has angered Egyptian regime insiders focused on the Libyan file, saying that talking about war battles as a political endeavor or an internal political like the parliamentary elections, is unacceptable to Sisi's aides who manage the media...

The sources pointed out that the return of the experienced Hegazy to supervise the Libya file has brought great relief within the military establishment, which has from the start been opposed to the idea of military participation in the crisis and sought to maintain ties with all parties, including building strong relations with all tribes in the Libyan territories, hoping to position Egypt as an umbrella for all in a way that helps preserve Egyptian interests in Libya, which has about a million and a half Egyptian workers.



Mauritania and the UAE's Expanding Influence in the West African Sahel



Map of the Sahel.

Source: Munion via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Map_of_the_Sahel.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

OE Watch Commentary: In the past year, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has deepened its ties with the governments of Mali and Niger in the West African Sahel, through a combination of financial and security assistance. In July 2019, the UAE pledged one billion UAE Dirhams (approximately \$270 million USD) in financial assistance to the government of Mali; in January 2020 it began delivering dozens of armored vehicles to Malian security forces. In Niger, rumors surfaced last summer that the UAE was negotiating to establish a military base; the negotiations were purportedly put on hold in September 2019 and have not been reported on since. Emirati moves to expand its influence in the West African Sahel come amidst a recent uptick in jihadist attacks, particularly in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The bloodiest so far this year was a mid-January ISIS attack in Niger, near the Malian border, that killed at least 89 government soldiers.

More recently, the UAE has focused on deepening cooperation with the new Mauritanian President, Mohamed Ould Ghazouani, who took office in August 2019 and made an official visit to Abu Dhabi in January 2020. The UAE's ties to Mauritania have deeper roots than those with Niger and Mali, partly because Mauritania is the only one of those three countries where Arabic is a widely spoken, official government language (albeit a different dialect than in the UAE). Mauritania is known for producing quality Islamic scholars, and as the accompanying excerpt explains, many of them have ended up in Emirati mosques. Under Ghazouani's predecessor, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, Mauritania joined the UAE in the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen and the 2017 boycott of Qatar, though its contributions to both have been mostly symbolic. In 2016, Abu Dhabi financed the construction of a military education campus next to Nouakchott University, which was named the Mohamed bin Zayed Defense College in a nod to its benefactor. In January 2020, Abu Dhabi pledged \$2 billion for investment and development projects in Mauritania. Some media outlets reported that discussions had also taken place for the UAE to build a military base in north Mauritania. Although the rumor was officially denied by the Mauritanian government, it gained traction among media outlets opposed to Emirati foreign policy. According to the accompanying excerpt from *Arabi21*, expanded Emirati security cooperation with Niger, Mali and Mauritania has raised some eyebrows in Algeria, which shares a border with all three of those countries.

Emirati policy in the Sahel may mirror its approach to Yemen, which was characterized by pragmatism in its dealings with local forces and a focus on securing a foothold in strategic and resource-rich locations. The Sahel countries, sub-Saharan Africa's gateway to Europe, possess significant untapped mineral wealth. Over the past few years, the UAE (specifically Dubai) has emerged as one of the largest importers of unrefined African gold from several Western African countries, including Mali. Much of it is smuggled out of Africa without government approval, and jihadist groups appear to be increasingly involved in the artisanal gold industry. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“Mauritania denied hosting an Emirati military base on its soil...”



Continued: Mauritania and the UAE's Expanding Influence in the West African Sahel

Source: موريتانيا والإمارات.. علاقات تتجدد
 "Mauritania and the Emirates... Renewed Relations," *al-Khaleej*, 3 February 2020. <http://www.alkhaleej.ae/alkhaleej/page/2b1bcfaa-0bc6-487d-a9fa-ae1f371cc219>

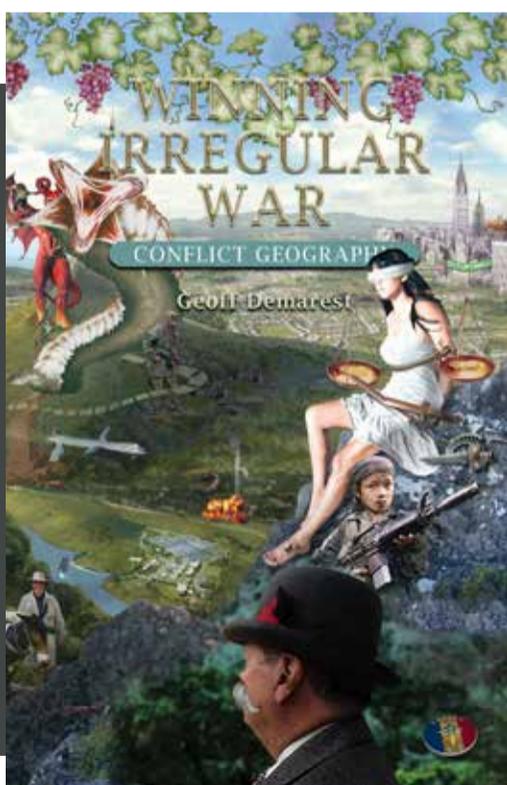
Sheikh Zayed, may God have mercy on him, paid close attention to the great Mauritanian excellence in the field of Islamic sciences and Arabic language. He was keen to embrace Mauritanian legal scholars and judges who enabled the Maliki school, which is the official doctrine of the Emirates. This followed cooperation in various fields, and there were Mauritanian police missions that continue to serve Emirati security, with some personnel still serving there today. Many Emirati mosques are led by Mauritanian imams.

Source: موريتانيا تنفي إنشاء الإمارات قاعدة عسكرية على أراضيها
 "Mauritania Denies Construction of Emirati Military Base on its Territory," *Anadolu Agency*, 30 January 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/wm6k7ad>

On Thursday [30 January], Mauritania denied hosting an Emirati military base on its soil. The official Mauritanian news agency quoted an unnamed source in the Ministry of Defense as denying what he called "rumors which were covered by the media a few days ago about the establishment of the UAE military base north of the country." The source added that "Mauritania has close fraternal relations with the UAE based on the principle of common interests and cooperation in all fields, including military cooperation."

Source: هل تسعى الإمارات للتواجد في شمال أفريقيا لدعم "حفتة"؟
 "Does the UAE Seek a Presence in North Africa to Support Haftar?" *Arabi21*, 1 February 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/sgcfbfd>

... the Algerian newspaper "Patriotique Algérie" recently revealed that "the Abu Dhabi government is seeking to establish a base and a military airport in northern Mauritania near the southern border of the state of Algeria." The newspaper described the Emirati move as an "attempt to encircle Algeria and a threat to its national security"... Ali Mounir Douala, an Algerian researcher in international relations, stressed that "Algeria constantly rejects the idea of foreign military bases not only on its territory, but also in neighboring countries such as Libya and Tunisia to the east, and Mali, Niger, and Mauritania to the south. Its recent position regarding Emirati activities, if it is indeed true, will come from these principles"... Moroccan researcher and academic, Nouredine Lachhab, pointed out that "the UAE is not able to put pressure on Algeria now, because the latter is still going through a transition, and the Algerian people are still mobilized. Even though the Algerian political system has a military background, the army is a national army and not one of mercenaries, like some armies in the Arab east, who live on American aid and dominate the economy...

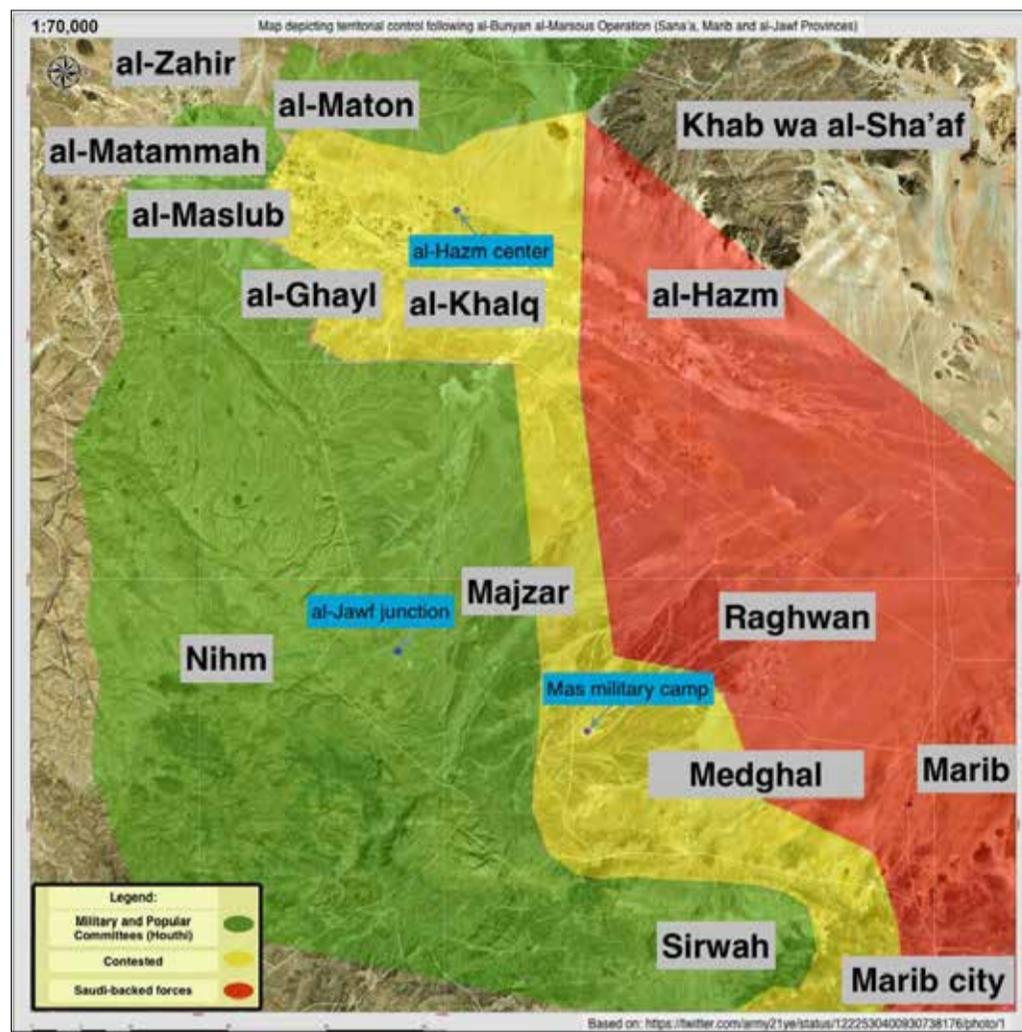


Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. As Geoff Demarest puts it: "I hope that some of the ideas in it will be contagious."

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



Shifting Dynamics in Yemen as Houthis Advance East of Sana'a



Advances in territorial control on the Nihm Front as presented by Houthi military spokesman.
Source: Yahya Saree Twitter account, <https://twitter.com/army21ye/status/1222530400930738176/photo/1>, Public Domain

OE Watch Commentary: When the Yemen war began in 2015, the stated goal of the Saudi-led coalition was to push the Houthis out of Sana'a. Despite near-absolute control of the skies, the Saudi-led coalition was unable to penetrate the capital. The front dividing Sana'a and Marib, the key centers of gravity for the Houthi-led military/Popular Committees and the Saudi-backed Yemeni National Army respectively, has been largely static since 2016. In mid-January 2020, a missile (attributed to but never publicly claimed by the Houthis) struck a forward base of the Saudi-backed forces, killing over 100 people. The Houthis then began moving eastward toward Marib, pushing their opponents out of Nihm District (Sana'a Province) and into Marib and neighboring al-Jawf, in what Saudi-backed forces described as a "tactical retreat." The Houthis claimed that their eastward advances were defensive, in response to attempted incursions toward Sana'a by their adversaries.

There are many ways of viewing movement along this long-static, key front, as noted in the accompanying passage from the southern Yemeni newspaper *Aden Ghad*. The Houthis themselves have emphasized the military element, with the report claiming that they were able to take full control of adversary communications networks "to the point that the National Army's 7th Military Zone and those fronts became completely isolated." In a lengthy press conference by their military spokesman Yahya Saree, they also emphasized how their air defense systems, "including the Fater-1" (unveiled last

August and resembling a 3M9 missile from a Soviet-era 2K12 [SA-6] pre-Houthi Yemeni military air defense system), forced coalition aircraft toward higher altitudes. The Houthis have recently been keen to emphasize their air defense capabilities.

Houthi military claims are often bombastic, and some in Yemen appear to believe that the "near-total absence of coalition aircraft" during the offensive, as one newspaper described, was due less to Houthi capabilities than to a Saudi "conspiracy." It does seem odd, as one of the accompanying passage highlights, that the Saudi-led coalition's media channels "completely ignored" this important battle. Some seem to believe that Saudi Arabia is recalibrating its support for the National Army, which is plagued by corruption, driven by parochial interests and largely controlled by the Islah Party. The Houthi offensive coincided with a visit to Riyadh by Tareq Saleh, nephew of former longtime Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh and leader of a reconstituted Yemeni Republican Guard, who has positioned himself to become Saudi Arabia's new key partner in Yemen, potentially at the expense of current leaders in Islah and the National Army.

The Houthi military spokesman concluded his press conference on the Houthi offensive by making direct appeals to the tribes and people of Marib Province. The Yemeni conflict will be won through alliances and tribal politics, and it appears that the relationships between the major players, at least in what was formerly North Yemen, may be up for a consequential realignment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"This time the battle occurred with the near-total absence of coalition aircraft."



Continued: Shifting Dynamics in Yemen as Houthis Advance East of Sana'a

Source: تقرير يبحث في أسباب وأبعاد تجدد المعارك في جبهة نهم شرق العاصمة صنعاء.. معارك جبهة نهم.. ما الذي يحاول أن يقوله كل طرف؟
 “Report on the Causes and Dimensions of Renewed Battles in the Nihm Front East of the Capital Sana’a,” *Aden Ghad*, 1 February 2020. <http://adengd.net/news/440574>

Each side to the conflict, the Houthis and the Yemeni army - which some describe as being under the control of Islah - claims military and field victories, without providing a clear picture of the clashes. With the exception of the Yemeni army's admission that it has withdrawn “tactically,” ambiguity still dominates the scene on the Nihm front...

According to military sources, one reason the Houthis made such progress was that they were able to penetrate the national army's wireless communications network and issue fake orders for them to withdraw. They also disrupted other communications networks and the Internet, to the point that the National Army's 7th Military Zone and those fronts became completely isolated...

The Houthi rebel group explained the motives that led them to escalate to this degree in Nihm, saying that things were going well between them and the Islah Party, calm on the fronts and a joint call for the return of Yemeni fighters from the border with the Saudi Arabia, and sensing the danger of the coalition's project west of Taiz as well as the danger of targeting Yemeni unity.

They were therefore surprised by the unexpected attack on the Nihm front, with coalition air cover, despite the military understanding of a truce between the two sides. This perspective sees an “Islah” army, so to speak, which is lethargic and has not shown any desire to fight on the mountains of the Nihm front, despite the great military support that “Islah” fighters receive there.

This prompted the Arab coalition to abandon the Islah army in Marib and Nihm and turn to a military leader whose stock has risen recently and who seems to be the alternative option for the alliance, namely Brigadier Tariq Saleh, commander of the “Republican Guard” forces and the nephew of late Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Analysts adopting this perspective believe that meetings between Brigadier General Tariq and Saudi leaders in Riyadh a few days ago was the beginning of this approach, adopted by the coalition to find an alternative to the government army, which is controlled by Islah...

Some analysts accuse the leaders of the Yemeni army, led by Minister of Defense, Major General Muhammad al-Maqdashi, of “failing” to prove their field military capabilities; his involvement in financial corruption is no longer hidden to anyone...

Source: آخر تفاصيل ملحمة تحرير نهم ومعارك الجوف ومأرب
 “Latest Details on the Epic Liberation of Nihm and the Battles of al-Jawf and Marib,” *Yemeni Press*, 31 January 2020. <https://www.yemenipress.net/archives/179416>

“The military escalation in Nihm represented an attempt to attack our forces and advance to important locations. The aggressor aircraft launched several raids on our forces, more than 250 in total.” He emphasized that Air Defense Forces participated in the Bunyan al-Marsous operation and that the Fater System 1 played an important role in confusing military aircraft and preventing them from launching attacks. The spokesman for the armed forces stated that after activating the air defense system, the aggressor aircraft resorted to launching high-altitude raids so as not to be exposed to the Fater missiles. He said, “The air defense system succeeded in carrying out more than 25 operations to prevent attacks and force their departure. The continued aggressor raids on the area of operations prompted our forces to respond decisively, and the directives of the leadership were clear in hitting Saudi military installations and bases”...

He addressed the sons of Marib, saying, “History, sons of Marib, will preserve your place in its pages, just as we today preserve the place of our ancestors in fighting occupiers and conquerors. Be on the side that corresponds with your history, and that responds to your brotherhood, your uniqueness and your traditions.”

Source: تراجع للقوات الحكومية في نهم والحوثيون يسيطرون على جبل المنارة
 “Government Forces Retreat in Nihm and the Houthis Control al-Manara Mountain,” *al-Masdar*, 22 January 2020. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/176716>

According to the source, this time the battle occurred with the near-total absence of coalition aircraft.

Source: ملامح المؤامرة على نهم
 “Features of the Conspiracy in Nihm,” *al-Mawqea Post*, 28 January 2020. <https://www.almaqea.net/special-pens/3914>

- Coalition aircraft were absent during the battle of Nihm and al-Jawf, except for symbolic strikes. They continued to fly while the Houthi forces marched in dozens of convoys. One military leader described this on TV as tantamount to the aircraft protecting the Houthi convoys.
- Coalition media channels completely ignored events in Nihm and al-Jawf, which were instead busy covering the news of Haftar in Libya...

The fall of Nihm is not a coincidence or a defeat in its true sense. It is the result of repeated wrong practices that the coalition adopted a long time ago and for reasons that we all know, the most important of which is to weaken the legitimate government, taking over its decision-making, marginalizing its leaders, and assassinating or dismissing every national leader who opposes and denounces this absurdity.



Turkey to Build Fifth-Generation Stealth Fighter Jet

OE Watch Commentary: In the past decade Turkey's defense industry has thrived with the support of the government, who set a goal to become fully self-sufficient in the defense industry by 2023. Turkey also strives to become a major arms producer and exporter in the region. It has successfully produced military hardware and taken on ambitious projects. One of those ambitious projects is to produce Turkey's first indigenous fighter, the TF-X which was unveiled during the Paris Air Show in the summer of 2019. Turkish officials have repeatedly stated that it will be ready to take off in the next five to six years and will replace F-16 fighter jets. While the first accompanying article from pro-government *Daily Sabah* forecasts that the TF-X will fly by 2029, the second article from *Ahval* argues that it is unlikely to be ready in the 2020s.

According to the first excerpted article, the project was initially launched by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI). However, it was later taken over by TR Engine, a new research and development center for turbo shaft engines, founded in 2017 as a joint venture of Turkish defense contractors BMC, TAI, and "SSTEK, a subsidiary of the SSB [Presidency of Defense Industries]" to "incorporate various engine-related projects under a single umbrella." The general manager of TR Engine Osman Dur stated that the efforts to develop an engine are ongoing as the firm continues to negotiate with international partners. As the article reports, "Turkey wants the TF-X project to be a multi-partnered program, like the one enjoyed by the F-35 fighter jet program." This partnership is not limited to companies which can deliver an engine. The project became a priority for Turkey especially after the delivery of F-35 fighter jets was halted.

The second article paints a pessimistic picture of Turkey's ambitious plan to build the TF-X fifth generation fighter jet to replace F-16s. The author points to several signs that lead him to conclude that Turkey is unlikely to deliver this project in the 2020s. One of these involves statements of high-level Turkish officials regarding the completion timeline: In 2013, Turkey's Defense Industry Undersecretary Murad Bayar said that Turkey plans to replace F-16s with locally produced fighter jets by 2023. In November 2019, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Turkey's indigenous TF-X fighter jet will be ready in the next five or six years. Next, the author provides insights from analysts indicating challenges that Turkey faces in producing the TF-X fighter jet in the near future. The absence of Turkey's domestic technological capabilities to produce an engine for the fighter jet (and Turkey's efforts to partner with foreign companies to produce one) is another indication. As a Turkish defense analyst quoted in the article says, it is "impossible to talk about a fifth-generation fighter [jet] without a fifth-generation engine." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



TF-X TAI Le Bourget 2019.

Source: JohnNewton8 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TF-X_TAI_Le_Bourget_2019.jpg, CC-BY-SA-4.0

“Turkey’s bid to build a fifth-generation stealth fighter is behind schedule and the warplanes might not even get off the ground by the end of the decade.”



Continued: Turkey to Build Fifth-Generation Stealth Fighter Jet

Source: “Homegrown fighter jet to fly with domestic engine by 2029” *Dailysabah.com*, 10 January 2020. <https://www.dailysabah.com/defense/2020/01/10/homegrown-fighter-jet-to-fly-with-domestic-engine-by-2029>

Turkey’s TF-X National Combat Aircraft (MMU) – a joint project by the Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) and Presidency of Defense Industries (SSB) – is preparing for a maiden flight using a domestic engine in 2029.

Work to develop the engine continues at full speed, in cooperation with related institutions, according to Osman Dur, general manager of TR Engine, a new research and development (R&D) center for turboshaft engines.

...

The MMU is a fifth-generation jet with similar features to Lockheed Martin’s F-35 Lightning II. The domestically-built aircraft is being developed to replace the Turkish Air Forces Command’s F-16 fighters, ahead of the gradual phasing out of the latter throughout the 2030s.

...

The project to develop domestic capabilities to manufacture national jet fighter engines was initially launched by TAI but was later taken on by TR Engine, a company established in 2017 by the SSB to incorporate various engine-related projects under a single umbrella. Around 55% of the company is owned by Turkish defense contractor BMC, while TAI has a 35% stake. SSTEK, a subsidiary of the SSB, also has a 10% share in TR Engine.

... the General Manager of the group Osman Dur said the firm had been negotiating with international engineering and design firms, along with Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM)

...

Turkey wants the TF-X project to be a multi-partnered program, like the one enjoyed by the F-35 fighter jet program. Other countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific, such as Malaysia, are being considered potential partners in the project by Ankara...

Source: Paul Iddon, “Turkey’s TF-X fighter unlikely to get off the ground in the 2020s” *Ahval News*, 16 January 2020. <https://ahvalnews.com/tf-x/turkeys-tf-x-fighter-unlikely-get-ground-2020s>

Turkey’s bid to build a fifth-generation stealth fighter is behind schedule and the warplanes might not even get off the ground by the end of the decade.

Turkey is aiming to become a major arms producer...

Turkey’s defense undersecretary said in 2013 it would replace its fleet of F-16s with newer domestically made fighters by 2023. In November, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Turkey’s own TF-X fifth generation fighter jet would be ready for flight in the next five or six years. But even that later target looks unlikely to be met.

“For Turkey to develop a truly capable fifth-generation fighter would be a huge challenge, especially in just five years,” said Michael Peck, a writer who covers defense issues for the National Interest magazine.

Justin Bronk, a research fellow who specializes in combat air power and technology at the London-based Royal United Services Institute think tank, said the idea that Turkey could develop and field a functional fifth-generation jet fighter within a decade “is fantasy”.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said in December that Turkey was seeking to revive a deal with Rolls-Royce to jointly produce engines for the aircraft. The British company said in March last year that it had scaled back its participation in the TF-X project as it was unwilling to share its intellectual property with Turkish vehicle manufacturer BMC...

Levent Özgül, a defense analyst for BlueMelange Consultancy, said it was impossible to talk about a fifth-generation fighter without a fifth-generation engine. Even Rolls-Royce, he said, lacks the technology to build one.

“Turkey will struggle more than any of these given its lack of domestic experience and intellectual property in building combat aircraft,” Bronk said.



Israeli Defense Forces to Increase Integration, Agility and Lethality

OE Watch Commentary: In early February, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) conducted an extensive four-day military exercise simulating a multi-front conflict. The exercise came a week after Israeli Defense Minister Bennett approved the ‘Momentum Plan,’ intended to increase the agility and lethality of the IDF. The accompanying excerpts from Israeli sources examine the military exercise as well as the new ‘Momentum Plan.’

As the first article from the *Times of Israel* points out, the drills included multiple parts of the IDF including, “Northern Command, Southern Command, Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy, Intelligence Directorate, and Telecommunications and the Cyber Defense Directorate.” While the IDF said that the exercise was “not tied to a new, specific threat,” it was likely tied to the risk of simultaneously facing multiple old threats: Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip and attacks from Syria. The drill was called a “headquarters exercise” as it focused on the administrative facets of war, like interdepartmental planning and communication.



Armored Corps Operate Near the Gaza Border.

Source: Israeli Defense Forces via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armored_Corps_Operate_Near_the_Gaza_Border_\(14753318081\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armored_Corps_Operate_Near_the_Gaza_Border_(14753318081).jpg), CC BY 2.0

The military exercise came a week after Israeli Defense Minister Bennett approved the Momentum Plan. As stated in the second article from *Jerusalem Post*, the Momentum Plan, created by IDF Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi, will provide the IDF with an additional two billion Israeli Shekels (\$584 million) over several years. Moreover, Bennett stated, “At the heart of the plan is the principle of defeating the enemy quickly and powerfully, in the face of many complex arenas.” In 2019 the IDF spent approximately 11.6 billion Shekels (~\$3 billion) on equipment such as “the new Sa’ar 6 missile ships, active protection systems for the Eitan armored personnel carrier” in addition to upgrading the cyber and digital capabilities of the army. As stated by the article from *I24 News*, the Momentum Plan will create a new multi-dimensional combat unit intended to destroy enemy forces on all fronts. The new unit will test new fighting techniques and tactics before the tactics are introduced to the rest of the IDF. The Israeli news site *Arutz Sheva* noted the unit will include paratroopers, reconnaissance units, combat engineering units, Israeli Air Force pilots, and special forces from the Duvdevan and Oketz units. Over the next decade, the IDF intends to further expand the integration of different branches of the military into single combined units in order to neutralize opposing militaries’ capabilities more rapidly. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fesen)**

“At the heart of the plan is the principle of defeating the enemy quickly and powerfully, in the face of many complex arenas.”

Source: Judah Ari Gross, “IDF launches drill simulating multi-front war,” *Times of Israel*, 2 February 2020. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-launches-drill-simulating-multi-front-war/>

The Israel Defense Forces on Sunday launched a large-scale exercise simulating a war on multiple fronts, with units throughout the military taking part, the army said.

The four-day drill will be held as a “headquarters exercise,” the IDF said, meaning it will focus on the more administrative aspects of such a war...

The purpose of the exercise is to test and improve the communication between different parts of the military, wartime operations, and interdepartmental planning, the IDF said.

...Northern Command, Southern Command, Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy, Intelligence Directorate, and Telecommunications and Cyber Defense Directorate will take part in the drill.

...The military said it was planned in advance and is therefore not tied to a new, specific threat.



Continued: Israeli Defense Forces to Increase Integration, Agility and Lethality

Source: Anna Ahronheim, “Defense Minister Bennett approves Momentum multi-year plan,” *Jerusalem Post*, 26 January 2020. <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Defense-Minister-Bennett-approves-IDFs-Momentum-multi-year-plan-615410>

Defense Minister Naftali Bennett approved on Sunday the IDF’s multi-year Momentum Plan, formulated by Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kochavi to make the military “more flexible, smarter and deadlier.”

“At the heart of the plan is the principle of defeating the enemy quickly and powerfully, in the face of many complex arenas.”

Meanwhile, the Defense Ministry said Sunday that NIS 11.6 billion has been purchased from Israeli companies over the past year to increase the IDF’s lethality.

Among the most prominent procurement projects...include weapon systems for the new Sa’ar 6 missile ships, active protection systems for the Eitan armored personnel carrier, ammunition for infantry units, as well as technological projects for the IDF’s “digital army”...

Source: “IDF unveils new, revolutionary multi-faceted combat unit,” *I24 News*, 01 January 2020. <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/diplomacy-defense/1577894720-idf-unveils-new-revolutionary-multi-faceted-combat-unit>

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have revealed a new version of a combat unit...to serve as a testing ground for new fighting techniques and tactics

This multi-dimensional unit is part of IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi’s multi-year Tenufa (Momentum) Plan

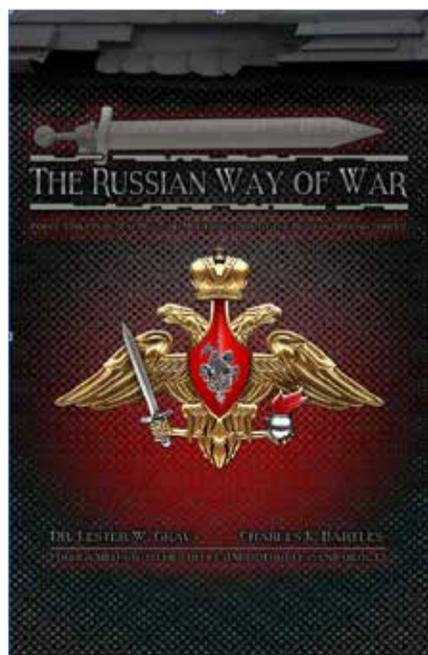
“Its members are meant to know how to operate in all fronts of the war...and the ability to locate, attack and destroy the enemy in all regions and on all levels,” the military said.

Source: Kobi Finkler, “IDF launches new combat unit,” *Arutz Sheva*, 1 January 2020. <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/273960>

Soldiers for the unit will be drawn from... paratroopers... reconnaissance units, the Armored Corps, army engineers, Air Force pilots, and Special Forces units include Duvdevan and Oketz.

...the new unit is based around the IDF’s new “operating concept for the next decade – to hit the enemy in a shorter period of time, and to neutralize its capabilities.”

Part of the new unit’s purpose is to help the army establish a framework for integrating various forces from various branches of the IDF “and to build them...into a unified force...”



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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Iran: Increasing Domestic Production of Rare Earth Elements

OE Watch Commentary: The 17 rare earth elements—15 lanthanides on the Periodic Table of Elements as well as scandium and yttrium—are increasingly important in industrial manufacturing as catalysts and in magnets, and play an important role in petroleum manufacturing. Despite their name, they are not all rare. Cerium, for example, is the 25th most common element in the earth's crust, more abundant than copper. Part of the reason for their 'rarity,' however, is that they are seldom found in concentrations of ore that make mining easy or profitable. China is the world's largest supplier of rare earth elements, but has sought to control the market first with export quotas (which the World Trade Organization deemed illegal in a 2014 ruling) and more recently via export licenses. (For a foundational understanding on rare earth and security issues, see: Cindy Hurst, "China's Rare Earth Element Industry: What Can the West Learn?" Foreign Military Studies Office, March 2010, <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/237820>.)



Ytterbium, used in production of higher-grade stainless steel and in nuclear medicine, is one of the rare earth elements Iran must now import.

Source: images-of-elements.com/ytterbium.php, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ce/Ytterbium-3.jpg>, CC BY 1.0

Many companies have turned elsewhere in order to diversify the market and reduce China's leverage over rare earths, but with mixed results. It is against this backdrop that the *Mehr News Agency*, an outlet owned by Iran's Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization, reports on Iranian attempts to produce its own exploitable concentrations of rare earth elements. In the excerpted article, Iranian Vice President Sorena Sattari, a scientist and mechanical engineer, suggests that Iran's motivation is largely financial: Iran spends over \$3.5 million importing rare earths annually. This amount may seem a pittance compared to an annual Iranian budget of over \$100 billion, so Sattari's motivation may be more strategic than economic. The Islamic Republic has deliberately built its own indigenous industries in order to avoid dependence on outside powers or vulnerability to sanctions. As the United States and international community tighten sanctions on Tehran, Iranian authorities might fear that future sanctions could hamper their ability to import rare earth elements, an event that could adversely impact Iran's refining and domestic electronics production. As such, Iranian authorities might see building plants to extract and concentrate rare earth elements to be a growing priority. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“We are pursuing investments to build an industrial scale rare earths extraction plant.”

Source: “Varadat-e Salaneh 200 Ton ‘Anasar-e Kamiyab-e Khaki (Annual Import of 200 Tons of Rare Earth Elements),” *Mehr News Agency*, 28 January 2020. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4838176>

Annual Import of Rare Earth Elements

Sorena Sattari [Iran's vice president for science and technology], on Tuesday morning [January 28] at the inauguration ceremony of a pilot plant to extract trace and strategic elements at the Iranian Mineral Processing Research Center in Savojbolagh County [in Alborz province in northern Iran], and told reporters, “Crude mining prevents processing and extraction of rare earth elements.” He noted that about 200 tons of these elements enter the country annually, and said, “The price of these per kilo is over \$20.”

The Vice President for Science and Technology said, “With the extraction and processing of trace and other strategic elements, production capacity increases and creates value, and it should be said for comparison, we sell one ton of limestone for \$20, and the price of one kilogram of these imported rare earth elements is \$20.”

Sattari expressed happiness that the technology is indigenous to the country, and said, “We are pursuing investments to build an industrial scale plant, and we hope that this will occur soon.”



Counterfeit Bank Notes Seized in Iran

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran has long suffered from high inflation, and faces 32 percent inflation in consumer goods in 2020. The Iranian currency has also devalued significantly. In 1979, the year of the Islamic Revolution, one US dollar bought 70 rials. Today, the exchange rate is over 42,000 rials to the dollar. Such devaluation has caused Iran to issue a series of ever-higher denomination bank notes. The Central Bank of Iran, for example, introduced a 200-rial bank note in 1982, and a 10,000-rial bank note a decade later. In 2007, a 50,000-rial bank note entered circulation.

The necessity of commerce required higher bills, but the Iranian government has been reluctant to acknowledge hyperinflation and print the denominations of bills necessary to ease transactions. For the past decade, the highest-circulation bill has only been a 100,000-rial note, worth less than \$2.50.

While many countries facing similar financial difficulties would turn to the US dollar or Euro, Iran's revolutionary ideology would forbid this, even if it were not for the impediments caused by US financial sanctions. In order to bypass the psychological impact of higher banknotes, the Central Bank has begun issuing "bank checks" in denominations of 500,000 rials and one million rials which circulate as currency.

In practice, these are easier to produce and, while they do have some safeguards against counterfeiting, they do not have the same level of security features as ordinary currency. In addition, higher denomination notes are often more tempting for counterfeiters to seek to copy. The excerpted article from an Iranian straight news portal reports on the seizure of 11 counterfeit 500,000 bank notes during a traffic stop in the Western Iranian city of Kermanshah.

While this episode is by itself minor and the contraband checks represent just over \$130, it likely signals a more widespread problem as no counterfeiter produces only 11 copies of a product. Nor does the news report suggest that the two individuals arrested for possession of counterfeit checks were the actual counterfeiters. That suggests that the Iranian security forces have not yet identified those responsible for the counterfeit checks.

As the Iranian economy continues to deteriorate—the United Nations has forecasted a 2.7 percent recession in Iran for 2020—counterfeit checks could further undercut local confidence in the economy. The lack of confidence could also extend to Iraq (to which Kermanshah is on the road) which still conducts heavy trade with Iran and remains a major Iranian trading partner. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Iran's 500,000 rial bank check, worth around \$12.00 in January 2020.

Source: Toranji.ir, <https://toranji.ir/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Iran-Cheque-50-2.jpg>

“Agents found 11 fake 500,000-rial bank checks.”

Source: “Kashaf bish az 5 Miliyon Rial Chek Pul Taghlibi dar Kermanshah (Discovery of more than 5 Million Rials in Counterfeit Checks in Kermanshah),” *Fartak News*, 29 January 2020. <https://cutt.ly/4rUU0Gs>

“Discovery of More than 5 Million Rials in Counterfeit Checks”

Colonel Hussein Barari stated, “While patrolling the western belt [road], a Kermanshah district rescue squad patrol stopped a Peugeot with two suspicious passengers after a short chase.” He continued, “On inspection of this vehicle, agents found 11 fake 500,000-rial bank checks, with the total counterfeit amount of 5.5 million rials [\$131]. Colonel Barari noted that, “In this regard, the two defendants were arrested and handed over to the judiciary for the necessary punishments.”



Solar Power Plant Opens in Tehran Province

OE Watch Commentary: On 29 January 2020, the Tehran provincial government opened two solar power plants in the Rey and Damavand counties, in theory, the largest Iranian solar energy plants to date. According to Deputy Energy Minister Mohammed Sadeqzadeh, the Hasanabad plant (located about 35 miles south of Tehran) can produce 12.7 megawatts of power, while the Damavand power plant (located about 50 miles to the east of Tehran) can, according to the excerpted press release, produce 10 megawatts, although most other Iranian press on the opening says the Damavand plant has only an 8.4 megawatt capacity. Despite the fanfare, these solar plants represent a drop in the bucket for Iranian energy generation needs. To put this in perspective, the Bushehr nuclear plant has a capacity of 915 megawatts and Iran operates more than 15 fossil fuel-operated power plants with capacities of 1,000 megawatts or more, five of which have capacities above 2,000 megawatts.



A new solar plant has opened in Hasanabad, a rural area in southern Tehran province.

Source: Tasnim News, <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1398/05/12/1398051213060670518023074.jpg>

The Tehran government's new emphasis on solar power likely has several motivations. Tehran is one of the most polluted cities on earth (see: "Tehran's Losing Battle with Air Pollution," *OE Watch*, June 2012). In January 2020, Tehran ordered its schools closed for a week due to severe air pollution. Iranian authorities hope that solar power plants will ultimately reduce air pollution caused by burning fossil fuels. In the press release, Sadeqzadeh also highlights savings in both gas and water, likely reflecting vulnerabilities in Iran's energy sector. Iran only refines about 60 percent of the gas it needs for domestic consumption. While much gas is utilized for transportation, Iran also needs gas and water to inject into declining oil fields to aid extraction. Therefore, Iran is dependent on imports of gasoline both to extract oil and produce electricity. Because US and international sanctions have eaten into Iran's hard currency reserves, Iranian officials may hope that an indigenous solar industry might also help it stem expenditure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The Hasanabad power plant is the first solar-powered plant in the province.”

Source: “Ifitah Nirugah Hasanabad Fashapuyeh” (Opening of the Fashapuyeh Hasanabad Power Plant),” Website of the Government of Tehran Province, 29 January 2020. tiny.cc/13ngjz

Opening of the Fashapuyeh Hasanabad Power Plant

According to the public affairs office of the Tehran provincial governor's office, Mohammed Sadeqzadeh spoke today at the inauguration ceremony of the Hasanabad Power Plant in Rey city via a video conference from the President's office, and he pointed to the capacity of the Hasanabad Plant, and stated, “This power plant has a total capacity of 12.7 megawatts, and the Damavand power plant has a capacity of 10 megawatts and is the largest solar plant in Tehran province, and is the 55th renewable power plant to be opened in this state.”

He said, “The construction of this power plant will result in 13 million cubic meters in gas savings and 9,000 cubic meters of water savings per year.” The Deputy Minister of Energy added, “The inauguration of the plant will also remove 29,000 tons of environmental pollutants, and a total of 127 billion tomans [\$30.2 million] has also been invested in them.” Sadeqzadeh continued, “The Hasanabad power plant is also the first solar-powered plant in the province that is opened on a megawatt scale, and the technology for these plants will be transferred to the country, and today we are self-sufficient in the construction of these plants, and there is also a plant for the production of solar panels and panels and other related equipment in the country.”



Shiny Metals for Shiny Arms: Russia and Mozambique's Trade Agreement



Presidents Mnangagwa and Putin during talks promoting bilateral trade between their two countries, 15 January 2019.

Source: Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59679>, CC BY 4.0

Chinese arms-manufacturer Norinco in exchange for mineral rights. The fact that business tycoon Kuda Tagwirei, who controls Zimbabwe's entire fuel industry, was in Russia when the recent deals were negotiated, adds to the suspicions.

Zimbabweans associated with organizations devoted to good governance note that there are times when trading minerals or mineral rights can be appropriate for a country, with funding for infrastructure such as railroads being an example. However, as these individuals note in the article, these weapons-for-minerals deals have only resulted in riches for the kleptocracy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Recent revelations that [the] government is mortgaging the country’s mineral wealth to Russian companies in exchange for arms and fuel are a damning indictment on the authorities’ penchant for murky and opaque deals in which strategic national resources are abused by the rich and the ruling elite at the expense of the citizenry.”

Source: Andrew Kunambura, “Mortgaging of minerals for arms a misplaced priority,” *Zimbabwe Independent*, 7 February 2020. <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2020/02/07/mortgaging-of-minerals-for-arms-a-misplaced-priority/>

Recent revelations that government is mortgaging the country’s mineral wealth to Russian companies in exchange for arms and fuel are a damning indictment on the authorities’ penchant for murky and opaque deals in which strategic national resources are abused by the rich and the ruling elite at the expense of the citizenry.

Public policy expert Tawanda Zinyama rightly notes: “If this is real, then I think the Russians cannot believe their luck. This is a huge bargain on their part.”

“Whilst government has a duty to ensure our military is well equipped for the purpose of national security, I think the biggest security threat we are facing now is a failing economy which is in urgent need of capital injection. Government must consult citizens and stakeholders on strategies for an economic turnaround and setting of priorities.”

The deal is seen as part of Zimbabwe’s efforts to revamp its antiquated military hardware, although government critics have said it is an attempt by President Emmerson Mnangagwa to consolidate power by strengthening the state’s military might, given that he has not hesitated to make full use of the troops even at the slightest threat.



Kenya Weighs Whether to Keep Forces in Somalia Against Al-Shabaab

OE Watch Commentary: Al-Shabaab's attack on the Mandu Bay Airfield in Kenya, which left an American servicemember and two American contractors dead during the first half of January has been widely reported. Less well known is that during the same timeframe, the Somali-based terrorist group launched four other attacks against Kenya. Indeed, as the accompanying article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* reports, over the last ten years, the main target of al-Shabaab attacks outside Somalia has been Kenya, resulting in over 600 dead and thousands injured. With al-Shabaab threatening more attacks as long as Kenyan forces remain in Somalia, the big question for Kenya now is whether it will withdraw those forces.

Kenyan forces first deployed to Somalia in October 2011. The goal was to create a buffer zone by pushing back al-Shabaab. Several months later, Kenya joined five other nations that had earlier formed the African Union Mission in Somalia, AMISOM. With AMISOM set to withdraw by 2021, Kenya faces a difficult choice: withdraw along with AMISOM or break ranks and stay?

Both scenarios have their positives and negatives. If Kenyan forces leave Somalia, al-Shabaab might stop launching attacks on Kenyan soil, though leaving also means the buffer zone between the nations could collapse. If they stay, Kenya would be able to engage al-Shabaab on Somali soil, perhaps lessening the group's threat to Kenya by maintaining the buffer zone. But remaining would also mean that al-Shabaab would continue to target Kenya. There are additional factors that complicate Kenya's difficult decision. Budgetary constraints make it difficult to maintain troops in Somalia, an option that also raises questions of legitimacy from an international law perspective. If they withdraw, there is no guarantee that al-Shabaab will stop targeting Kenya or recruiting and radicalizing new members on Kenyan soil.

Thus, Kenya faces a dilemma. The article, in mentioning possible soft power alternatives, provides some useful statistics on the topic: among the terrorist groups that existed between 1968 and 2006, only 7% of them ended their activities following military force. This is in contrast to 43% that did so following negotiations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“If the AU mission ends as planned, Kenya will be faced with two possible scenarios. Either it goes along with the AMISOM withdrawal strategy – which hopefully means al-Shabaab stops its attacks on Kenyan soil – or it breaks ranks with the AU and its member states and remains in Somalia unilaterally despite al-Shabaab threats to stage more attacks in 2020.”



Kenya Defense Force troops attached to AMISOM serving in Somalia. In the near future Kenya will have to decide whether its forces should leave Somalia when AMISOM does.
Source: AMISOM/Flickr/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amisom_KDF_Troops_In_Kismayo_Take_Rotation_010.jpg_\(15982704285\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Amisom_KDF_Troops_In_Kismayo_Take_Rotation_010.jpg_(15982704285).jpg), Public Domain

Source: Mohamed Daghar, Duncan E Omondo Gumba, and Akinola Olojo, “Somalia, terrorism, and Kenya’s security dilemma,” *Institute for Security Studies*, 22 January 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/somalia-terrorism-and-kenyas-security-dilemma>

Al-Shabaab has warned of more attacks in Kenya. In these statements one key message has remained consistent over the years: Kenya should remove its troops from Somalia if it ever wants peace with al-Shabaab. If it fails to do so, ‘its streets will continue to be filled with rivers of blood of its own people’, said an al-Shabaab statement following the high-profile Westgate Mall attack in 2013.

If the AU mission ends as planned, Kenya will be faced with two possible scenarios. Either it goes along with the AMISOM withdrawal strategy – which hopefully means al-Shabaab stops its attacks on Kenyan soil – or it breaks ranks with the AU and its member states and remains in Somalia unilaterally despite al-Shabaab threats to stage more attacks in 2020.

Whatever action Kenya opts for in the absence of a ‘formal agreement’ with al-Shabaab, which remains remote for now, there is neither a guarantee that terror attacks will cease nor an indication that the group will halt the recruitment of radicalised Kenyans. This is because the attacks as well as the constant need to fill membership ranks beyond Somalia have earned al-Shabaab visibility.



Burkina Faso: Fertile Soil for Homegrown Terrorists



Burkina Faso soldiers during a military exercise.

Source: Spc. Britany Slessman/AFRICOM/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flintlock_2017_small_unit_tactics_training_in_Burkina_Faso_170301-A-ZF167-075.jpg, Public Domain

of government in these locations. Additionally, many rural people have a negative view of the government, a view reinforced by human rights abuses committed by defense forces. As the passage notes, Ansar ul Islam used rhetoric “based on the fight against social inequality, injustices and poor governance. Its rhetoric – which targets security forces and the state – resonated with people in these areas.”

Thus, the absence of government in some areas enables terrorist organizations to take hold, whereas the presence of government – often corrupt and abusive – enables terrorist organizations to flourish in others. The article claims that, in order to counteract the growing threat of domestic terrorists, the state must find a way to change its relationship with its rural people. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The combination of poverty, a lack of public services, security forces’ inefficiency and neighboring countries’ instability has contributed to the growing radicalization of civil populations in Burkina Faso.”

Source: Mahamoudou Savadogo, “The changing face of Burkina Faso’s terrorist threat,” *The Conversation Africa*, 27 January 2020. <https://theconversation.com/the-changing-face-of-burkina-fasos-terrorist-threat-130267>

Unlike the approach taken by some jihadist movements in Mali, Ansar ul Islam didn’t try to take control of part of the country. Rather, it plunged the entire province into widespread violence by using rhetoric based on the fight against social inequality, injustices and poor governance. Its rhetoric – which targets security forces and the state – resonated with people in these areas.

“We don’t need the state any more. It’s the state that has radicalised all these young people. They have been chased from their land, starved, or killed. What’s happening now is the response to all these acts of violence committed by the state.”

The combination of poverty, a lack of public services, security forces’ inefficiency and neighboring countries’ instability has contributed to the growing radicalization of civil populations in Burkina Faso.



Burkina Faso: Sahelian Jihadists Conduct Massacre

OE Watch Commentary: On 25 January, militants attacked the village of Silgadji in Burkina Faso, massacring several dozen civilians. The excerpted French-language article details the tactics used by the militants based on an interview with one of the survivors. The survivor, who lost several family members in the massacre, stated that several days before the massacre, four militants warned villagers that men must wear pants above the ankle and let their beards grow and women must wear the veil. These demands reflected Sahelian jihadists' interpretation of Islam.

The villagers did not follow these demands, and days later, 100 militants returned to attack the village market, the most public location in the village where the jihadists' demands were supposed to be followed. The militants gathered the men and women and separated them into two groups and let the women go, but then began shooting the men to death, including those who tried to run away, and some women who also began running away. According to the article, the survivor recalled that Burkinabe security forces had also previously visited the village and claimed that the militants may have targeted the villagers because they suspected villagers were collaborating with the security forces.

The article also indicates that the security forces' inability to arrive to defend the village on time was a surprise to the villagers. At a time when villagers cannot depend on the security forces for protection and are facing massacres by jihadists, villagers in Burkina Faso will increasingly rely on themselves for self-defense. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Mosque Ouagadougou [Ouagadougou Mosque].

Source: Sputniktilt via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosquee_Ouagadougou.jpg, CC by 3.0

“In a previous visit, they had... ordered the men to... let the beard grow. To women, they demanded the wearing of the veil.”

Source: “Un rescapé du massacre de Silgadji témoigne (A Survivor of the Silgadji Massacre Testifies),” <http://lefaso.net>, 29 January 2020. <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article94628>

The village of Silgadji, in Soum province, was the victim of a terrorist attack on January 25, 2020. The location chosen by the attackers was the village market. In the days before the attack, alerts given by the villagers who felt things were coming on the fateful day. The witness of events, who lost several members of his family, between his mourning and anger, tells us about the painful events.

At around 3 p.m., in this village in the commune of Tongomayel, Soum province, Sahel region, four terrorists arrive perched on two motorcycles. They got their supplies of water and food before leaving. A few moments later, the visitors return, this time to tell the villagers that the instructions they had given were not followed. In a previous visit, they had indeed ordered the men to no longer wear pants that cover the entire foot and they should wear short pants and let the beard grow. To women, they demanded the wearing of the veil. They had warned that they would come back and those who did not comply would not have access to the market and would be retaliated against. According to a resident of the village, who told us the horror scenes, after those four terrorists came, nearly 100 terrorists swept through Silgadji.

When they brought them there, the residents were divided into two groups and seated. Then the attackers freed the women. After a few questions to the men, they told them openly that they will execute them because they did not obey their orders.



Burkina Faso to Arm and Train Civilians to Counter Terrorist Groups



Burkina Faso-Pos.

Source: German Wikipedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burkina_Faso-Pos.png CC by 3.0

OE Watch Commentary: Burkina Faso is the latest West African country to face serious security threats from terrorist groups. According to the excerpted French-language article from *RFI*, a French news and current affairs outlet, Burkina Faso is so overwhelmed by terrorist groups that its military is calling on civilians to volunteer to support its efforts. The article notes the latest incident that sparked the adoption of this new policy was a 20 January terrorist attack that killed 36 Burkinabe civilians.

The civilian volunteers will receive 14 days of military training on basic tactics, such as managing observation posts, conducting ambushes, and rules of discipline, including respecting human rights. The article indicates the purpose of the training is to enable the civilian vigilantes to be able to defend their own communities until the security forces can arrive and support them. The article points out the risk that the trainees could themselves become security risks, including joining the terrorist groups. Therefore, participants in the trainings will be required to undergo what Burkina Faso calls a “moral investigation” to determine their suitability for the trainings. Senior military officials also express concerns about possible unintended consequences of the training initiative, such as jihadists increasingly targeting civilians now that they are being armed to combat them.

In the past, civilian self-defense militias called “koglweogo” were implicated in rights abuses and racketeering, among other crimes, in Burkina Faso. Given this past record, there is concern that this may re-occur despite the vetting of participants. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The idea of involving the citizens in this national cause is a good thing, but it is the modalities and the implementation that worry us.”

Source: “L’armée burkinabè va former des civils volontaires pour défendre le pays (The Burkinabe army to train civilian volunteers to defend the country),” *RFI*, 22 January 2020. http://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200122-arm%C3%A9e-burkinab%C3%A8-va-former-civils-volontaires-d%C3%A9fendre-pays?ref=tw_i

It sounds like forming self-defense groups, but officially they will be volunteers for the defense of the homeland. These volunteers will receive initial military training for fourteen days. They will be trained by specialists on armament, basic tactics, including ambushes, on managing an observation post, civic and moral education, rules of discipline, and the principles of using weapons and respecting human rights. Their task will be to provide information and defend territory at the level of their place of residence in the event of an attack, while of course waiting for the defense and security forces to deploy there.

To prevent volunteering from contributing to terrorist networks, recruitment will be followed by a moral investigation and will be supervised by the military. And these volunteers will be responsible before the courts for reprehensible acts committed during their missions, according to these texts. “The idea of involving the citizens in this national cause is a good thing, but it is the modalities and the implementation that worry us,” one civil society member explained. “Does introducing a form of confusion between civilians and the military not risk exacerbating the violence of the jihadists against civilians?” asked a security expert.



Al-Qaeda Loyalists Defect to ISIS in the Sahel



[Jemal Oumar] Traders at the market in Bassiknou tell Magharebia that they encounter al-Qaeda preaching while trading in Mali.

Source: Magharebia via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bassikounou-2011.jpg>, CC BY 2.0

that clashes have begun occurring between Kufa and his deputy, who is planning to defect from Kufa to ISGS. Kufa previously needed this deputy to strengthen JNIM's presence in central Mali because the deputy is from that region. However, the deputy believed Kufa mismanaged relationships with local communities over pastoral land.

The article is a reminder that jihadist groups in the Sahel are not only battling regional militaries but also engaging in fratricidal conflicts. The regional militaries, however, are unlikely to benefit significantly from JNIM's own infighting or intra-jihadist conflicts, because defectors from Kufa will join ISGS and divert personnel and resources to ISGS. This will result in ISGS's becoming an even greater adversary for regional militaries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

OE Watch Commentary: In the Sahel region, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have affiliate groups. Al-Qaeda's affiliate is called Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and ISIS's affiliate is called Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS). Although JNIM was previously stronger than ISGS, now ISGS is thought to be stronger than JNIM. The excerpted French-language article from the African think-tank *Timbuktu Institute* claims that ISGS will continue to strengthen and JNIM will weaken.

The article claims that fighters are planning to defect from JNIM subleader Amadou Kufa to ISGS because Kufa has an alienating leadership style and is considered to be too subservient to JNIM's overall leader, Iyad ag Ghaly. Whereas Kufa's fighters are mostly Fulani, Iyad ag Ghaly is a Tuareg. At the same time, the article notes that ISGS has recently launched several major attacks and released high quality propaganda videos with attack footage. These videos are apparently convincing Kufa's fighters that ISGS is on the upsurge.

As a result of the competition between JNIM and ISGS, the article reports that clashes have begun occurring between Kufa and his deputy, who is planning to defect from Kufa to ISGS. Kufa previously needed this deputy to strengthen JNIM's presence in central Mali because the deputy is from that region. However, the deputy believed Kufa mismanaged relationships with local communities over pastoral land.

“An important fact today complicating the map of jihadism in the Sahel and the whole region will be intense rivalry between terrorist groups despite the impressions of convergence and coordination.”

Source: “Remous au Macina: ‘Des lieutenants d’Amadou Khouffa sur le point de rejoindre l’Etat islamique au Grand Sahara’ (Twist in Macina: ‘Lieutenants of Amadou Kufa about to Join Islamic State in the Greater Sahara’),” *Timbuktu-institute.org*, 20 January 2020. <https://timbuktu-institute.org/index.php/toutes-l-actualites/item/305-remous-au-macina-des-lieutenants-d-amadou-khouffa-sur-le-point-de-rejoindre-l-etat-islamique-au-grand-sahara-timbuktu-institute>

The rivalries between Al-Qaida and the Islamic State will take a new turn in the coming days and will restructure the balance of power in Mali and more particularly in central Mali. Indeed, elements of the Macina Liberation Front are increasingly accusing Amadou Kufa of a certain propensity to “alienate” others and be the “servant” of Iyad Ag Ghali. Unexpected circumstances are pushing [his followers] into the arms of Aboul Walid Al-Sahraoui, the head of Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS), who led the attacks in Inatés, Niger and whose video was widely disseminated. But, an important fact today complicating the map of jihadism in the Sahel and the whole region will be intense rivalry between terrorist groups despite the impressions of convergence and coordination.

Control of Mali and the “three-border area” represents a crucial issue for the different groups. Sources in the Macina area in central Mali report to Timbuktu Institute that violent clashes took place on January 10 in Liptako between elements of Amadou Kufa involving a certain Mamadou Mobbo. It should be remembered that Mamadou Mobbo was one of those who helped legitimize Amadou Kufa's fight in the beginning in Macina, where he did not actually come from. Kufa, who is instead from Tenenkou in Gourma, needed Mamadou Mobbo to gain acceptance in central Mali.



Boko Haram Threatens to Cut Borno State from Nigeria

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article from a Nigerian source discusses how Boko Haram's current strategy risks cutting off northeastern Nigeria's Borno State from the rest of the country. For several weeks in January, the group attacked the crucial Kano-Maiduguri highway connecting northern Nigeria's largest city, Kano, with Borno's capital, Maiduguri. The article points out that this is similar to the group's strategy during the height of its territorial conquests in 2013-2014 in Borno, when it sought to render that highway and other roads inaccessible by bombing major bridges and occupying roadside villages.

In terms of tactics, the article observes that Boko Haram often dresses in military attire, which makes drivers mistakenly believe the militants are the army. This enables the group to set up fake checkpoints and capture or kill passengers and disrupt traffic. In particular, the article states that Boko Haram has recently begun to target aid workers and Christians on the highways and released their execution videos through media channels affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In a worst case scenario, the article argues that the Kano-Maiduguri highway would have to be closed down, which would severely affect trade in northern Nigeria. This is why, apparently, Borno governor Babagana Zulum has urged the military to take all measures to secure that highway. This means that passengers are increasingly forced to travel with military convoys, including passengers who are especially targeted by Boko Haram, such as Christian pilgrims. The article ends on a pessimistic note by reminding that Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari had promised to end the insurgency when he came into office in 2015- a promise that remains unkept. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Civilian Joint Force members patrol in Maiduguri.

Source: C. Oduah (VOA) via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Civilian_Joint_Force_members_patrol_in_Maiduguri.jpg, Public Domain

“It seems that if the government fails to address the problem, the road may soon be in the hands of the insurgents.”

Source: “Increasing Boko Haram Attacks on Highways Threaten to Cut Borno Off from Nigeria,” *premiumtimesng.com*, 23 January 2020. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/373896-special-report-increasing-boko-haram-attacks-on-highways-threaten-to-cut-borno-off-from-nigeria.html>

Fear is now mounting that Borno State may soon be totally cut off from the rest of Nigeria as Boko Haram insurgents in the past few weeks have launched daily attacks on the Kano-Maiduguri highway, the only remaining safe route to the state.

Today, to travel from Maiduguri to Biu, about 180 kilometres in the southern part of the state, commuters now go through Yobe, Bauchi and Gombe states, covering a distance of about 560km. It is even worse for communities in northern Borno. In December 2018, the military reopened most of the roads after “reclaiming” them from Boko Haram. But it still required heavily armed soldiers to escort long convoys of vehicles to ply the routes. Despite that, travellers and their military escorts suffered a series of fatal ambushes by Boko Haram gunmen. Today, the “reopened roads” have been abandoned as it has become suicidal to ply them.

Though the Theatre Commander said the highway is safe for motorists, it was the first time in a long time that pilgrims were given military escort from Damaturu to Maiduguri. Governor Zulum two weeks ago begged the Federal government to ensure that the military does not shut down the Maiduguri-Kano highway. But it seems that if the government fails to address the problem, the road may soon be in the hands of the insurgents. President Buhari had in May 2015 promised to end Boko Haram and improve the security situation in the Northeast. It is now clear from the current state of insecurity that the promise is far from fulfilled.



Mali Army Returns to Kidal after Six Year Absence

OE Watch Commentary: Malian armed forces recently returned to the northern city of Kidal six years after effectively being driven out of the region. The announcement was one of the highlights of the Algiers Peace Accord Follow-up Committee held in Bamako in January 2020. According to the committee, “the return of the reconstituted army to Kidal will be a reality beginning January 24, 2020.” Although it took another few weeks to fulfill the mandate, the units that entered Kidal in mid-February, known as “reconstituted” include former rebels integrated into the Malian army in accordance with the 2015 Algiers peace agreement.

The return of the army to Kidal is intended as a prelude to the deployment of other reconstituted units to Ménaka, Gao and Timbuktu. There is a lot at stake. According to *Africa News*, Kidal, 1,500 km northeast of Bamako, is the Tuareg cultural stronghold and the historical cradle of the most influential Tuareg clans. It is also a region that has been marginalized since Malian independence in 1960, and where the various Tuareg rebellions were born.

Since the federal government suffered a significant military defeat in May 2014, Kidal has been controlled by the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), a Tuareg-dominated alliance of former rebel armed groups. The CMA is a signatory to the 2015 Algiers Agreement with an alliance of pro-government armed groups, called the Platform.

The return of the reconstituted Malian army made up of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) and ex-combatants is a necessary positive step for several reasons. First, according to local media outlets, Malian public opinion towards the government and the armed forces has become more and more negative in recent months as the Malian army suffered a number of battlefield setbacks. The inability of the armed forces to beat insurgents, secure territory and provide security to the population has been a major stumbling block in the government’s efforts to maintain credibility and hence order. The move back into Kidal could reverse that negative trend as it is in effect regaining lost territory and restoring national sovereignty over part of the country that until recently had no real federal presence.

Second, the move to put the Malian army back in Kidal might be a small positive step for a renewed trust in foreign military and political efforts, i.e., the UN mission and the French Operation Barkhane. Many Malians also believe that the French forces were specifically keeping the Malian army out of Kidal the last six years to establish a partnership with the Toureg and other elements governing Kidal to secure the country’s natural resources for France’s benefit.

Finally, the article concluded that the return of a federal presence to Kidal could help regional stability and relations between Mali and its neighbors. The issue has been causing tension as Mali’s neighbors have claimed that Kidal served as a rear base for jihadist attacks into neighboring countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Malian soldiers stand in formation during the closing ceremony of Exercise Flintlock in Bamako, Mali, November 20, 2008.

Source: Staff Sergeant Samuel Bendet, U.S. Africa Command via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Malian_Soldiers.jpg, Public domain

“The return of the national army to Kidal... is... a strong affirmation of a restoration of authority of the Malian state...”



Continued: Mali Army Returns to Kidal after Six Year Absence

Source: “L’armée malienne est de retour dans la ville symbole de Kidal (The Malian army is back in the symbolic city of Kidal),” *AfricaNews*, 13 February 2020. <https://fr.africanews.com/2020/02/13/mali-l-armee-vient-d-arriver-dans-la-ville-symbole-de-kidal-commandement/>

The Malian army returned on Thursday to Kidal (north), a symbolic city from which it had been absent for years and where its return is supposed to demonstrate the restoration of state sovereignty over the territory...

In a context of serious security deterioration in Mali and the Sahel, the return of the national army to Kidal, today under the control of ex-Tuareg rebels, is anticipated as a strong affirmation of a restoration of authority of the Malian state, which is no longer exercised over large areas of the country.

It is also supposed to give the appearance of reconciliation in the country at war since 2012. The units that entered Kidal, known as “reconstituted”, include former rebels integrated into the Malian army in accordance with the peace agreement of Algiers of 2015.

The return of the Malian army to Kidal must be a prelude to the deployment of other “reconstituted” units in Ménaka, Gao and Timbuktu.

The implementation of the Algiers agreement, with its provisions for the integration of ex-combatants, as well as the recovery of the authority of the State are considered as political components essential for an end to the crisis, in more than the purely military action carried out by the Malian, French, African and UN forces.

Mali has been confronted since 2012 with separatist, Salafist and jihadist insurgencies and inter-community violence which has left thousands of people dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. Departing from the north of the country, the violence spread to the center and to neighboring countries, Burkina Faso and Niger.

Kidal, 1,500 km northeast of Bamako, is the Tuareg cultural stronghold and the historical cradle of the most influential clans. It is also a region that has been marginalized since Malian independence and where the various Tuareg rebellions were born.

The Malian army had not recovered since May 2014. A visit by the Prime Minister at the time, Moussa Mara, had given rise to fighting which had resulted in his heavy defeat against the rebels.

Kidal has since been controlled by the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA), a Tuareg-dominated alliance of former rebel armed groups. The CMA is a signatory to the 2015 Algiers agreement with an alliance of pro-government armed groups, called the Platform.

The conditions for the deployment of “reconstituted” Malian forces in Kidal were the subject of months of negotiations between the CMA , the Malian state and its foreign partners.

Yvan Guichaoua, researcher at the University of Kent, underlines the importance of the return to Kidal.

“There are many symbolic obstacles that must be removed to create the minimum cohesion required to form a viable counterterrorism front, and the return of forces to Kidal provided for in the peace agreement was one of those obstacles,” he said.

The situation in Kidal is also a source of strong tension for Mali’s neighbors who suspect or denounce alliances between separatists and jihadists. For them, Kidal served as a rear base for jihadist attacks.

Kidal also gives rise to accusations against... France, because of its presumed links with the Tuareg rebels... These accusations appear in speeches hostile to the French presence, [which have] become louder in recent months.



Russian Foreign Minister Comments on the US in Latin America

OE Watch Commentary: In late December, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov granted an interview to Venezuelan news source *Telesur*, where he discussed his views on US policy and actions in Latin America. The noteworthy parts of the interview are excerpted here.

Lavrov claims that the “United States has tried to shape Latin America as it sees fit, but the region is more complex than originally anticipated by American simpletons.” He notes that the internal political processes of various Latin American countries are related to each country’s specific needs and dynamics and argues that the “US attempted to influence internal political processes in Latin America in order to support their geopolitical interests.” He states that a key strategy that the US used in Latin America was “to change so-called undesirable regimes and redirect any doubts down correct “channels.” He also asserts that the US has “attempted to divide regional integration processes and impose rigid neo-liberal leaders to control political processes that occurred during 2019 in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia.” Lavrov also maintains that the US has not been successful in achieving its goals in Latin America. He closes his interview by claiming the US has accused Russia for Latin America’s failures, and promises Russian support to help keep Latin America and the Caribbean strong. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Sergei Lavrov, 2016.

Source: US Department of State via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sergey_Lavrov_February_2016.jpg, Public Domain

“The US attempted to influence internal political processes in Latin America in order to support their geopolitical interests.”
-Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

Source: “Lavrov: América Latina es más compleja de lo que calculó EE.UU. (Lavrov: Latin America is More Complex than the US Estimated,” *Telesur*, 26 December 2019. <https://www.telesurtv.net/noticia/-20191226-0010.html>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s comments regarding US interests in Latin America are translated below as follows:

“The United States has tried to shape Latin America as it sees fit, but the region is more complex than originally anticipated by American simpletons.”

“A key US strategy in Latin America was to change so-called undesirable regimes and redirect any doubts down correct “channels”.

“The US has attempted to divide regional integration processes and impose rigid neo-liberal leaders to control political process that occurred during 2019 in Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia.”

“Internal political processes are developed in various Latin American countries and are directly related to the countries’ specific needs and dynamics.”

“The US attempted to influence internal political processes in Latin America in order to support their geopolitical interests.”

Lavrov says that despite the hard strangulation with economic sanctions and “color revolutions” methods, it has not been possible for the US. implement a “lightning war” in relation to Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua.

He also referred to the fact that the Government of the United States has held “external forces” (in reference to Russia) responsible for its failure in politics around Latin America.

The diplomat said that for Russia, the Latin American and Caribbean region is an important element of the emerging multipolar world order and that the role of his country is to contribute to these nations being strong, politically united and economically sustainable.



Russia-Cuba Relations Continue Revival

OE Watch Commentary: On 5 February, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov kicked off a three-day visit to Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela to meet with his counterparts. During Lavrov's visit to Cuba, Venezuelan news source *Telesur* printed a tweet by Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez as well as Lavrov's comments on Russia-Cuba relations, demonstrating the strong relationship. Rodriguez tweeted, "We ratified our wonderful relationship and ongoing commitment to continue expanding cooperation to tackle problems." Meanwhile, Lavrov noted that Russia is "categorically opposed to US sanctions and stand[s] by our Cuban friends during this time. We further insist on eliminating financial/economic barriers imposed by the US in order to guarantee complete socio-economic development, provide sovereign equality and ensure that equal rights are granted to all Cubans."

The second accompanying passage from *The Spectator* points out that Russian support to Cuba is nothing new and most recently goes back to 2013 when the two countries began increasing trade and investment activities. The passage also notes that Moscow is stepping up its military support for Havana. It points out for example, that Russia issued a ~\$43 million loan to Cuba in February 2019 so that the island could maintain its Soviet-era military equipment. It also highlights that in June of 2019, "the Russian navy also sent one of its most advanced warships to Cuba in a gesture of solidarity amidst Havana's growing tensions with Washington." (Also see: "Increased Russian Soft Power in Cuba," *OE Watch*, January 2020 and "More Russia in Cuba," *OE Watch*, November 2019) **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Embassy of Russia in Havana.

Source: Manuel Castro via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Embassy_of_Russia_in_Havana,_Cuba.jpg, CA by 2.0

“We (Russia) are categorically opposed to US sanctions and stand by our Cuban friends during this time. We further insist on eliminating financial/economics barriers imposed by the US to guarantee complete socio-economic development, sovereign equality and ensure that equal rights are granted to all Cubans.”

Source: “Canciller de Rusia llega a Cuba en visita oficial (Russian Chancery Arrives to Cuba on Official Visit),” *Telesur*, 6 February 2020. <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/cuba-rusia-lavrov-llega-gira-america-latina-20200206-0001.html>

Bruno Rodriguez Tweets Regarding his visit with Sergei Lavrov

--“We ratified our wonderful relationship and ongoing commitment to continue expanding cooperation to tackle problems.”--

Lavrov to Telesur Regarding Russian Take on US Sanctions Imposed on Cuba

--“they (the US) are showing marked interest in disrupting economic activity on the island which is actually a human rights violation in the sense it hurts the common interests of the people.”

“We (Russia) are categorically opposed to US sanctions and stand by our Cuban friends during this time. We further insist on eliminating financial/economic barriers imposed by the US in order to guarantee complete socio-economic development, provide sovereign equality and ensure that equal rights are granted to all Cubans.”

Source: “Simes, Dimitri. “Putin is Resurrecting Russia’s Cold War Pact with Cuba,” *The Spectator*, 6 February 2020.

<https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2020/02/putin-is-resurrecting-russias-cold-war-pact-with-cuba/>

With Cuba feeling the burden of US sanctions, Russia has emerged as an alternative source of trade and investment. Trade between the two countries more than doubled between 2013 and 2019, jumping from £139 million to over £380 million.

Additionally, Moscow is also stepping up its military support for Havana. For example, Russia issued a £33 million loan to Cuba in February 2019 so that the island could maintain its Soviet-era military equipment. In June of 2019, the Russian navy also sent one of its most advanced warships to Cuba in a gesture of solidarity amidst Havana’s growing tensions with Washington.



Juan Guaidó and Cubazuela



María Corina Machado at a gathering in Guarenas in 2014.
Source: Carlos Díaz via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:María_Corina_Machado.jpg, CC BY 2.0

OE Watch Commentary: Juan Guaidó, who is officially recognized as the President of Venezuela (or at least as interim president) by a number of countries including the United States, arrived back in Venezuela on 11 February. He had been on a foreign trip that included Canada and the United States, where he was a spotlighted guest at the State of the Union Address on 4 February. Upon his arrival at the international airport in Maiquetía, Guaidó was met by a throng of supporters as well as Bolivarian protesters. The accompanying passages from local sources shed light on how Guaidó is viewed by the Maduro regime and the opposition.

As the first accompanying reference reports, the Bolivarians (affiliates of the regime of Nicolás Maduro and the de facto rulers) proceeded to physically attack members of Guaidó's entourage. In the four-hour-long video report, the more dramatic violence begins a little after the three-hour mark, with much of the video showing interviews with people waiting at the airport before the arrival. Perhaps significant about the event is that the Maduro regime allows Guaidó to return and remain at large, and also that while no one in the opposition will get away with beating any Bolivarian celebrity or functionary, Bolivarians who beat up opposition deputies and Guaidó supporters are unlikely to be punished. In other words, while the regime might see disposing of Guaidó to be an unnecessary risk, neither Guaidó himself nor his people or movement present much of a real threat to the regime. In fact, the Guaidó opposition seems to be treated as a prop to be ridiculed and humiliated, at the regime's pleasure.

This may go some way to explain the content of the second accompanying reference, which is a screenshot taken on 11 February from *DolarToday*, a popular opposition website. *DolarToday* has long been running a "what if elections were held today" survey. María Corina Machado, who supports Guaidó as the interim president but takes a harder line than he does, comes out ahead with 55% of the vote. Not scientific, the survey still tells us something. Machado regularly underlines that if the Venezuelan people are ever to rid themselves of the current regime, physical coercion will have to be part of the formula. If the survey is reflective of popular attitudes within the overall opposition population, it suggests that while the opposition publicly gets behind Mr. Guaidó as the interim president, a majority of that opposition favors a more assertive understanding of what opposition should mean.

Some of the reason for dissatisfaction with Guaidó may be found in the third accompanying reference. In it, essayist Emmanuel Rincón scolds Guaidó for having suggested that Cuba help resolve the problem in Venezuela. As Rincón sees it, Cuba is the main problem. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“Security personnel tried to stop the legislators [supporters of Guaidó] from getting there, and persons attached to the regime of Nicolás Maduro... came there to intimidate and assault the legislators as well as members of the media...”

Source: Producers, “Juan Guaidó Salió de Maiquetía rumbo a Caracas (Juan Guaidó Left Maiquetía in route to Caracas),” *800 Noticias*, 11 February 2020. <https://800noticias.com/en-vivo-juan-guaido-arriba-al-aeropuerto-de-maiquetia>

“...Venezuelan leader Juan Guaidó just arrived at the Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetía at 5:03 this Tuesday after completing international rounds...

After entering the lobby of the airport, Guaidó was able to take his vehicle and go up toward Caracas...

Security personnel tried to stop the legislators [supporters of Guaidó] from getting there, and persons attached to the regime of Nicolás Maduro, along with presumed workers of the sanctioned airline Conviasa, came there to intimidate and assault the legislators as well as members of the media...”



Continued: Juan Guaidó and Cubazuela

Source: Editors, “Si las elecciones presidenciales fueran hoy ¿A quien elegirías como presidente? (If the presidential elections were held today, who would you elect as president?),” *DolarToday*, 11 February 2020, <https://dolartoday.com/video-guaido-llego-venezuela-entre-enfrentamientos-y-bloqueos-en-maiquetia-11feb/>

Si las elecciones presidenciales fueran hoy ¿A quien elegirías como presidente?

Maria Corina Machado (55%, 38,020 Votos)

Juan Guaido (30%, 20,657 Votos)

Leopoldo Lopez (5%, 3,779 Votos)

Henry Falcon (4%, 2,552 Votos)

Henry Ramos Allup (3%, 2,059 Votos)

Henrique Capriles (3%, 1,691 Votos)

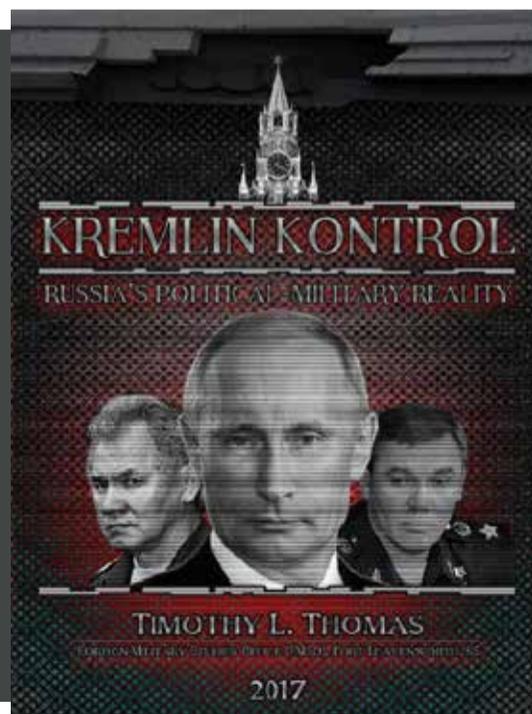
Participantes: 68,758 [[participa](#)] [[mas encuestas](#)]

Source: Emmanuel Rincón, “No Guaidó, Cuba no es parte de la solución, es el principal problema (No, Guaidó, Cuba is not part of the solution, it is the main problem),” *Panam Post*, 28 January 2020, <https://es.panampost.com/emmanuel-rincon/2020/01/28/guaido-cuba-solucion/>

“...For those foreigners that read me and do not understand the division in the Venezuelan opposition, it is basically this – the ‘official opposition’, that which is in the Assembly, in spite of passing 21 years being crushed by Chavism, continues to consider Chavism as a political force and not as a criminal force...”

Nevertheless, Guaidó went back to doing it his way [after having asserted that the regime was a criminal conglomerate and that Cuba was its mentor], declaring publicly that he hopes Cuba, the country that has subjected, robbed and extorted us for more than two decades, form part of the solution...

That a great part of the country calls them [the Guaidó crowd] collaborators is not gratuitous...”



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>



ELN Gaining Strength in Colombia and Venezuela

OE Watch Commentary: More regional reportage is appearing that indicates the power of the Colombian group National Liberation Army (ELN) continues to rise. The accompanying reference is an article from Colombian leading legacy newspaper *El Tiempo*, reporting the results of a study, which found that the ELN is present in half the states in neighboring Venezuela, and controls vital economic resources. The article enjoyed immediate resonance, was broadly chosen for comment, linkage and republication in regional outlets. It is hardly the first article to list evidence of increased ELN strength. It goes a little further, however, floating the ELN's comfortable presence in Venezuela as an argument for why it is not possible to defeat the ELN militarily. The editorial, extending from assertions in the study, implies that negotiations between the Colombian government and the ELN guerrilla group should not be totally discarded and/or that diplomatic communications with the regime of Nicolás Maduro in Caracas should be reinitiated in some form or another. The researchers of the study cited ELN's growing ability to hurt Colombia, including kidnappings and displacements, as the reason for their prescription of diplomacy. A jaw-dropping line from the article suggests that if the Colombian government goes down the road of trying to militarily defeat the ELN, it might "lead to a low intensity war with high costs." One cannot help but wonder what the researchers would call whatever it is that has been going on in Colombia for the past several decades. (Also see: "ELN Rising," *OE Watch*, June 2019). **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“The scenario of a military defeat of the ELN is improbable and could lead to a low intensity war...”

Source: Editors, “El Eln tiene influencia en siete de los diez municipios con más coca (The ELN has influence in the ten counties with the most coca),” *El Tiempo*, 30 January 2020. <https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/conflicto-y-narcotrafico/radiografia-del-eln-y-su-presencia-en-zonas-de-narcotrafico-456930>; and Elías Rivas, “ELN tiene influencia en 12 de los 24 estados venezolanos: El Tiempo (ELN has influence in 12 of 24 Venezuelan states: El Tiempo),” *Noticierodigital*, 30 January 2020. <https://www.noticierodigital.com/2020/01/eln-tiene-influencia-en-12-de-los-24-estados-venezolanos-el-tiempo/>

“Ideas for Peace Foundation (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, FIP) claims in an in-depth study that shows the [strength of] ELN today and why getting rid of this group by way of arms does not appear viable. ‘The scenario of a military defeat of the ELN is improbable and could lead to a low intensity war with high costs in humanitarian and environmental terms.’...

...Why does the FIP assert that it is not possible to defeat the ELN militarily?

The fact that they have Venezuela not only as a strategic rearguard, but also as a destabilizing alliance changes the panorama in a radical manner. Thus, to do things like in the past as they were done against the heads of the FARC in Colombia is very difficult.” ...

According to the International Crisis Group and Insight Crime data, this guerrilla has influence in 12 of the 24 Venezuelan states where it would be smuggling gasoline, mining and extortion. In addition, affirms the Venezuelan organization FundaRedes, the ELN carries out indoctrination and recruitment activities in schools and controls stations endorsed by the government of Nicolás Maduro in at least six states....

In addition to extortion, the humanitarian effects of the ELN have been increasing. Thus, while in 2015 there were two events of confinement and 11 displacements involving that guerrilla, in 2018 those cases increased to 8 and 51, respectively....

Control in border areas is also seen on the Colombian side. Since 2017, in Vichada there is information about the control of mines exercised by the ELN and the appropriation of minerals that enter the country. Even before the kidnappings on the Colombian side, relatives of victims say they have had to move to the other side of the border to negotiate with the guerrillas for their release.

As the control of the ELN on the other side of the border grows stronger, violence has intensified. That is why, says the FIP, the effects of a military offensive against the ELN or the possibility of reactivating a negotiation will depend greatly on what happens in the future with Maduro.



ELN and FARC Involvement in Colombia's Protest Marches

OE Watch Commentary: Protest marches have long been a feature of political expression in Colombia. There have been a lot of marches in the last year or so, however, some less peaceful than others. The accompanying passages provide local perspectives and discuss claims that “the FARC and the ELN have been manipulating the marches using paid infiltrators.”

The first accompanying reference, from a well-known conservative political leader, expresses an opinion of frustration regarding this particular form of struggle and its costs, pointing to the violence of the 2019 marches. Beyond the ideological coloring of the marches, their organization, timing, geographical positioning, and logistical sustainment have been all but perfected. He writes, “...the vandals are infiltrated, organized to generate violence and... there is someone behind them.”

The second through fifth references are from *Pulzo*, a new, right-leaning news outlet, which has focused coverage on the marches. *Pulzo* notes in the second reference that the marches have had a great deal of organizational participation from the dissident FARC groups. That reportage cites a set of audio recordings of an intercepted conversation between FARC organizers released by the Attorney General's office and played by Caracol Radio. Evidently, they are discussing how to manipulate the marches to cause chaos and get the government to negotiate with them in the process. The third reference reports that the leftist mayor of Bogotá, Claudia López, saw the evidence and is convinced that it is irrefutable, that the FARC and the ELN have been manipulating the marches using paid infiltrators. The passage quotes the Mayor as saying that “that they are paid infiltrators for illegal armed groups.”

The fourth referenced article covers a number of methods of student recruitment uncovered by the investigations, as outlined by the mayor. One of those methods has gained special public interest in Colombia, for obvious reasons. A Marxist Don Juan, aka ‘Simón, aka El Polvo Disidente, had great success seducing co-eds and recruiting into radical organizations.

The fifth reference gives us a specific assertion regarding the operational goals of radical leaders for the marches. They had been attempting to block the international airport, gaining international notoriety, placing a cost on travel and commerce, thus creating a mechanism for strategic extortion. So far, they have not been successful.

The sixth accompanying reference, from the *Panam Post* has reportage of plans for the next round of marches, “convoked for February 20-21” that are being orchestrated by the educators union. In spite of greater knowledge regarding operational details, it does not appear that the Colombian government is much closer to solving the challenge from radical manipulation of student protest marches as a form of struggle. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“According to the mayor, FARC dissidents paid vandals who infiltrated the Bogota marches.”

Source: José Félix Lafaurie Rivera, “¡No más marchas! (No more marches),” *Contexto Ganadero*, 24 January 2020. <https://www.contextoganadero.com/columna/no-mas-marchas>

“It is disconcerting to read what the Mayor of Bogotá says about the marches...

Of course, she had to recognize that the vandals are infiltrated, organized to generate violence and, most seriously, that there is someone behind them. Where do they come from? She asks. Could it be that the mayor does not know?

Her reiterated accusations against her antecessor in the National Government [NFI] is outrageous: That last year there was stigmatization of the marches, militarization of the City, curfews, and a death, while the recent marches, with four exceptions, were peaceful and ‘creative’. We have seen the ruins from those exceptions and it does not make the Mayor look good ignoring the violence of the 2019 marches and [for her] to question the decisions taken...

I marched in 2008 against the FARC, the most massively attended demonstration in our history, and I would again, but in one that repeats, with a wounded pitch of street protest: No-more-marches/no-more-marches/ no-more-marches...”



Continued: ELN and FARC Involvement in Colombia's Protest Marches

Source: Editors, “Las Farc-disidencias están metidas en las ‘marchas de protesta’ (FARC-dissidents are involved in the ‘protest marches’),” *Pulzo*, 30 January 2020. <https://www.pulzo.com/nacion/fiscalia-revela-audios-capturados-marchas-bogota-PP837847>

“The audio recordings were made known by Caracol Radio this Thursday, and in one of them a man is heard informing another, who he refers to as his ‘little boss’, that they are calling him to give him bad news about the ‘food’...”

Nevertheless, the radio station [Caracol Radio] says that the authorities interpret this conversation as code for the traffic and fabrication of explosives used to organize disturbances in the marches, since none of these detainees has experience or knowledge regarding bakeries or the cultivation of trees...

Within the documents, El Tiempo [daily newspaper] details that the revealed objective is to obtain ‘agreements with the government by way of the mobilizations [marches], assemblies and hordes [crowds]’, in addition to generate chaos in the cities...”

Source: “Disidencias de Farc pagaron a vándalos que infiltraron marchas en Bogotá, según alcaldesa (According to the mayor, FARC dissidents paid vandals who infiltrated the Bogota marches),” *Pulzo*, 5 February 2020. <https://www.pulzo.com/nacion/disidencias-farc-pagaron-vandalos-que-infiltraron-marchas-bogota-PP840588>

“The chief executive [Mayor of Bogotá] made known that this finding [regarding ELN and FARC participation in the marches] came out of a robust investigation process in which the authorities made ‘an irrefutable collection of evidence during several months’...”

The Mayor stated that, ‘We are not talking about people who became agitated one day and went out to vandalize, but that they are paid infiltrators for illegal armed groups’...”

Source: Editors, “Criminal casado y con hijos enamoró a universitarias para reclutarlas e infiltrar marchas (Criminal married with children seduced co-eds to recruit them and infiltrate marches),” *Pulzo*, 5 February 2020. <https://www.pulzo.com/nacion/como-disidencias-farc-eln-reclutaron-jovenes-para-infiltrar-marchas-PP840800>

“...That is only one of the strategies used by FARC dissidents to get youths to upset public order...”

Blue Radio explained that it involves a man known by the alias ‘Simón’, who in spite of having a family, approached groups of university students in order to achieve extramarital relations with students and convince them to join radical groups that are committing acts of violence during the protests...”

Source: Editors, “Motivo por el que encapuchados quieren llevar marchas a El Dorado, según el Distrito (The reason why masked [protesters] want to carry the marches to El Dorado [intl airport], according to the District),” *Pulzo*, 22 January 2020. <https://www.pulzo.com/nacion/para-que-quieren-llegar-encapuchados-dorado-paro-nacional-PP833137>

“...“The team of Claudia López [Mayor of Bogotá] asserted that the goal of the protestors is to block the El Dorado airport so that the marches become ‘an international news item’...The Mayor explained that the demonstrators have already tried to get to El Dorado using the student marches, ‘by way of confrontation’...”

Source: Andrés Fernández, “El anuncio de paro de Fecode coincide con fechas de Petro y ELN (The announcement of the FECODE strike coincides with dates Petro and the ELN),” *Panam Post*, 10 February 2020. <https://es.panampost.com/felipe-fernandez/2020/02/10/paro-de-fecode-eln/>

“...“The team of Claudia López [Mayor of Bogotá] asserted that the goal of the protestors is to block the El Dorado airport so that the marches become ‘an international news item’...The Mayor explained that the demonstrators have already tried to get to El Dorado using the student marches, ‘by way of confrontation’...”



Coca Spraying in Colombia

OE Watch Commentary: The use of aerial spraying of glyphosate to eradicate coca cultivations is a perennial controversy in Colombia, one that has recently returned to the forefront. The eradication method is controversial because of its relative environmental, health and socioeconomic impact. The accompanying references shed light on this debate in Colombia.

The first accompanying reference is a recently published opinion from a leading conservative who succinctly states arguments for augmenting aerial spray of glyphosate against coca cultivations in the country. The author addresses three major arguments – environmental, criminal and economic. He notes that while strict controls have been made on the use of glyphosate, the cultivation of coca itself does far more environmental damage.

The second reference is about six months old, published in the same weekly newspaper, *El Espectador*, a legacy brand with a long history. The writer is a left-leaning opinion leader. He attacks the use of glyphosate, arguing among other things that legalization of cocaine might be the preferable method of control.

The third reference is from the web page of an individual (John Marulanda, retired Colombian Army Colonel) whose opinions on security topics in Colombia are widely referenced locally. His article puts the question into context. He argues that the issue of spraying and the issue of drug trafficking writ large, cannot be separated from the generalized environment of illegality in Colombia. Looking at these references and others like them to consider the pros and cons of aerial glyphosate spraying in Colombia, suggest that attempting to use this method in isolate would be a frustratingly ineffective exercise as a reducer of coca production. In fact, even its use as an integrated element of a multi-part effort to reduce production might still have only a partially mitigating effect on the chaos of impunities in Colombia. Maybe the saddest reminder from the attached references is that the physical, natural environment of Colombia has been terribly hurt by cocaine production, while efforts to limit the use of glyphosate (using environmental arguments) are eagerly supported by those actors who are doing the most harm. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Aerial spraying.

Source: Jan Amiss from Pixabay, <https://pixabay.com/photos/airplane-crop-duster-dangerous-465619/>, Public Domain

“This is a transport business, not a peasant economy...”

Source: Carlos Enrique Moreno, “La triple moral del glifosato (The triple standard of glyphosate),” *El Espectador*, 26 January 2020. <https://www.elespectador.com/opinion/la-triple-moral-del-glifosato-columna-901422>

“...for each hectare of coca seeded, it was necessary to deforest 2.5 hectares of forest. The coca leaf that that hectare produces each year requires for its processing around 2,260 liters of gasoline, 406 kilos of cement, 13 liters of sulfuric acid, two liters of hydrochloric acid, two kilos of potassium permanganate, solvents, urea and other chemicals...”

Of the approximately 12,000 homicides in Colombia in 2019, more than 50% were due to henchman activities related more than anything to drug-trafficking and illegal mining...

This is a transport business, not a peasant economy...”

Source: Salomón Kalmanovitz, “Otra vez el glifosato (Glyphosate again),” *El Espectador*, 1 July 2019, <https://www.elespectador.com/opinion/otra-vez-el-glifosato-columna-868594>

“The Administration of Iván Duque announced plans to restart aerial spraying of herbicide...

An even more intelligent strategy, although utopic, would be to legalize use and control the traffic of cocaine...

But let’s not fool ourselves: the Administration run by the Democratic Center will look for confrontation in general and the war against drugs in particular in order to polarize, get United States’ support and keep itself in power...”

Source: John Marulanda, “Viejo-nuevo terrorismo en Colombia (New-old terrorism in Colombia),” *www.jmarulanda.com*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.jmarulanda.com/site/viejo-nuevo-terrorismo-en-colombia/>

“...With the highest production of cocaine in the world, uncontrolled borders, impunity, corruption and a Public Force under siege, it is patently necessary to reevaluate the concept of terrorism in the country’s politics and its discourse on crime. And it urges the taking of decisions, as in Bolivia, to suspend relations with Cuba, an island that adopts and protects the narco-terrorists that overwhelm us...”



El Salvador's Constitutional Crisis

OE Watch Commentary: The political health of El Salvador recently displayed what look like symptoms of authoritarianism. On 9 February, President Nayib Bukele (elected this past June) led an armed contingent of military and police into the legislative chamber to force the passage of a financing loan for \$109 million worth of military and police equipment for his security plan. It did not go over well. The first accompanying reference is from an article on 11 February, in *ElSalvador.com*, reporting on Salvadoran's Supreme Court's order that Bukele not do that again. The second reference, also from *ElSalvador.com*, is reportage the same day of the negative response from the legislators, who apparently met in an extraordinary plenary session the day after Bukele's military stunt and issued a "pronouncement to reject the militarization of the Legislative Branch that was ordered by President Nayib Bukele." The third reference, from legacy newspaper *La Prensa*, is of President Bukele's counter-response -- he was hardly contrite. The session of the legislature that Bukele occupied had been called into emergency session by the President using a tenuous interpretation of the Constitution. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Official photo of Nayib Bukele, 46th President of the Republic of El Salvador.
Source: Presidency of the Republic of El Salvador via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bukele-president-official.png>, CC BY 3.0

“[A]bstain from using the Armed Force in activities contrary to constitutionally established purposes and putting the republican, democratic and representative form of government at risk...”

Source: L. Alas, E. Velásquez and O. Iraheta, “Sala le ordena a Bukele no utilizar a militares y policías para fines políticos (Court orders Bukele to not use military and police for political ends),” *ElSalvador.com*, 11 February 2020. <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/sala-constitucional-crisis-asamblea-legislativa-nayib-bukele-demanda/685263/2020/>

“[A]bstain from using the Armed Force in activities contrary to constitutionally established purposes and putting the republican, democratic and representative form of government at risk...”

Source: Cecilia Fuentes, “Asamblea condena la toma militarizada de la institución y exige a Bukele desistir de amenazas (Assembly condemns militarized take-over of the institution and insists Bukele stop making threats),” *ElSalvador.com*, 11 February 2020, <https://www.elsalvador.com/noticias/nacional/asamblea-legislativa-bukele-prestamo-diputados-crisis/685327/2020/>

“The congressmen of the legislative Assembly carried out an extraordinary plenary session Monday afternoon with the objective of emitting a pronouncement to reject the militarization of the Legislative Branch that was ordered by President Nayib Bukele on Sunday, 9 February. ‘Nothing will be gained by force. It cannot be conceded (the loan of \$109 million) with a pistol to the head....’

Source: Gabriel Campos Madrid, “Si fuera un dictador habría tomado el control de todo”, así ha respondido el presidente Bukele (‘If I were a dictator, I would have taken control of everything’ is how President Bukele responded),” *La Prensa*, 11 February 2020. <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Si-fuera-un-dictador-habria-tomado-el-control-de-todo-asi-ha-respondido-el-presidente-Bukele-20200210-0093.html>

“ ‘If I were a dictator or someone who did not respect democracy... I would have taken control of all of it. The Armed Forces and the Police are part of that, too. The people got mad when I asked for calm, but if they had wanted, I would have taken control of the whole government that night’ he added.”



Panama Lifts Weapons Moratorium

OE Watch Commentary: On 21 January, the President and Security Minister of Panama issued a press release, excerpted here, announcing the decision to let a 2011 law expire that limited the amount of firearms importers could receive per shipment. The accompanying passages discuss this development, in addition to providing insight as to why this change may be significant.

In 2015, Panama passed legislation which made it legal for Panamanians to own legally purchased weapons and for gun importers to import weapons into the country. The move was hailed as a win by gun right activists worldwide, given that the “right to bear arms” is not included in Panama’s constitution.

Panama is currently facing challenges on this issue however, in that citizens can purchase legal weapons, but that stores simply don’t have them on the shelves, due to the weapons-moratorium imposed in 2011. And even if someone is able to obtain a weapon, it may take up to a year to license and register.

Now with the moratorium lifted, *El Diaro* discusses how this represents a new chance for everyday citizens to own weapons. However it also notes that “some fear that the legislation will just make it easier for criminals to obtain weapons.”

Panama has a long way to go in making weapons readily available to customers looking to buy them legally. The application process is still backed up, and with the moratorium lift, importers will have more opportunities to purchase legally imported weapons. Still, demand for weapons (both legal and illegal) in Panama make it likely that a black market for this item may persist for some time in the country, as discussed in the excerpts from *Insight Crime* and *Alerta Paisa*. Black market necessity is associated with too many buyers in Panama and the fact that the country serves as a hub for illegal weapon imports and is responsible for sending them to neighboring countries such Venezuela and Colombia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Panama’s Association of Gunowners (APPA) views the moratorium lift as positive in the sense that it will allow everyday citizens expanded access to weapons. However, some fear that the legislation will just make it easier for criminals to obtain weapons.”



9mm LUGER; 7,62 TOKAREV; .357 SIG; 10mm AUTO; .40 S&W; .45 GAP; .50 AE.
Source: Spectrums via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:9mm_7,62mm_357sig_10mm_45SW_45GAP_50AE_002.jpg, Public Domain

Source: Press Release, Republic of Panama, 21 January 2020. <https://www.minseg.gob.pa/2020/01/dejan-sin-efecto-la-veda-de-importacion-de-armas/>

Panamanian President Laurentino Cortizo and the Minister of Public Security Rolando Mirones did not extend the weapons moratorium in 2020. It is now up to the Directorate of Institutional Public Security Affairs (Diasp) to respond to requisites to register weapons as long as they are complying with requisites set in place and have the corresponding permits to do so.

Source: “El Gobierno de Panamá reabre la importación de armas (Panamanian Government Lifts Firearm Moratorium),” *El Diorio.es*, 22 January 2019. https://www.eldiario.es/politica/Gobierno-Panama-reabre-importacion-armas_0_987601241.html

Panama’s Association of Gunowners (APPA) views the moratorium lift as positive in the sense that it will allow everyday citizens expanded access to weapons. However, some fear that the legislation will just make it easier for criminals to obtain weapons.

Source: “Lift on Panama Firearms Import Ban May Backfire Amid Homicide Spike,” *Insight Crime*, 31 January 2020. <https://www.insightcrime.org/news/brief/panama-firearms-import-ban/>

Officials in Panama have ended a nearly decade-long ban on the importation of firearms, a move that could end up benefiting traffickers and corrupt officials at a time when the Central American nation’s murder rate is on the rise.

Panama has in the past been identified as an important hub in the regional arms trade, according to a 2012 threat assessment from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Its geographic location makes it a natural destination for weapons originating in countries where gun laws are lax. From Panama, the guns are then moved out of the country and often south into Colombia.

Source: “Mercado negro de armas de Panamá y Venezuela llega a Medellín (Black Market Weapons Arrive to Medellín from Panama and Venezuela),” *Alerta Paisa*, 31 March 2019. <https://www.alertapaisa.com/noticias/antioquia/mercado-negro-de-armas-de-panama-y-venezuela-llega-medellin>

Colombian Police Commander Eliécer Camacho Jiménez of Medellín reported that the city serves as a distribution point for illegal weapons that enter the country from Panama and Venezuela.



Social Networking Enables Kidnappers in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico

OE Watch Commentary: Extortion is a commonly employed threat tactic utilized by criminal groups in Mexico. According to Mexican news source *El Herald*, kidnapping represented the most utilized extortion tactic until the end of the Sinaloa and Juarez Cartel turf war in mid to late 2011. As the passage notes, Ciudad Juarez was named the “kidnapping capitol of the world” in 2009, but with the implementation of the city’s first-ever Anti-Extortion Task Force, extortion related cases dropped by 90%.

However, kidnapping related extortion apparently remains prevalent in the city as “family members and criminal posers began using social media networks to include WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to intimidate victims into believing that they were at risk for being kidnapped.” Then, “victims ... provide ... information over multiple social networking sites or phone apps.” Extortionists also use these applications to gain information about the daily life of their victims. Although this source focuses on Ciudad Juarez, it is likely that criminal throughout Mexico are utilizing social networking applications to carry out extortion related kidnappings. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Map showing Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Source: Battroid via Wikimedia, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mexico_Chihuahua_Juarez_Location_map.svg, Public Domain

“Extortionists use applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, to gain information about the daily life of their victims.”

Source: “Redes sociales, arma de extorsionadores (Social Networks, Hidden Weapon Used by Extortionists),” *El Herald*, 21 October 2019. <https://www.elheraldodejuarez.com.mx/policiaca/redes-sociales-arma-de-extorsionadores-4391865.html/amp>

Ciudad Juarez experienced never-before violence from 2006 through 2011. In 2009, the city ranked highest for kidnappings and was deemed the “kidnapping capitol of the world” in 2009. Following violence decreases in 2011, Mexican police worked to regain control in the border city and quickly replaced its first-ever Anti-Kidnapping Task Force with the city’s first-ever Anti-Extortion Task Force.

Since its’ inception, extortion related cases dropped by 90%, but kidnapping related extortion remained prevalent in the city as family members and criminal posers began using social media networks to include WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to intimidate victims into believing that they were at risk for being kidnapped. How? Kidnappers contact victims or family members of potential victims and make them believe they are at risk for being kidnapped. Ironically, it is the victims themselves that unwittingly provide enough information over multiple social networking sites or phone apps to make them believe the scheme is real in the first place.

Extortionists, use applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, to know the daily life of their victims.