

# Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH



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*FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT*



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Operational Environment Watch provides translated selections with background from a diverse range of foreign media that our analysts and expert contributors believe will give security professionals an added dimension to their critical thinking about the Operational Environment.

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**ON THE COVER:**

*Russian paratroopers made a landing as part of a group on new parachute systems from a height of 10,000 meters in arctic conditions.*

Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=75731@cmsPhotoGallery>, CCA 4.0

# OEWATCH

## Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

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## No Hunter at the Victory Day Parade

**OE Watch Commentary:** Due to coronavirus concerns, Russia's main Victory Day parade was comprised mostly of aircraft which, as the first excerpt points out, "flew over Moscow's Red Square to mark the 75th anniversary of the Soviet Union's Victory over Nazi Germany." There had been earlier speculation that the aerial parade would include both the Su-57 multirole fighter jet and Russia's new S-70 heavy attack UAV "Hunter." However, as the TASS excerpt indicates, while "a wing of four fifth-generation Su-57 multirole fighter jets" was included in the parade, there was no sign of the S-70 UAV. The duo had made their debut back in September 2019, when, as the second excerpt recalls, "a flight was performed in automated mode: the interaction between Okhotnik [Hunter UAV] and the Su-57 was successfully worked out." This excerpt, from the pro-Kremlin site, *Polit-Rossiya*, quotes military commentator Viktor Baranets, who asserts that in the future, the Hunter UAV will be equipped with "dagger hypersonic missiles." To date, however, the Russian military has yet to field any attack UAV.



S-70 Okhotnik.

Source: TerHussein via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=81104025>, CC BY-SA 4.0

The third excerpt from the military weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer*, provides additional background on what might be delaying the fielding of this heavy UAV. It reminds readers that "the plans of the military department to field an attack UAV of this class were announced at the MAKS air show in August 2009." This excerpt suggests that because of the UAV's heavy weight (approximately 20 tons), combined with its design ("tailless flying-wing aircraft") the delays behind fielding may be caused by "aerodynamic instability." The author concludes on a pessimistic note, bemoaning the fact that Russia has yet to field an attack UAV, which he claims could be the result of "military-political miscalculations, lack of scientific forecasting or elementary corruption." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"In the future we should also expect to equip unmanned aerial vehicles with hypersonic weapons..."***

**Source:** "Russia holds air parade over Moscow's Red Square on Victory Day," TASS, 9 May 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1154697>

*A parade formation of 75 helicopters and aircraft flew over Moscow's Red Square to mark the 75th anniversary of the Soviet Union's Victory over Nazi Germany in the 1941-1945 Great Patriotic War, TASS reported from the scene.... After that, four MiG-31K interceptor-fighters carrying Kinzhal air-launched hypersonic missiles appeared in the skies over Moscow together with a wing of 4 fifth-generation Su-57 multirole fighter jets.*

**Source:** Victor Butkevich "Полковник Баранец рассказал об оснащении С-70 'Охотник' гиперзвуковым 'Кинжалом' (Colonel Baranets spoke about equipping the S-70 Hunter with a hypersonic Dagger)," *Polit-Rossiya*, 11 May 2020. <https://politros.com/165952-polkovnik-baranec-rasskazal-ob-osnashenii-s-70-okhotnik-giperzvukovym-kinzhalom>

*Test launches of dagger hypersonic missiles from the T-22M3 took place in Russia. However, the Russian military will not stop there and in the future, the latest weapons can be installed on the S-70 Okhotnik heavy attack unmanned bomber. This opinion was expressed in a conversation with PolitRussia by retired colonel Viktor Baranets, a military observer for Komsomolskaya Pravda.... Baranets noted, in the future we should also expect to equip unmanned aerial vehicles with hypersonic weapons. "I believe this will be done when we launch our heavy drone "Hunter," which is now in the testing phase.... The S-70 Hunter is a Russian heavy strike UAV, which is being developed by the Sukhoi Company. The unmanned bomber, made according to the "flying wing" design, made its first flight in August 2019. Later, a flight was performed in an automated mode: the interaction between Hunter and an S-57 was successfully worked out...*

**Source:** Oleg Falichev, "Сможет ли охотиться 'Охотник'? (Will the Hunter be able to hunt?)," *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer (VPK)*, 13 April 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/56451>

*The latest attack UAV could become a suitcase without a handle for the Russian army.*

*For the first time, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation published on the network a video of the first flight of the prototype of the latest UAV "Hunter" on August 7, 2019. A heavy attack drone of the "flying wing" type then flew over the Chkalov State Flight Test Center in Astrakhan and landed at the airport. After that, information about it in the media practically disappeared. Two conclusions can be drawn. The UAV is classified and do not want to "expose" ahead of time. Or, it revealed significant shortcomings that must be eliminated.... In any case, both versions only fuel interest in this mysterious novelty of Russian military-technical equipment.*

*S-70 Hunter is a Russian Sukhoi heavy unmanned bomber. The plans of the military department to get in service with an attack UAV of this class were announced at the MAKS air show in August 2009....*

*...On August 3, 2019, Hunter made its first flight, which lasted more than 20 minutes. Under the control of the operator, he flew over the airfield at an altitude of about 600 meters and made a successful landing. On September 27, 2019, the Russian Ministry of Defense reported to the media about the first joint flight of the Hunter and the Su-57 fighter, which lasted more than 30 minutes. An unmanned aircraft flew in an automated mode. Then, in the sky between the UAV and the leader aircraft, interaction was worked out to expand the fighter's radar field and target designation for the use of long-range aviation weapons without the Su-57 entering the conditional anti-aircraft defense zone....*

*There are still no open accurate data on this subject. The project is classified. And yet, something became known. Presumably, the "Hunter" has a mass of about 20 tons.*

*...The fact is that tailless flying-wing aircraft are often characterized by aerodynamic instability...*

*It's hard to say when the Hunter UAV will go hunting.... Why are there still no small and medium shock drones in the Russian Federation...What is the reason: in military-political miscalculations, lack of scientific forecasting or elementary corruption?*



## Alternate Medical Service for Russian Draftees

**OE Watch Commentary:** Like many other countries, Russia continues to struggle with the challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. All sectors of society, to include the military, have been enlisted to help reduce the threat of infection and to provide medical care to the ill (see: “Constructing Multifunctional Medical Centers to Combat Coronavirus,” *OE Watch*, May 2020). Perhaps it was just fortuitous timing, but according to the accompanying excerpt from the pro-Kremlin daily, *Izvestia*, Defense Ministry officials recently announced that young Russian men who opt for Alternative Civilian Service (AGS) in lieu of being trained as a soldier, will soon be able to “be trained in the paramedic profession,” and elect to serve “within the civilian structures or the Defense Ministry system.”

Since the early 1990s, Russia has allowed young men who hold pacifist views, the option of completing their conscription requirement outside of military service. As the excerpt points out, selecting this option has not been very popular, with only a few hundred young men choosing AGS each draft cycle. Not only is the process convoluted, filled with bureaucratic hurdles, and generally frowned upon by defense officials, but prospective candidates are required to serve 21 months instead of the normal 12-month conscription period.

The excerpt suggests that the military’s attitude toward those recruits who select AGS may be changing. The article quotes an expert who asserts that “working in the medical field is an important and honorable deed,” pointing out that “the spread of coronavirus infection has shown that medical professionals are still at the forefront, in the hospitals, fighting for the lives of thousands of people.” The military also plans to reduce the time commitment for those choosing AGS from 21 to 18 months.

Even with serious national concerns over the spread of COVID-19, the Kremlin leadership elected to go forward with the Spring 2020 conscription campaign. In a roundabout way, allowing future draftees the option of AGS and being trained as a paramedic, may help to stem the spread of the coronavirus within the military. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

**“Working in the medical field is an important and honorable deed...”**

**Source:** Roman Kretcul, Bogdan Stepovoi, Aleksei Ramm, “Санитарный призыв: в РФ меняют правила прохождения альтернативной службы (Sanitary Draft: Russian Federation Changes Alternative Service Rules),” *Izvestia*, 16 April 2020. <https://iz.ru/996298/roman-kretcul-bogdan-stepovoi-aleksei-ramm/sanitarnyi-prizyv-v-rf-menaiut-pravila-prokhozheniia-alternativnoi-sluzhby>

*New Alternative Civilian Service (AGS) rules are being introduced in the country. It is planned that, as soon as in 2021, the draftees opting for AGS will be able to serve through the Defense Ministry channel. The young people will be trained in the paramedic profession at the Russian Federation Armed Forces Main Temple Military Spiritual and Educational Center base. Afterwards, the draftees will be dispatched to serve in medical institutions, Izvestiya’s sources in the Defense Ministry reported. Their service term will be reduced from 21 to 18 months, unlike those who serve their AGS in civil structures.*

*Previously, the young men whose beliefs forbid taking up arms, served only in civil establishments -- as paramedics, social workers, and so on. They now have the opportunity to serve the Motherland within the military department system. As such, they will have no need carry an assault rifle....*

*The option to choose civilian service instead of the military one became available for the Russian draftees in the early 1990s. There were no mechanisms for implementing this option at the time, and the young men, who had applied for the AGS, sometimes waited for years until a service place was allocated for them. Some treated this option as an opportunity to legally evade military service, by stretching the time up to the end of the draft age.*

*Today, the list of professions available for those choosing the alternative serve already numbers dozens of positions. These, for instance, include: a woodworker, a driver, a welder, a postman, an elevator operator, a house painter, a tractor operator, a paramedic, a gate-keeper, a gardener, a reindeer herder, a baker, a fireman, etc.*

*...However, this service is not very popular. There are only several hundred draftees opting for the AGS every six months, while approximately 130,000-135,000 draftees in the same time period choose the military service.*

*The service term for those choosing the AGS through the Defense Ministry channel will be reduced to 18 months. After training, they will be dispatched for service in medical institutions....*

*...Colonel Aleksandr Perendzhiyev, the Associate Professor at the Plekhanov REU [Russian University of Economics], is also confident that the young men serving the AGS can be very useful to the country and the society. “Working in the medical field is an important and honorable deed,” the expert told Izvestiya. “The world is changing, and the situation with the spread of coronavirus infection has shown that medical professionals are still at the forefront, in the hospitals, fighting for the lives of thousands of people.”*

*...It is also important for the draftees to keep in mind that certain restrictions will apply to the citizens who have opted for alternative service, when they are processed for government jobs.*



## Inside Russia: Spreading Virus Disinformation Narratives

**OE Watch Commentary:** In Russia, as in many other countries, COVID-19 has exposed weaknesses within the country's medical system. The Kremlin's optimistic forecasts from a few months ago have been replaced with sobering statistics, frantic construction of new medical facilities, and continued social restriction measures. As the country continues to struggle in stopping the spread of the virus and addressing its economic consequences, the perennial question as to "Who is guilty?" (кто виноват?) has surfaced. Not surprisingly, as the title of the accompanying article from the popular daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda* insinuates ("Does the US surround Russia with secret bio labs in order to infect us with a new virus?"), it is clear which country many Russians find most responsible.

The article begins by describing how "around... Russian borders, 33 US medical centers are concentrated, where secret biological developments are underway." These laboratories, which were developed after the end of the Cold War to assist the former Soviet republics with their health needs, have now been transformed by articles like this into the primary perpetrator of any disease. Filled with innuendo and conspiratorial analysis, the article attributes every infectious outbreak over the past 20 years in this region to these US labs, going so far as to suggest that by maintaining labs in countries around Russia, the US will be able to infect Russia via "migrant workers." It includes comments from an alleged "expert," who implies that pandemics are part of US strategy, asserting that "viruses will be used to destabilize the country, undermine its economy and change power. This is how the idea and technology of the 'color revolutions' was successfully used."

This article is not an outlier, but rather represents a central theme in the many faceted Kremlin campaign to both divert criticism of its own performance and to "prove" once again that the US will stop at nothing to weaken Russia. A vaccine for COVID-19 will ultimately be developed, but as this article indicates, it may take much longer to reverse anti-American sentiments in Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“Around... Russian borders, 33 US medical centers are concentrated, where secret biological developments are underway...”***

**Source:** Dmitry Steshin, "США окружают Россию секретными биологическими лабораториями, чтобы забросить нам новый вирус? (Does the US surround Russia with secret bio labs in order to infect us with a new virus?)," *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 29 April 2020. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27126/4208473/>

*...Around the Russian borders, 33 US medical centers are concentrated, where secret biological developments are underway*

*...Indeed, after the collapse of the USSR, such laboratories began to grow in the newly formed republics, like mushrooms. What they were doing was of little interest until the terrible documents about research in a similar US laboratory near Tbilisi fell into the hands of the former Minister of State Security of Georgia.... Now, Igor Giorgadze lives in Russia as a political refugee.... According to him, the Americans began to agree on the creation of a biolaboratory in Georgia under Shevardnadze, in the early 2000s. And they built and opened a strange laboratory, the activity of which was able to activate, under Saakashvili, in 2003-11....*

*In 2018, Giorgadze passed creepy documents from this laboratory. For example, a register of deaths during research. December 2015 - 30 dead in a month, 24 people died in one day. April 2016 - 30 dead, August - 16 dead. In the column "cause of death" - "not established". Surnames of the dead are unknown - medical secret. Some kind of "factory of death" ...*

*...Of course, Giorgadze made this information public. And then a scandal also began. But scandals in today's world do not live long, everyone forgot about this story. But two years later, there was a worldwide pandemic of the still unexplored virus. Therefore, the KP special correspondent contacted the ex-Minister of State Security of Georgia....*

*- Igor Panteleimonovich, was there any official and political reaction to your investigation? Inside Georgia, in the West, in Russia?*

*"...By strange coincidence, it is from these countries that the main stream of migrant workers goes to Russia.... With such a density of biological centers monitoring safety, Uzbekistan has experienced several strange epidemics since 2011, and the diseases remain unknown..."*

*"...And the concern of Ukrainian opposition deputies, who noticed strange laboratories, was caused not only by the current coronavirus pandemic, but also by local outbreaks of incomprehensible diseases of recent years. For example, in 2016, immediately 20 Ukrainian troops died from a virus similar to the flu. Another 200 people were hospitalized...."*

*It is easy to guess why the US biolaboratory is clinging to the borders of Russia. They need local material for research. But why? Really, someone in their right mind is able to start a biological war? Logic says yes. Total, unlikely, but local - completely. And I asked Igor Giorgadze a question that tormented me, which there was especially no one to ask:*

*- Is there any common sense in the assumption that this belt of laboratories is preparation for a war that will take place in unprecedented, previously unknown forms?*

*"...Viruses will be used to destabilize the country, undermine its economy and change power. This is how the idea and technology of the "color revolutions" was successfully used. The state did not seem to collapse, but the power changed radically ..."*

*"I believe that the Third World War began immediately after the Second," Giorgadze replied. - In 1991, the first goal of the Third World War was achieved, they destroyed the USSR, they celebrated the victory. But the war continues, only against Russia. And this war is changing its form. Analyzing today's events, I note that even if the spread of this virus was not specifically planned, it turned out to be realistic to use the pandemic in their tactical and strategic plans.... Therefore, we can consider the pandemic as one of the scenarios of the Third World War, a prologue or rehearsal - this version cannot be discarded...."*



## Faith and Russian Military Victory

**OE Watch Commentary:** Coronavirus concerns have delayed the opening and dedication of the new Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces located in Patriot Park, about an hour outside of Moscow. Once these concerns abate, this huge cathedral will be dedicated to the Soviet Union's victory in the "Great Fatherland War" (WW II) where it will serve as an apt metaphor for a current Russian perspective regarding faith and military power.

While the USSR was officially atheist, some Russians today credit their WW II victory to divine intercession. The accompanying excerpt, from an article in the normally agnostic military weekly, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, describes a number of military incidents from WW II (and later) where "faith helped fighters in the most hopeless situations." The author begins by describing the challenges the Soviet military



*German soldiers defending Königsberg, January, 1945.*

Source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R98401 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv\\_Bild\\_183-R98401,\\_K%C3%B6nigsberg,\\_Volkssturm.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-R98401,_K%C3%B6nigsberg,_Volkssturm.jpg), CC-BY-SA 3.0

faced toward the end of the war, when trying to "storm Königsberg [Kaliningrad] in April 1945," emphasizing the many layers of defense which protected this stronghold. He asserts that "there are things in the story of the capture of Königsberg that are hard for a materialist to believe," relating how shortly before the Nazi capitulation, a "religious procession moving along the front line" forced the "Nazis suddenly [to] drop their weapons and...run away." Later, when the Soviets broke through, they asked a captured soldier why they had stopped shooting, and the German "replied 'the weapon refused.'"

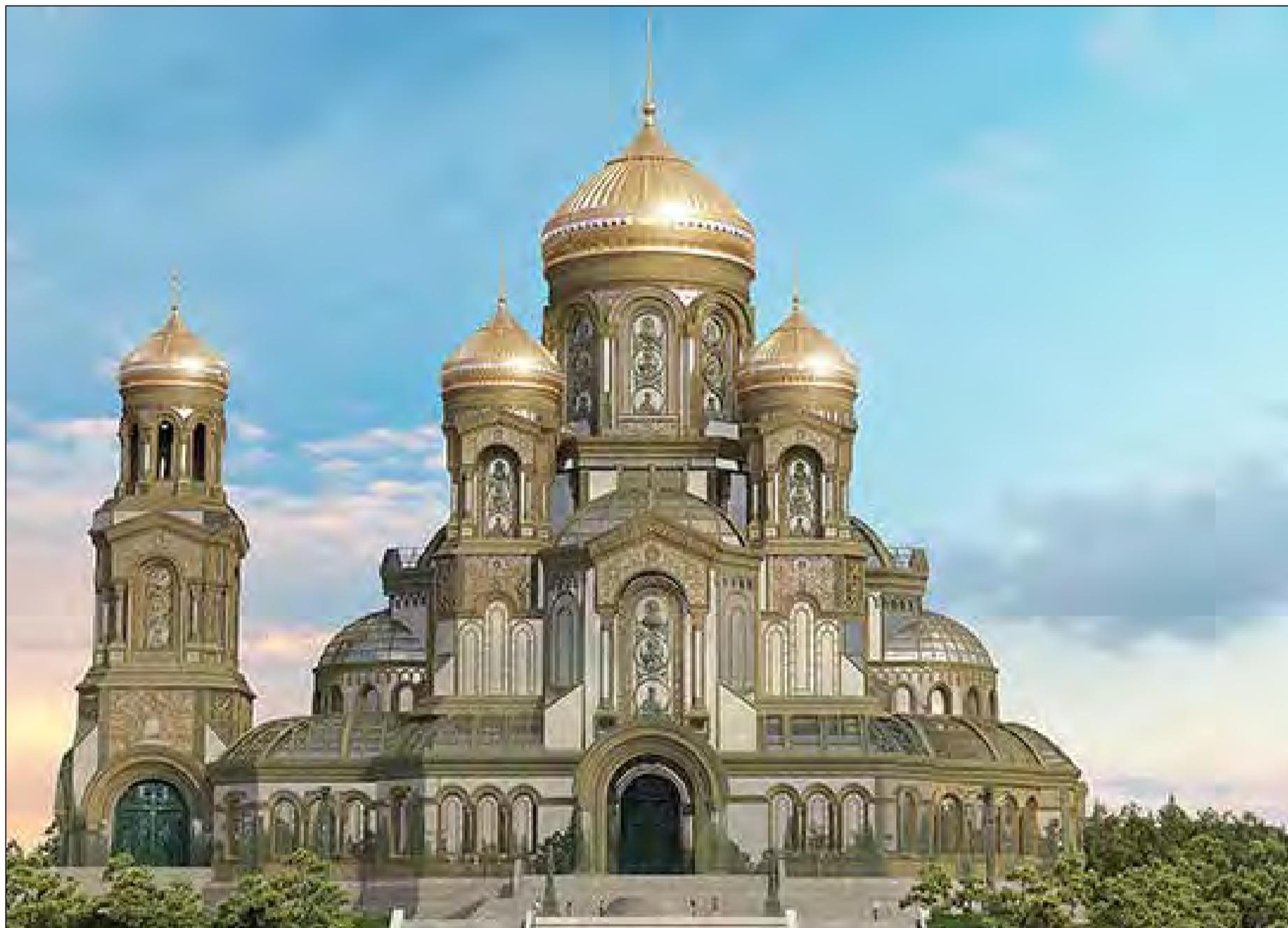
The author goes on to describe "many other stories of miraculous salvation during the years of the great war," questioning "how do we, raised in the spirit of militant atheism, relate to them? Everyone has the right to draw conclusions." The author's answers point to divine intervention. He recounts other recent examples which he attributes to providence, for instance, recalling that during the funeral ceremony "honoring the Kursk crew, seagulls appeared in the sky (185 kilometers to the coast) and the rays of the sun broke through the cloudy horizon." The author concludes the article by asserting that even though "the buckles of the belts of Hitler's soldiers were stamped with the words 'God with us,'... the Lord, according to veterans of the Great Patriotic War, was on the side of the Red Army... [because] God is always on the side of those who serve and fight for a just cause."

Not that long ago, when describing the outcome of previous conflicts, Soviet historians would often point to Marxist-Leninist teachings for an explanation. Soviet military victories (to include WW II) reflected the veracity and inevitability of the communist cause. Since that ideology has been largely discredited, some Russian writers have adopted a new existential formula to explain their victories. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***"The buckles of the belts of Hitler's soldiers were stamped with the words 'God with us,'... but the Lord, according to veterans of the Great Patriotic War, was on the side of the Red Army..."***



## Continued: Faith and Russian Military Victory



Model of Russia's Main Military Cathedral.

Source: Russian Federation Defence Ministry, <http://mil.ru/et/news/more.htm?id=12206176@egNews>, CCA SA 4.0 Intl

Source: Valery Gromak, "С кем был Бог (Who was God with)," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 13 April 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/56444>

*Faith helped fighters in the most hopeless situations.*

*About the storm of Königsberg in April 1945, many bright pages were written. But few people know that our soldiers took the impregnable fortress city thanks to courage and heroism, but also with ... God's help.*

*The Germans began the construction of well-developed, long-term engineering structures on the territory of East Prussia in 1932 and continued to develop them before the attack on the Soviet Union. After the defeat at Stalingrad in 1943, the Nazis intensely resumed this construction.... As a result, a number of modern fortified areas were created in the Königsberg area, including engineering-friendly frontal and cut-off positions. Large defense nodes were saturated with long-term structures....*

*There are things in the story of the capture of Königsberg that are hard for a materialist to believe.... On April 7, at the Annunciation, they were waiting for the battle and suddenly saw a religious procession moving along the front line, Orthodox priests walking at the head of the column carry the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God with chants befitting the moment. And then something unbelievable happened. Seeing the procession, the Nazis suddenly dropped their weapons... They took Königsberg with God's help... When the captured German was asked why they had stopped shooting, he replied: 'The weapon refused.'*

*...There were many stories of miraculous salvation during the years of the great war.... How do we, raised in the spirit of militant atheism, relate to them? Everyone has the right to draw conclusions.... I will bring two more stories that I myself have witnessed.... Something similar happened during the laying of the Orthodox cross and wreaths at the point of death of the Kursk nuclear submarine... After honoring the Kursk crew, seagulls appeared in the sky (185 kilometers to the coast) and the rays of the sun broke through the cloudy horizon. For many non-religious people, this has become a landmark.*

*On the buckles of the belts of Hitler's soldiers the words "God with us" were stamped. But the Lord, according to veterans of the Great Patriotic War, was on the side of the Red Army, its soldiers and commanders. God is always on the side of those who serve a just cause and fight for a just cause.*



## Chinese Help to Restore the Kuznetsov

**OE Watch Commentary:** Much has been written over the past several years regarding the improved relations between Russia and China, particularly in the military realm. This relationship became ever more important for the Kremlin leadership after its aggression against Ukraine and subsequent sanctions from Western countries. Having been restricted from accessing key markets in the west, Russia has increasingly looked east for trade and the acquisition of essential products. The accompanying excerpt from the *Colonel Cassad* blog site describes how China plans to provide Russia with both the necessary equipment and personnel expertise to help repair Russia's sole, much beleaguered aircraft carrier, Admiral Kuznetsov.



*The Admiral Kuznetsov in 2012.*

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Admiral\\_Kuznetsov\\_aircraft\\_carrier.jp,g](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Admiral_Kuznetsov_aircraft_carrier.jp,g) CCA 4.0 Intl

As described last month (see: “No Dock for the Kuznetsov?” *OE Watch*, May 2020), Russian plans to construct a new dock to repair this carrier have run aground, and as the excerpt points out, “Russia is powerless to change this situation [on its own], since the design and construction of an aircraft carrier is a very complex process, and Russia does not have auxiliary equipment and even modern shipyards.” Enter China. The article describes how “Russia has ordered a 1,000-ton gantry crane and an 800-ton crane in China, and China will also send appropriate technical personnel to participate in the construction of the Russian shipyard.”

While there is no mention of what this assistance will cost, the article does suggest that China is not about to make such a gift, pointing out that “it’s better to teach a person how to fish than just give him one.” The article concludes with rich hyperbole regarding the brotherly warmth between the two countries, asserting that this deal “also allows Russia to understand the correct choice of China as a partner,” and that “relations between China and Russia are a bit like gentlemen’s relations - simple and pragmatic.” One comment from a Russian helps to balance such hyperbole: “China has no partners, only satellites. Partnership is only between equals.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“China’s actions show its sincerity, and this also allows Russia to understand the correct choice of China as a partner...”***

**Source:** “Понять правильность выбора Китая в качестве партнера (Understand the correct choice of China as a partner),” *Colonel Cassad* blog, 14 May 2020. <https://coloneccasad.livejournal.com/5867053.html#cutid1>

*The Chinese boast that they will help Russia with the equipment and personnel for the new Russian shipyard, where large-capacity ships are to be built. At a crucial moment, China gave Russia a generous gift. The Russian Navy is very pleased. It is worth making friends with such a partner....*

*...The Russian Navy has not received new warships for a long time. The only aircraft carrier, Admiral Kuznetsov, was damaged and cannot be used during operations. Therefore, under the double pressure of external concerns and internal problems, Russia began to actively cooperate with China, trying to turn the tide. The giant energy agreements reached between China and Russia last year are of great importance for Russia’s economic development.*

*As you know, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Navy inherited only one aircraft carrier - Admiral Kuznetsov. Today, this already insufficiently powerful veteran cannot satisfy the needs of the Russian Navy at all. Russia is powerless to change this situation [on its own], since the design and construction of an aircraft carrier is a very complex process, and Russia does not have auxiliary equipment and even modern shipyards.*

*However, at present, Russia has ordered a 1,000-ton gantry crane and an 800-ton crane in China, and China will also send appropriate technical personnel to participate in the construction of the Russian shipyard. As the old proverb says: “It’s better to teach a person how to fish than just give him one.” At the same time, China’s actions show its sincerity, and this also allows Russia to understand the correct choice of China as a partner.*

*In fact, relations between China and Russia are a bit like gentlemen’s relations - simple and pragmatic. We cannot ignore each other’s real difficulties. This year marks 70 years since the establishment of Sino-Russian diplomatic relations. I hope that through the joint efforts of the two countries the world can become more peaceful and stable in the new year!*

*Reader Comment: nelson654*

*China has no partners, only satellites. Partnership is only between equals...*



## Toward a “System of Regional Security in the Arctic”: A Russian Perspective

**OE Watch Commentary:** In a recent article from the Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal, *Military Thought*, on the subject of military security in the Arctic, one Russian General Staff analyst noted a paradox: There were many nations and organizations with Arctic development interests but no “functioning...regional security system.” The article’s main purposes are to outline the “disintegrated...and artificially muddled” nature of the various entities’ relationships and to spotlight the existing Arctic Council as the premier institution to develop a cooperative regime, which the author, Colonel O. Gavrilov, labels a “System of Regional Security in the Arctic” (abbreviated from Russian language as “ASRS”).

The article helpfully lists various leading organizations, including five Arctic states, three sub-Arctic states, EU countries (that border on Arctic regions), NATO member states (that border on Arctic regions), the Arctic Council (which are the eight Arctic and sub-Arctic states), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Defense Cooperation, and the Asia Forum of Polar Research. The article also notes but does not fully list that there are 20 other nongovernmental organizations associated with the Arctic.



Complex expedition to the North Pole, organized by the Expedition Centre of the Russian Defence Ministry, 20 April 2017.

Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, [https://eng.mil.ru/en/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12119454@egNews, CCA 4.0](https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12119454@egNews, CCA 4.0)

Gavrilov describes a contradiction between this large cast of Arctic-interested parties to the collective “muddle” in terms of Arctic security and security policy. Besides a litany of anti-Russian positions and actions that he catalogs from the various actors, he particularly offers the criticism that the Arctic Council—one of only two that Russia belongs to—currently “does not take up issues of military security.” However, he sees in that organization, comprised of Russia, USA, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland, a less-muddled deficiency that if corrected with an ASRS could “act as a regulator of international relations and reduce the level of dangers and threats” and would benefit Russia in terms of its military-political policies. He breaks down the ASRS into 24 “manifestations of regularities,” or establishing principles. These are not detailed requirements of what the ASRS would look like or should do, rather the list is a seemingly esoterically range principles of an ASRS designed to “unite existing views” of the participating entities and save them “from serious errors.” These foundational concepts include such things as “Communicativeness” to “Historicity” to “Tolerance” to “Goal-setting.” The “forms and methods”—a signaling term of the Russian General Staff—states that the ASRS’s objectives should “stay within the international law field.”

While this article does not develop the details of the ASRS enough for outside predictive insight into specific Russian General Staff plans for the Arctic, it, nevertheless, shows one likely approach that will be explored through their military science. And this is not unexpected. The way the General Staff sees it at this point, the current status quo favors the Russian military in the Arctic and an ASRS would promote Russian national interest and a more calculable way for Russia to maintain its leading position in the militarization of the Arctic region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**

**“One has to admit with regret that at the moment this kind of universally recognized system [Arctic regional security system] does not exist, and this is the main problem of the Arctic region.”**

**Source:** EO. Gavrilov, “The Condition and Development Prospects of a Regional Security System in the Arctic, *Military Thought* (in English), Vol. 28, No. 3 (2019), pp. 1-19.

“...many contradictions between Arctic and sub-Arctic countries nowadays fail to be properly settled. In this context, it appears expedient to outline the principle political mechanisms of uncovering dangers and threats in the Arctic...”

Above all, it is necessary to point out that the Arctic region now boasts a fairly well formed system of international relations...

...The presence of so large a number of international organizations on the Arctic suggests that the region is of special interest to many states, and even more importantly, that the system of relationships among them is intricate, disintegrated, and artificially muddled.”



# Looking Beyond China: Asian Actors in the Russian Arctic (Part One)

by Sergey Sukhankin

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**OE Watch Commentary:** Among the non-Arctic states seeking partnership with Russia as a means to increase their presence in the northern polar region, China has become by far the most visible player. Yet, other emerging actors—India and Japan—should also be noted. (This is the first of a two-part series that addresses Asian actors in the Russian Arctic. While Part One deals with India, Part Two will focus on Japan.)

On 14 January, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that New Delhi and Moscow are tightening cooperation in the development of Arctic-based oil and natural gas projects. This information was confirmed by Indian Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan. Following these statements, Russian state-owned petroleum giant Rosneft concluded an agreement with Indian Oil, envisaging the latter's annual procurement of two million tons of crude from the Russian High North. Other Indian energy firms, including Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum, were also reportedly negotiating contracts with Rosneft.

More far-reaching news arrived on 5 February, when, following negotiations in New Delhi with Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin, Minister Pradhan announced that Indian companies would be joining the Vostok Oil extraction project. Expected to begin operations in 2024, Vostok Oil (according to Rosneft) will be pivotal in transforming the Russian Arctic by contributing to the development of 15 new industry towns in the region, two airports and a seaport, as well creating at least 100,000 new jobs. The main strategic advantage of this project is its geographic proximity to the Northern Sea Route (NSR)—Russia's much-hyped east-west maritime transportation corridor (under continued development), which hugs the country's Arctic coast and is anticipated to become an engine of Russian economic growth for decades to come.

The involvement of India in Vostok Oil was motivated by two important aspects. First, despite its geographic remoteness from the region, India is gradually becoming an important Arctic player in its own right. The first signs of interest emerged between 2007 and 2008, when India conducted its first scientific expedition to the Arctic and then established the Himadri Station at Svalbard. India managed to secure Observer status in the Arctic Council (AC) on 12 May 2013, an event celebrated as New Delhi's "Arctic victory." And in 2015, during his visit to Moscow, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted the strategic importance of India's presence in the AC, acknowledging the "high cooperative potential of Indian-Russian ties in the Arctic region." As a non-Arctic state—and thus unable to participate in local affairs unilaterally—but strategically interested in cultivating a regional presence, India will have to closely cooperate with Russia. Its involvement in the Vostok Oil project appears to underscore this approach.

Second, Indian interest in the Arctic region—initially limited to pursuing scientific research—is progressively acquiring visible geo-economic features. This trend is inseparable from Modi's strategic aim of achieving energy security for India through the diversification of energy suppliers. Russia, with its vast Arctic resources, is deemed one of the main elements of this Indian energy strategy. It acquired concrete shape between 2014 and 2018, when Indian corporations, including ONGC Videsh, and the political leaderships of the two countries signed a series of agreements/memoranda pertaining to the intensification of their partnership in the Arctic region via cooperation on oil and gas projects there. The fifth Eastern Economic Forum (EEF), hosted in Vladivostok on 4-6 September 2019, became an important milestone, when the Russian side specifically "invited" the Indians to take part in its Arctic projects. Importantly, several days prior to the summit, Pradhan argued that India is interested in establishing an "energy bridge" with Russia—an initiative premised on three main types of energy resources to be imported from Russia:

– Oil (primarily concerned with Vankor-based oil deposits), which is to be managed by such Indian corporations as ONGC, Oil India, Indian Oil Corporation as well as Bharat Petroresources.

– Liquefied natural gas (LNG—from Yamal-based deposits and the Arctic LNG-2 project), whose consumption in India has increased exponentially. Incidentally, Indian scholars have argued that for India to optimize its LNG consumption and import scheme, the country should study Chinese and German cooperation with Russia.

– Coal (a strategically important commodity for the Indian steel industry), whose imports are to be managed by such Indian corporations as Tata, SAIL, NMDC and Jindal.

However, this excessively promising picture needs to be supplemented by several factors that could affect Russian-Indian cooperation in the High North going forward.

(Continued)



## Continued: Looking Beyond China: Asian Actors in the Russian Arctic (Part One)

First is the sensitive issue of the “internationalization” of the Arctic. While Russia maintains that the Arctic must remain “for Arctic countries,” India sees the region as a part of a global heritage. For Moscow, this narrative represents a strategic threat to its national interests.

Second is the “Chinese factor,” premised on two pillars. On the one hand, India sees Chinese advancements into the region as a strategic threat: in addition to geo-economic and geopolitical calculations, growing Chinese activities there are likely to further pollute the Arctic and speed up adverse climactic changes with global repercussions that can be expected to have a detrimental effect on India. Moreover, India, which supports the denuclearization and demilitarization of the region, has serious concerns over potential Chinese attempts to increase its military involvement north of the Arctic Circle. On the other hand, India feels ill at ease with the development of the Northern Sea Route, which could dramatically diminish the role of the Indian Ocean as a transportation artery between East and West, and at the same time redraw the balance of power between India and China. Namely, a year-round functional NSR with sufficient capacity will remove New Delhi’s ostensible ability at present to (in case of a bilateral conflict) block vessels to and from China passing through the Indian Ocean and the Straits of Malacca carrying strategically important resources and raw materials.

Finally, despite Indian involvement in Russian-backed Arctic projects, New Delhi does not share Moscow’s utilitarian stance on the Arctic due to the former’s potential ecological and climate concerns. Furthermore, inexpensive oil, which seems to be the new long-term reality, could make India more cautious about investing in expensive Arctic oil or LNG projects. **End OE Watch Commentary (Sukhankin)**

Over the years, FMSO has studied and written about foreign perspectives on pandemics. One example is below. For more information on previous FMSO work on pandemics including Ebola, search OE Watch issues:

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

### Avian Influenza: Potential Impact on Sub-Saharan Military Populations with High Rates of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

By Robert Feldman and Kent Nickell

Before COVID-19 grabbed all of the headlines, health officials were also looking at several other diseases that could potentially reach pandemic level. One of these was H5N1, commonly known as avian influenza or bird flu. This article, which originally appeared in *Military Medicine*, discusses the possibility that in people infected with both H5N1 and HIV, the AIDS from HIV might suppress the immune reaction to allow further mutation of H5N1 to occur, with a possible disease outbreak from the new strain to follow.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/200034>



## Russian Airborne Troops Conduct High Altitude Arctic Parachute Drop

**OE Watch Commentary:** The first accompanying passage from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses an airborne operation in Arctic conditions that entailed soldiers of an Airborne Troops elite subunit conducting a high-altitude jump from 10,000 meters (32,808 feet) and landing at the designated area “with precision accuracy.” Personnel of the 45th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade apparently took this high-altitude Arctic jump in stride. As the passage notes, the Arablet-2 steerable parachute proved its worth as did the cold-weather gear manufactured by the Kalashnikov factories. The paratroopers’ mission was to protect an isolated Russian air-defense site. As the second passage discusses, after landing in the snow, the paratroopers began the main stage of the tactical and special exercise including reconnaissance and search operations.



As the first passage notes, the goal of the exercise was to “defend the Russian infrastructure in the region from outside aggression and to rehearse an evacuation,” also pointing out that “Denmark, Canada, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, the US, and even China are competing for the Arctic.”

*For the first time in world history, Russian paratroopers made a landing as part of a group on new parachute systems from a height of 10,000 meters in arctic conditions.*

Source: Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/multimedia/photo/gallery.htm?id=75731@cmsPhotoGallery>, CCA 4.0

The “Arctic Trefoil” refers to the shape of the large self-contained living and working facility completed in 2017. Two of Russia’s legendary paratroopers, Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Deputy Defense Minister, Colonel-General Andrei Serdyukov, Commander of the Airborne Forces observed the jump. Readers may remember General Yevkurov for his 12 June 1999, 500-kilometer march to seize the Pristina International Airport ahead of NATO forces to ensure a Russian presence in Kosovo after the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“Today, we have conducted a group air insertion of personnel on the new special purpose parachute system in the Arctic from an altitude of 10,000 meters with the use of oxygen equipment and the subsequent accomplishment of the combat training missions for the first time in world history. No one has ever done that prior to us.... This is General of the Army Sergey Shoygu’s direct order and we have successfully accomplished it.”***

***-Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov***



## Continued: Russian Airborne Troops Conduct High Altitude Arctic Parachute Drop

**Source:** Unattributed, “Арктический трилистник” защитили Арбалетом (They defended an Arctic Trefoil with a Crossbow),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27 April 2020. [http://www.ng.ru/armies/2020-04-27/8\\_7854\\_arctic.html](http://www.ng.ru/armies/2020-04-27/8_7854_arctic.html)

### ***They defended an Arctic Trefoil with a Crossbow***

The “Arbalet-2” [crossbow-2] parachute system and “Kalashnikov” Concern’s new equipment permitted the conduct of an airborne operation in Arctic conditions. From an altitude of 10 kilometers, the soldiers of an Airborne Troops elite subunit from Moscow’s Kubinka landed at the designated area with precision accuracy and conducted exercises to block a foreign state’s special forces team alongside an “Arctic Trefoil” military base on the Franz Josef Land Archipelago. This is one of six strategic facilities, which the Ministry of Defense has deployed along the Northern Maritime Route that is strategically important for Russia. It not only ensures the security of merchant shipping in arctic waters but also serves as an outpost, which forces back the employment line of American “Tomahawk” cruise missiles. These missiles will be able to reach the positions of our most state-of-the-art “Sarmat” strategic nuclear missiles, which will be deployed near Orenburg.

“Today, we have conducted a group air insertion of personnel on the new special purpose parachute system in the Arctic from an altitude of 10,000 meters with the use of oxygen equipment and the subsequent accomplishment of the combat training missions for the first time in world history. No one has ever done that prior to us”, Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov reported. “This is General of the Army Sergey Shoygu’s direct order and we have successfully accomplished it.”

Denmark, Canada, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, the US, and even China are competing for the Arctic. Each of these countries has its own reasons. According to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Arctic states possess the sovereign right to develop the mineral resources within the exclusive economic zones that belong to them. This is 200 nautical miles from the coast and 350 nautical miles - from the continental shelf... Russia resorted to preventive measures to secure its right to the possession of the territories along its coast in the Arctic Zone. Six military bases are deployed there today: on Kotelnyy Island (the Novosibirsk Islands), Aleksandra Land (part of the Franz Josef Land Archipelago), Sredniy (Severnaya Zemlya), and also in the Village of Rogachevo (Novaya Zemlya), on Mys Shmidt (Cape Schmidt), and on Wrangel Island (part of Chukotka Autonomous Okrug). Besides these, there are more than a dozen military airfields, air defense missile systems’ positions, and military ports here. This entire infrastructure operates round-the-clock.

The “Arctic Trefoil” is located at the entrance from the European Portion of the Continent to Asia. Approximately 150 Russian...servicemen are working autonomously there. Contact with the mainland is limited by sea conditions and the capabilities of Military Transport Aviation. But they are not subject totally to the will of nature. VDV [Airborne Troops] exercises just demonstrated this. They did not simply conduct a landing from a record altitude of 10,000 meters but also demonstrated this type of troops’ new capabilities for combat in adverse climatic conditions.

All of the paratroopers completed special training at the VDV 309th Special Parachute Training Center in Ryazan. All of them were equipped with special breathing masks for high altitudes. Their descent onto the ice used the latest “Arbalet-2” parachute systems. They were developed to meet the requirements of VDV reconnaissance and special subunits. They allow paratroopers to jump from all types of military transport aircraft and helicopters at speeds of up to 400 kilometers per hour. These parachutes can handle additional equipment exceeding two times a paratrooper’s body weight. The paratroopers had new Arctic clothing and survival gear which allows them to function for a long time in the unfavorable arctic weather.

This is not the VDV’s first experience in airborne assaults in the Arctic. They began in 2014. At that time, as now, an airborne assault force landed on drift ice. The goal of the exercise was the same - to defend the Russian infrastructure in the region from outside aggression and to rehearse an evacuation. The complexity of the event increased because the military personnel parachuted onto an unprepared landing zone. Navigation instruments and communication gear operate poorly near the North Pole and the weather changes frequently. Nevertheless, the VDV accomplished their assigned mission. The second phase had difficulties as the weather deterioration prevented the first attempt to extract the paratroopers. The second attempt demonstrated the capability of the Il-76MD military transport aircraft. The aircraft not only supported the landing of the assault force and a cargo drop but also conducted a landing at the new Franz Josef Land Archipelago’s military airfield.

**Source:** Thomas Nilsen, “Paratrooper jump at 10,000 meters over Russian Arctic base,” *The Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 26 April 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/04/paratroopers-jump-10000-meters-over-russian-arctic-base>

### ***Paratrooper jump at 10,000 meters over Russian Arctic base***

The jump took place over Aleksandra Land, the westernmost island on the archipelago of Franz Josef Land. Here, at 80 degrees north, Russia’s Arctic forces have built its northernmost military complex with a new 2,500-meter-long runway and a huge building infrastructure.

The Nagurskoye base is equipped with the latest gear for Arctic military warfare. That includes snowmobiles, personnel carriers, helicopters, radar, and anti-aircraft missile systems like the S-300 aimed at strengthening control over Arctic air space....

With the new runway, bombers like the MiG-31K can use the airport. So can large transport planes. The airport is built about three kilometers west of the runway Russia abandoned after the end of the Cold War.

After landing in the snow, the paratroopers began the main stage of the tactical and special exercise. Several dozen of them conducted reconnaissance and search operations aimed at destroying the conditional enemy sabotage and reconnaissance group... The soldiers also used a UAV in their search for the enemy.

The exercise continued for three days along the northern shores of Aleksandra Land, around Cape Nimrod, close to the eastern edge of the largest glacier on the island. In the end, the soldiers advanced to their collection point and went back to the Nagurskoye base.

Lt. Gen. Yunus-Bek Yevkurov promises more training like this. “We will conduct similar exercises annually, in different regions of the Arctic, with different compositions of the participants involved and at different phases of training.” Before being appointed Deputy Minister of Defense last summer, Yevkurov headed the Republic of Ingushetia for more than ten years. At Franz Josef Land, Yevkurov observed the exercise together with another Deputy Defense Minister, Colonel-General Andrei Serdyukov, Commander of the Airborne Forces. He headed up the Russian effort in Syria last summer.



## Russia's Baltic Fleet Forces Conduct Extensive Exercise in Kaliningrad

**OE Watch Commentary:** NATO's 'Cold Response' military exercise in Norway was cancelled midway due to the COVID-19 outbreak (see: "Russia's Hot Response to NATO's 'Cold Response' Exercise," *OE Watch*, April 2020). Defender 2020, NATO's military exercise facing Kaliningrad, was also cancelled/postponed for the same reason. Russia, however, conducted her counter exercise in Kaliningrad and pulled out all the stops, as discussed in the accompanying passage from *Izvestia*. Like all countries, Russia is suffering from the coronavirus outbreak and even cancelled the huge 9 May Victory Day parade in Moscow because of the virus. Their rationale may be that wars are fought alongside epidemics, so major training for war should also continue despite disease outbreaks. The American War for Independence was fought during the course of a major smallpox epidemic that nearly cost Washington his army (see: *Pox Americana: The Great American Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* by Elizabeth Fenn). **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“Large-scale exercises of the Baltic Fleet forces in Kaliningrad Oblast occurred in the last 10 days of April.... A Military Department spokesman told Izvestia that the Baltic Fleet maneuvers were based on the combat training plan and that all missions were accomplished.”***

**Source:** Dmitriy Boltentkov and Roman Kretsul, "The Baltic Fortress: the maneuvers in Kaliningrad Oblast demonstrate how the Armed Forces repel aggression," *Izvestia*, 3 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1006630/dmitrii-boltenkov-roman-kretcul/baltiiskaia-krepost-cto-pokazali-manevry-v-kaliningradskoi-oblasti>

### ***The Baltic Fortress: the maneuvers in Kaliningrad Oblast demonstrate how the Armed Forces repel aggression***

*Large-scale exercises of the Baltic Fleet forces in Kaliningrad Oblast occurred in the last 10 days of April.... A Military Department spokesman told Izvestia that the Baltic Fleet maneuvers were based on the combat training plan and that all missions were accomplished.*

#### ***In the Sky***

*The Baltic Exclave is the country's most vulnerable region since it has no land ties either with Russia or with allied Belarus. Contemporary military conflicts show that much is decided in the initial period of combat - the first two to three days. This combat also determines the further course of operations.*

*The primary mission of the Baltic Fleet is to prevent the enemy from conducting massive missile-aircraft strikes against its facilities and the infrastructure of Kaliningrad Oblast. It also needs to lay minefields to counter an enemy amphibious landing and to conduct a land defense. All of these actions were rehearsed during the course of the exercises that were conducted during the last 10 days of April.*

*The A-50U Early Radar Warning Aircraft "Sergey Atayants" flew in to command and control the air forces and air defense forces in Kaliningrad Oblast. Those unique aircraft are rare guests in the sky over the Baltic.*

*Under the command and control of the A-50U, Su-30SM and Su-24M strike aircraft conducted a series of sorties, during the course of which they refined the conduct of strikes against airborne and coastal targets. Combat helicopters, among which were Ka-29s, which recently arrived in the Fleet, also accomplished a broad range of combat missions. And two Tu-160 strategic missile aircraft became involved in the maneuvers over the Baltic Sea on 29 April. In general, this major exercise was the first for the recently created Kaliningrad 132nd Composite Aviation Division.*

*The large-scale aerial maneuvers attracted the attention of the NATO countries. In particular, Belgian fighter aircraft "intercepted" the A-50U. They escorted the Tu-160s and some other of our aircraft on various sectors of the routes. The Russian pilots gave as good as they got - Su-27s "intercepted" a Swedish reconnaissance aircraft and also unduly aggressive Belgian F-16s.*

*On the whole, Kaliningrad Oblast is adequately protected with air defense systems, beginning with S-400 long-range complexes and ending with on-board ship systems. Due to the proximity of Baltiysk Naval Base to the NATO countries' borders, the PVO crews will not have time to build up in the event of the initiation of combat operations. This is precisely why the ship air defense systems have been included in the region's defense loop.*

#### ***At Sea***

*In the last several years, the Baltic Fleet has received four new small missile ships (MRKs), which are armed with "Kalibr" missile systems. The MRKs "Mytishchi", "Sovetsk", "Liven", and "Passat" have become part of the fleet. They conducted artillery firing and missile launches together with the Missile Boats "Morshansk" and R-257. Unfortunately, the Baltic Sea's maritime commerce conditions do not permit the conduct of full-fledged missile firings. Consequently, the launches were electronic.*

*The Baltic Fleet Corvettes "Soobrazitelnyy", "Sterebugshchiy", and "Stoykiy" also rehearsed missile and artillery firings at airborne, naval surface, and coastal targets.*

*The Large Landing Ships (BDK) "Korolev" and "Kaliningrad", the Small Hovercraft Landing Ship "Yevgeniy Kocheshkov", and small landing craft conducted an amphibious landing of naval infantrymen on the coast during ... the exercises. The BDKs also laid naval mines. This obstacle would help defend the coast of Kaliningrad Oblast from an enemy amphibious assault force and from the operations of the North Atlantic Alliance countries' submarines.*

*Antisubmarine warfare ships conducted a search and rehearsed the "destruction" of submarines.... Minesweepers, including the latest Project 12700 Ship "Aleksandr Obukhov", were involved with the mine-clearing of the water area. All Baltic Fleet ships essentially put to sea during the exercises.*

#### ***On Land***

*The Baltic Fleet ground force was recently reinforced with new equipment - "Msta" and "Pion" artillery systems and "Smerch" multiple rocket launcher systems. A tank regiment has also joined the 11th Army Corps. In the future, one of the motorized rifle brigades will upgrade into a full-fledged division. All of the new ground force equipment, was involved for the first time during these exercises.*

*The Baltic Fleet forces conducted these major exercises, despite the coronavirus pandemic that is raging in the world and in Russia. The exercises were a serious inspection of the entire oblast's defense system. Judging by the careful attention NATO paid to them, maneuvers were successful.*



## Northern Fleet Expands Intelligence Support Vessels

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to the *Barents Sea Independent Observer* and *Svobodnaya Pressa*, the Northern Fleet has yet another ice class scientific research ship to explore, map the Arctic seabed and conduct intelligence information. The ship was named after Physicist Anatoli Aleksandrov, who became famous after devising a method for demagnetizing Soviet ships during World War II. He also worked on the design of the Soviet atomic bomb and later on the RBMK nuclear reactor that exploded in Chernobyl in 1986. The vessel was built as part of the Main Directorate for Deep Sea Research [GUGI], which conducts underwater research and intelligence gathering. GUGI has six nuclear-powered mini-submarines and a host of support vessels. (Also see: “For Those in Peril Under the Sea,” *OE Watch*, August 2019 and “Cruising in a Stretch-Submarine,” *OE Watch*, June 2019.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“More than a year after schedule, the Zvezdochka yard in Severodvinsk, northern Russia, has officially handed over the “Akademik Aleksandrov” to the Northern Fleet. The ship is the 3rd in the Navy’s new series of special-purpose ships made for transportation of big-dimension military and special equipment, as well as search and rescue operations.”***

**Source:** Atle Staalesen, “Navy gets new vessel for secret underwater operations in Arctic,” *The Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 14 April 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2020/04/navy-gets-new-vessel-secret-russian-underwater-operations-arctic>

### ***Navy gets new vessel for secret underwater operations in Arctic***

*More than a year after schedule, the Zvezdochka yard in Severodvinsk, northern Russia, has officially handed over the “Akademik Aleksandrov” to the Northern Fleet. The ship is the 3rd in the Navy’s new series of special-purpose ships made for transportation of big-dimension military and special equipment, as well as search and rescue operations. It was put on the water in Severodvinsk in May 2017 and has since undergone final construction works and testing. Its sister ship “Zvezdochka” is already serving in the Northern Fleet, while the Pacific Fleet operates the “Akademik Kovalyov”. A fourth ship of the kind is currently under construction at the yard in Severodvinsk.*

*The “Akademik Aleksandrov” will be involved in some of the most top secret operations of the Russian Navy.... [The] vessel was built on order from the Main Directorate for Deep Sea Research [GUGI], the top secret unit directly subordinated the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces. Russia has expanded its fleet of special purpose vessels recently. Several of them are built for seabed operations possibly including sabotage operations against underwater cables. The “Akademik Aleksandrov” and its sister vessels are believed of carrying small-scale submarines for special operations and testing new weapons, including the Poseidon underwater nuclear drone.*

**Source:** Vladimir Tuchkov, “Secret Intelligence Collector Akademik Alexandrov will approach Trump in the area of Alaska: the Defense Ministry’s Main Directorate for Deep Water Research is Solving two Global Missions,” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 14 April 2020. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/262548/>

### ***Secret Intelligence Collector Akademik Alexandrov will approach Trump in the area of Alaska***

*Akademik Alexandrov is a secret ship. And, although several of its technical specifications are not secret, one can only guess as to the composition, purpose and capabilities of the special equipment....The ship has a displacement of 5,800 tons. A length of 96 m, a beam of 18 meters, and a draft of 9.3 meters. It develops a speed of 14 knots. The crew is 65 men. It is equipped with two electric motors with a power of 3,262 hp each. It has a helicopter pad to take helicopters on board, but does not possess its own helicopter....There are three electro-hydraulic cranes... The S2500 – possesses a record cargo capacity among domestic ship-based cranes, lifting 100 tons to a boom reach of up to 25 meters. The S120 has a telescoping boom, the maximum extension of which is 20 meters. This crane is equipped with a device to compensate for dynamic loads and a pitch compensation system, and positions cargo underwater to a depth of 500 meters. The S15 is a crane manipulator with a cargo capacity of up to 2 tons....*

*The ship is intended to carry out scientific and research operations on the Arctic shelf and Antarctic seas, supporting the operation of special equipment, monitoring areas of fleet activity, areas of the conduct of tests, position location of potentially dangerous bottom objects, the installation of bottom monitoring/measurement and other equipment. It can also support search and rescue operations, towing, the installation of military and special equipment, and the tracking and lifting of sunken naval equipment.*

*However the main mission for which the Akademik Alexandrov was built...are intelligence collection and sabotage operations...It is equipped for deep-water submersion of diving teams. It must have television guidance equipment, which can operate at depths down to 6,000 meters... Deepwater intelligence collection is carried out against underwater cable lines of the US and the NATO countries, over which secret information is transmitted and circulates in naval networks of the North Atlantic alliance. It is read with the aid of special devices, attached to the cable, and transmitted to the carrier-ship of the intelligence collection equipment. By this method it is also possible to introduce jamming into the cable line with the goal of temporarily disrupting the operation of information trunk lines....*

*Oceanographic research ships can gather important data extremely effectively, placing hydrophones, which capture acoustic waves, disseminated in the water environment on the bottom, near NATO bases. In this way it can track the situation in a ... broad region, identify the movement of submarines, capture the acoustic signatures of new submarines and surface ships, recognize the specifics of operation of this or that equipment of submarine and surface ship bases.*

*The ships could also collect surface – broadcast – radio-technical intelligence. And in this sense, working directly in two environments, is more effective than intelligence collection aircraft....*

*The ship could work in the construction of a network of autonomous robotic bottom base stations (ADS), which will spread hydro-acoustic antennas, able to operate both in a passive as well as in an active mode on the bottom. The ADS would process sonar data received and retransmit it to a command post via a satellite channel. The ADS network is able to monitor the surface and underwater situation over an area of hundreds of cubic kilometers.*

*The ship could also receive relief maps of the sea bottom in sectors explored by the Poseidon underwater nuclear unmanned vehicle. Without such maps the covertness of a strategic unmanned vehicle will be low, since it will have to use active acoustic location for orientation.*



## Russian Electronic Warfare Leverages Artificial Intelligence

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses the capabilities of Russia's first brigade-level EW C2 system, the RB-109A 'Bylina' Automated EW system. The RB-109A reportedly has an artificial intelligence capability, which automates C2 duties. Presumably, this artificial intelligence is a more advanced technology, as the term 'automated' [автоматизированный] is often used to describe Russian systems, but the RB-109A is specifically mentioned to have 'artificial intelligence' [искусственный интеллект]. The excerpted article from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* discusses how the Russian Moskva-1 electronic warfare system also leverages artificial intelligence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



EW The 1L265 Intelligence Vehicle of the 1L267 Moskva-1 System.  
Source: Vitaly Kuzmin via Vitalykuzmin.net, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2017-Static-p4/i-KG92wV3/A>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

***“The new complexes [Bylina] will increase the effectiveness of the employment of EW systems by 40 to 50 percent...”***

***-Viktor Murakhovski, Editor-in-Chief of “Arsenal of the Fatherland” Magazine***

***“A high-level of artificial intelligence is one of the important characteristics of the Moskva-1. For example, during a massive enemy air attack, the system automatically determines the most important targets...”***

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm, Anton Lavrov, and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Видит цель: «Былина» сможет атаковать противника без участия оператора (See the Target: The ‘Bylina’ Will be Able to Attack the Enemy Without an Operator),” *Izvestia* Online, 16 April 2020. <https://iz.ru/1000101/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/vidit-tsel-bylina-smozhet-atakovat-protivnika-bez-uchastiia-operatora>

*The Armed Forces are preparing for massive deliveries of “Bylina” electronic warfare (EW) complexes, which artificial intelligence will control. Units and formations will receive the unique system by 2025. Bylina can analyze the situation and find and classify targets in real time without the operators’ participation. After this, it will determine which systems will better suppress or destroy enemy communications equipment or other equipment. Experts note that the employment of those complexes will significantly increase the effectiveness of the EW systems on the battlefield...The new equipment is capable of tracking the probable enemy’s ships and submarines. The new complexes will increase the effectiveness of the employment of EW systems by 40 percent to 50 percent, “Arsenal of the Fatherland” Magazine editor in chief Viktor Murakhovskiy reported to Izvestiya. “The battlefield’s contemporary information space is saturated with electronic systems — both ours and the enemy’s,” he pointed out. “We are talking about unmanned aerial vehicles, communications systems, and radars. In that situation, it is important to suppress enemy electronics and, in so doing, not interfere with our own.”*

*It is very difficult to accurately take into account all of the nuances of the process in the manual mode. The Bylina will help precisely with this. The system uses elements of artificial intelligence. Based upon the available information, it decides which EW systems, based upon which scheme, on which frequencies, and with what output it needs to operate against some or other targets. If necessary, the Bylina makes changes to the operation of individual components in real time, the expert pointed out. The elements of artificial intelligence permit it to take into account a multitude of variable factors. As a result, the machine will instantaneously make a decision there, where a man will require time to ponder and for additional calculations...*

*The RB-109A Bylina Automated EW equipment control system’s equipment is mounted on five all-terrain trucks. Electronic equipment, communications gear, and also life support equipment will be installed in closed truck beds. That configuration provides full independence and adequately comfortable working conditions for the combat crews in field conditions. Having arrived at the deployment location, the soldiers and officers can immediately begin to accomplish the combat mission.*

**Source:** “радиусе полутысячи километров все под контролем «Москвы» (‘Moskva’ Keeps Everything Under Control Within a Range of 500 km),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 30 March 2020. <https://www.vpk-news.ru/news/56157>

*The Russian Moskva-1 electronic warfare system, which has been supplied to the army since 2015 and has advanced capabilities for controlling the electronic weapons of a potential enemy, has no match in the militaries of other countries...The electronic edition of the Army Standard made this information public. According to the publication, Moskva-1 has a range of up to 400 kilometers with a 360-degree view. The complex has two modules: the 1L265E electronic intelligence module and the 1L266E automated control post for jamming stations.*

*Among other things, the system is designed for the detection of the enemy’s military equipment and cruise missiles by monitoring airspace. Moskva-1 identifies targets, sets the course, measures parameters and trails air radiation sources operating in the radio frequency range.*

*Moskva-1 transmits data on detected enemy targets to either air defense and aviation units for destruction, or to other electronic warfare systems for suppression. Often, the Moskva-1 system works in conjunction with the Krasukha S-4 electronic warfare system. Moskva-1 can simultaneously set tasks for nine electronic warfare and air defense systems. At the same time, Moskva-1 remains invisible to the enemy’s radio surveillance, since it operates in passive radar mode and transmits all information through secure communication channels.*

*A high-level of artificial intelligence is one of the important characteristics of the Moskva-1. For example, during a massive enemy air attack, the system automatically determines the most important targets...*



# The Changing Character of War and the Growing Role of Electronic Warfare

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted interview of Lieutenant General Yuriy Lastochkin, Chief of the Russian Federation's Electronic Warfare Troops, discusses his views on the role and future of electronic warfare. In particular, General Lastochkin discusses the changing character of war, and how Russian electronic warfare capabilities are expanding into "the information and telecommunications environment." The excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses how the Murmansk-BN electronic warfare system can be used to disrupt telecommunications as well as more conventional military purposes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



1RL257E Krasukha-4 EW System.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin via [Vitalykuzmin.net](https://www.vitalykuzmin.net), <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ARMY-2019-Static-part-3/i-BXBvGVL/A>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

***“The traditional frontal collisions of large troop groupings at the strategic and operational level are gradually becoming a thing of the past; remote contactless effect through the entire depth of the enemy battle order becomes the main method of achieving the operational (battle) objective.”***



## Continued: The Changing Character of War and the Growing Role of Electronic Warfare

**Source:** Victor Hudoleyev, “Стражники эфира на правильном пути (Guards of Airwaves on Right Path), *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 15 April 2020. <http://redstar.ru/strazhniki-efira-na-pravilnom-puti/?attempt=1>

### **Yuriy Illarionovich, what is the role of electronic warfare in modern military conflicts?**

*The modern military operations are defined by a widespread use of an entire spectrum of combat information and control systems, functioning in a single information and telecommunications environment; countering those determines the leading role of electronic warfare in modern armed conflicts. I will stress that the emergence of a new field of confrontation -- the information and telecommunications environment -- significantly expands the spectrum of the REB forces and assets' tasks, and places their employment methods within the ranks of important measures for the comprehensive support of the troops (force) groupings' operations in modern conditions. At the same time, the role of electronic warfare at the modern stage is determined by its potential capabilities in electronic suppression of information transmitting channels, in the insertion of "intelligent" jamming into enemy troops and weapons command and control automated systems; electronic protection of own technical equipment information, data transmission and processing from destruction, distortion, reconnaissance, and information leaks through technical channels; comprehensive technical monitoring of the countermeasures effectiveness against enemy technical assets, and the electronic protection of own troops (forces).*

*In addition, conducting electronic warfare makes it possible to exclude (disrupt) the high-precision navigation of precision-guided weapons' carriers, and thereby to reduce the likelihood of suffering damages to critically important industrial and defense infrastructure facilities of the Russian Federation. The experience of combating enemy troops and weapons control systems in regional conflicts of the last decade attests to the fact that the modern information technologies, used in the leading countries' armed forces control systems, make it possible to significantly reduce spatial, time, and information gaps between troop formations and command and control entities. The traditional frontal collisions of large troop groupings at the strategic and operational level are gradually becoming a thing of the past; remote contactless effect through the entire depth of the enemy battle order becomes the main method of achieving the operational (battle) objective...*

### **From your standpoint, which directions of the Electronic Warfare Troops development are especially relevant right now?**

*The analysis of the conflicts of recent years has shown that the main features influencing the development of the electronic warfare troops include: the use of various electronic systems of not only military, but also of civilian (dual) designation, including mass media, satellite, cellular, trunk networks, various social networks, official and amateur radio stations; indoctrination of the population in the conflict zone; the widespread use of unmanned aerial vehicles for reconnaissance, delivering strikes, and conducting electronic warfare; the large-scale use of global navigation satellite systems; the maximal use of technical equipment of all frequency ranges for conducting electronic reconnaissance. These circumstances predetermine the main directions of the REB troops development. These include: the creation of robotized electronic jamming systems; the increase of the capacity of electronic warfare assets and systems; the disruption of communications and data transmission systems of various designations; combating robotic armament systems, military equipment and precision-guided weapons, including those used by enemy unmanned aerial vehicles; the obstruction (stalling) of nautical-time support; active counteraction against radio and radio-technical reconnaissance assets...*

### **What are the innovative approaches in developing the REB troops weapons systems?**

*The balanced development of the electronic warfare weapon system envisages the improvement of REB equipment both with the use of traditional approaches and with the introduction of innovative solutions. The traditional approach to the development of the REB equipment envisages its improvement in the areas of expansion of target range, reducing the number of REB assets types, their unification, the increase of protection against precision weapons, their mobility and upgrade potential...*

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Без шума в эфире: войска готовы глушить вражеские радио- и телетрансляции (Without Noise on the Air Waves: The Troops Are Prepared to Jam Enemy Radio and Television Transmissions), *Izvestia Online*, 28 April 2020. <https://iz.ru/985812/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/bez-shuma-v-efire-voiska-gotovy-glushit-vrazheskie-radio-i-teletransliacii>

*The troops have learned to combat the terrorists' television and radio stations. As the experience of the wars in Chechnya and Syria have shown, the guerrillas used them to agitate the population and to recruit new followers. State-of-the-art technologies permit the extremists to rapidly establish that broadcast. Russian army units are prepared to utilize the latest "Murmansk-BN" electronic warfare complexes to counter the propaganda threat. The experts point out that this equipment will permit them to effectively defend the information space...the "Murmansk" vehicles didn't have to conduct a lengthy and exhausting forced march to the enemy's deployment location - the EW systems operated at a range of over 2,000 kilometers from the targets...*

*As a rule, the EW complexes plan of action is rather simple: They use a more power signal to "choke" the transmission channels, TelecomDaily Information-Analytical Agency General Director Denis Kuskov explained. "At the contemporary level of development of the equipment, television and radio broadcast channels - are one of the simplest and most effective methods to impact the population" - the Analyst reported to Izvestiya. "The television and internet infrastructure in a combat operations area will be damaged or disconnected as the first priority. The production and delivery of print products will require time and major labor costs. It is easiest of all to organize information and propaganda using small mobile television and radio stations".*

*Moreover, one can supply the population only that information flow, which the distributors need, via small mobile television and radio stations, the expert pointed out. They will be able to appreciably influence the population and the people's mood in this manner. In the expert's opinion, you don't need a lot of resources and time to prepare this content - one man in front of a camera or microphone is sufficient.*

*...The "Murmansk-BN" was declassified quite recently. Right now, we already know that this - is an automated radio jamming complex for communications lines in the short-wave band. Based upon its output parameters, it surpasses all existing equivalent systems in the world by several times. It is sufficient to point out that the complex's radio communications jamming range totals approximately 5,000 kilometers and in ideal conditions the signal's transmission can be increased up to 8,000 kilometers. In the travel configuration, the "Murmansk" equipment is accommodated in several "KamAZ" large-capacity, multi-axle motor vehicles. Powerful telescoping antenna masts and also low-frequency antenna wires are included in the set. If necessary, the masts are extended to a height of up to 32 meters using hydraulic equipment.*

*Those vehicles were transferred to the Baltic Fleet last year. The complex, which has been placed on alert in Kaliningrad, is also capable of depriving enemy combat ships, aircraft, drones, and troop headquarters of communications.*

*With the acceptance of the "Murmansk-BN" into the inventory, the army has received at its disposal EW equipment, which operates not only in the operational-tactical but also in the operational-strategic depth. Furthermore, this complex is capable of conducting communications intelligence. As a rule, the NATO countries use the short-wave radio band, in which it operates, for communications at great distances between aircraft and surface ships.*



## 'Penitsillin' Artillery Reconnaissance System Enters Service

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses Russia's most recent attempt to diversify artillery reconnaissance capabilities, the 'Penitsillin' automated sonic-thermal system artillery reconnaissance system. The Penitsillin is mounted on a Kamaz-6350 chassis, with a detection radius of up to 25 km. It consists of the 1B75 electro-optical module, which works in the infrared and visible spectrum using imaging cameras placed on a telescopic boom, and several ground-installed 1B76 sound and seismic receivers. The system receives and processes thermal, acoustic and seismic signals from enemy fire, calculating their location and transmitting the data to friendly artillery reportedly in less than five seconds. Russian experts point out that the latest equipment will fundamentally increase the effectiveness of Russian artillery. According to *Izvestia*, training has already begun on the system, as the system will eventually be fielded throughout the Artillery Troops and the Coastal Defense Artillery Troops. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

***“The shot from a gun creates a sound wave in the surface layer of the atmosphere, which covers very great distances... These sensors and special algorithms, which take into account the current state of the atmosphere (humidity, wind, and other parameters), permit the electronics to calculate the deployment location of the enemy weapon positions with the highest accuracy.”***

***-Viktor Murakhovskiy, Editor-in-Chief of “Arsenal of the Fatherland” Magazine  
Center for Space Situation Reconnaissance***

**Source:** Bogdan Stepovoy and Anton Lavrov, “«Пенициллин» идёт в разведку: артиллерию наведут на цель электронные комплексы ('Penitsillin' Is Going on Reconnaissance: Electronic Complexes Guide the Artillery to the Target),” *Izvestia* Online, 6 May 2020. [https://iz.ru/1007743/bogdan-stepovoi-anton-lavrov/penicillin-idet-v-razvedku-artilleriiu-navedut-na-tcel-elektronnye-kompleksy](https://iz.ru/1007743/bogdan-stepovoi-anton-lavrov/penicillin-idet-v-razvedku-artilleriiu-navedut-na-tsel-elektronnye-kompleksy)

### ***'Penitsillin' Is Going on Reconnaissance: Electronic Complexes Guide the Artillery to the Target***

...Sources in the Military Department told *Izvestiya* that the fundamental decision on the initiation of the deliveries of the AZK 1B76 "Penitsillin" reconnaissance complexes has already been made. They plan that the equipment will initially begin to arrive in the Ground Troops artillery regiments and brigades and later the equipment will augment the arsenal of the Russian Navy's Coastal Missile-Artillery troops...There is only one "Penitsillin" complex in the Armed Forces for the time being. It arrived at the Missile Troops and Artillery Combat Employment Center in Saratov this year. The officers-instructors, who will teach the crews to work with the new equipment beginning next year, have already been trained. After passing the examinations and all of the needed standards, the crews will obtain the new equipment and will be sent to the troops...

A set includes a special optical-electronic module - six each ordinary and thermal-imaging cameras, which operate in the infrared range. They have been installed on a vertical lifting mast and are capable of supporting high-speed data sorting. The video systems can conduct surveillance of an extensive sector and detect the flashes of shots or the explosions of projectiles, which will permit the electronics to determine the munition's flight trajectory and the location of the camouflaged artillery positions. The complex also has several special remote sensors. They permit the calculation of the shooter's coordinates while using the acoustic location principle, Viktor Murakhovskiy pointed out. "The shot from a gun creates a sound wave in the surface layer of the atmosphere, which covers very great distances", he explained. "These sensors and special algorithms, which take into account the current state of the atmosphere (humidity, wind, and other parameters), permit the electronics to calculate the deployment location of the enemy weapon positions with the highest accuracy."

The preparation of the "Penitsillin" for combat takes a matter of minutes - the crew needs to competently deploy and camouflage the equipment. Then its role is reduced to the minimum - the electronics engage. The modules must supplement each other in an engagement. Based upon the characteristics of the sound wave, the flashes, and also based upon the strength and nature of the detonations, the complex determines which artillery, rocket-propelled, or missile systems launched the munitions. The time of receipt of the coordinates of a single target, which is conducting firing, totals no more than five seconds. During this short interval, the target's location is plotted on an electronic



## Russian-Ukrainian Antagonism Spreads to History

**OE Watch Commentary:** World War II memorials have served to deepen the antagonism between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. A recent commemorative ceremony in Berlin became the subject of an open conflict as reflected in the accompanying excerpts from the pro-Kremlin *Izvestia*.

The first excerpt describes the reaction of the Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany, Andrei Mel'nik, to an invitation from Berlin, to participate in a ceremony dedicated to Soviet soldiers fallen in WW II. The invitation for the ceremony to be held at the site of the Wehrmacht surrender on 2 May 1945, was also extended to representatives of Russia and Belarus. The Ambassador refused to attend, stating that it was his moral obligation to honor the memory of war victims, but could not imagine doing so with Russian representatives “even in his worst dream.” He stated that the Ukrainian contribution to the war was being minimized and that Russia was seeking to claim sole credit for the victory. The article also points out that Mel'nik “blamed Moscow for the troubles of Ukraine and for the situation in the south east of the country.”

The next day, *Izvestia* covered the response of Russian Senator Aleksei Pushkov to the Ukrainian Ambassador's refusal to participate in the wreath-laying ceremony. As the second excerpt points out, Pushkov posted on Twitter that the Ukrainian refusal was “just the next demonstration of contempt from the side of the Kievan elite.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Byrne)**



*Wreath of honor to celebrate at the Soviet War Memorial in Berlin-Treptow.*  
Source: By Bernd.Brincken - Own work via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11222509>, CC BY-SA 3.0

***“He said that to honor the memory of the victims of the war is his moral obligation, yet “even in his worst dream” he could not imagine laying wreaths with the Russian representative...”***

**Source:** “Посол Украины в Берлине отказался возлагать цветы с послом России (Ukrainian Ambassador Refused to Lay Flowers with the Ambassador of Russia,” *Izvestia*, 2 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1006979/2020-05-02/posol-ukrainy-v-berline-otkazalsia-vozlakat-tsvety-s-poslom-rossii>

*Ambassador of Ukraine to Germany Andrei Mel'nik refused to take part in a flower-laying ceremony to fallen Soviet soldiers due to the presence of Russian Ambassador Sergei Nachev, writes the newspaper Tagesspiegel.*

*According to the edition, the Ukrainian diplomat received an invitation from Berlin along with the Russian and Belarussian diplomatic missions to a dedication to the 75th anniversary of the Victory over fascism and the capitulation of the Wehrmacht.*

*Only Mel'nik refused. According to him, the role of Ukrainian in the battle with the Nazis is underestimated as if the Soviet Red Army could be considered Russian. He said that to honor the memory of the victims of the war is his moral obligation, yet “even in his worst dream” he could not imagine laying wreaths with the Russian representative. He again blamed Moscow for the troubles of Ukraine and for the situation in the south-east of the country.*

**Source:** “Пушков оценил отказ посла Украины от участия в церемонии в Берлине (Pushkov Evaluates the Refusal of the Ukrainian Ambassador to Participate in Ceremony in Berlin),” *Izvestia*, 3 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1007240/2020-05-03/pushkov-otcenil-otkaz-posla-ukrainy-ot-uchastiia-v-tceremonii-v-berline>

### ***Pushkov Evaluated the Refusal of the Ukrainian Ambassador to Participate in Berlin Ceremony***

*Russian Senator Aleksei Pushkov called the refusal of the Ukrainian ambassador Andrei Mel'kina to lay a wreath together with the Russian ambassador in honor of the 75th anniversary of the capitulation of the Wehrmacht a demonstration of hatred.*

*According to Pushkov, nothing else was to be expected from the Ukrainian government. “I don't think that the refusal of the ambassador of Ukraine to lay a wreath together with the ambassador of Russia, which is widely reported- is newsworthy. Who expected otherwise? It is just the next demonstration of contempt from the side of the Kievan elite. The place for this information is “petty facts”. Nothing more”, -wrote the senator of Twitter on May 2nd.*



## Conscription in the Caucasus during Coronavirus

**OE Watch Commentary:** The governments of the Caucasus have been dealing with a number of issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, including safely carrying out conscription for their respective armed forces. The accompanying excerpted articles offer a look at how this is taking place.

The article from *Trend*, a news agency in Azerbaijan, reports that “the draft for military service and the return home of service members in Azerbaijan will be carried out by a special method.” The official interviewed does not offer any more details about this, but claims that “if the rules of the coronavirus were not followed during military service, it would be extremely difficult to protect the military,” suggesting that the armed forces have been following some set of measures to curb the spread of the virus to continue operating.

The first article from *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, a news website focusing on the Caucasus region, reports on the upcoming draft in Armenia and how “members of the armed forces and recruits will be provided medical masks, gloves and disinfectants, and the parents of the conscripts will be able to follow the process through a video feed.” As of the article’s publication date, Armenia is reportedly the “leader in the number of infected.” The article also mentions other measures that will be taken during the draft and that it “will be held [from] July 1 to August 30.”



*Georgian Soldiers during an exercise.*

Source: Eric Bloom, US Army via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgian\\_Soldiers\\_during\\_an\\_exercise.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Georgian_Soldiers_during_an_exercise.jpg), Public Domain

The second article from *Kavkazskiy Uzel* reports on how the Georgian government has been dealing with the pandemic and its draft. As of early March, the Georgian government “postponed the spring draft for a month” until “April 13.” While there has been no update on the status of the draft since the article came out, the government extended its state of emergency until late May.

Overall, the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia are moving forward with their annual drafts, though they are taking precautions during the ongoing pandemic. While there is no updated information on when and how the Georgian government will carry out its draft, it is worth considering how conscription in Georgia has changed over the past few years. The Georgian government abolished the draft for the armed forces in 2016, as it tried to bring in more contract soldiers, only to reinstate it a year later. If this is any indication, the draft in Georgia is likely to happen to at some point and in some form. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“During the summer draft, members of the armed forces and recruits will be provided medical masks, gloves and disinfectants, and the parents of the conscripts will be able to follow the process through a video feed, the Ministry of Defense of Armenia reported.”***



## Continued: Conscription in the Caucasus during Coronavirus

**Source:** Ilham Isabalayev, “Призыв на военную службу в Азербайджане будет осуществляться в особом порядке (The draft for military service in Azerbaijan will be carried out by a special method),” *Trend*, 1 May 2020. <https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/society/3232972.html>

*The draft for military service and the return home of service members in Azerbaijan will be carried out by a special method...Ramin Bayramli, head of the association for the management of medical territorial units, said this at a briefing today.*

*According to him, if the rules of the coronavirus were not followed during military service, it would be extremely difficult to protect the military...*

**Source:** “Минобороны Армении определило меры безопасности на время призывной компании (The Ministry of Defense of Armenia has determined the security measures for the draft),” *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, 29 April 2020. <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/348969/>

*During the summer draft, members of the armed forces and recruits will be provided medical masks, gloves and disinfectants, and the parents of the conscripts will be able to follow the process through a video feed, the Ministry of Defense of Armenia reported...Armenia, which has a smaller population than Georgia and Azerbaijan, remains the (regional) leader in the number of infected...*

*Conscripts at the processing point will be transported in small groups, for which the number of vehicles will be increased, said Shushan Stepanyan, a spokesman for the defense ministry...Recruits with a fever will be isolated in military units for 14 days and they will be under the care of medical staff and tested for COVID-19...The draft will be held July 1 to August 30 and preparatory work will start on May 1...*

Over the years, FMSO has studied and written about foreign perspectives on pandemics. One example is below. For more information on previous FMSO work on pandemics including Ebola, search OE Watch issues:

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

## Death Unguarded: Unsecured Virulent Pathogens in African Medical Facilities

By Robert Feldman

While affluent countries can afford secure, state-of-the-art bio labs to house deadly pathogens for research, many countries do not have the financial and/or technical resources to provide such facilities. Antiquated equipment, minimal security, and other problems have plagued these labs in less developed countries, increasing the risk for theft of lethal microbes by terrorists as well as dangerous accidents. This article discusses these issues and the concerns regarding the ability of some countries to provide ongoing and adequate security of these facilities.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/195089>



## Kazakhstan's Substitute Draft to Combat Coronavirus

**OE Watch Commentary:** Although the government of Kazakhstan has been using fewer conscripts to fill the ranks of its armed forces over the past several years, the annual draft remains an important part of maintaining readiness. Contract soldiers currently make up an estimated 75 percent of the country's armed forces, with the rest of the positions filled by conscripts. The accompanying excerpted article reports on how the Kazakh government is dealing with the draft amid the nationwide state of emergency due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The article, from the Russian-language news website *Inform Buro*, reports that due to the state of emergency, “the spring draft was suspended,” along with the discharge of conscripts in the spring. However, the government appears to have found a substitute during its state of emergency. The article notes that, those fit for military service will be drafted for “special groups to combat the spread of coronavirus,” based on a decree signed by Kazakh President Qassym-Zhomart Toqaev in early April. The article mentions that this will not be a national draft, but instead that “the number of soldiers and the terms of service [will be] established by local authorities.”

The Deputy Chief of the General Staff mentions that the conscripts in the special groups “will serve at checkpoints, patrol, disinfect and guard facilities and participate in flood control” and that “in regions where military units are garrisoned, there may not be a draft.” The article also reports that those drafted “will receive the same salary as they get now,” that they “will serve close to their place of residence so that they can spend the night at home” and that the “same benefits for military personnel will be provided for those conscripted into the special groups.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Quarantine in Nur-Sultan. 26 March 2020.

Source: Yakov Fedorov via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2020-03-26\\_Quarantine\\_in\\_Nur-Sultan-1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2020-03-26_Quarantine_in_Nur-Sultan-1.jpg), CC BY SA 4.0

***“The Deputy Chief of the General Staff of Kazakhstan, Ruslan Shpekbayev, told reporters that the special conscripts would patrol settlements, engage in sanitation and participate in the response to possible floods in the spring.”***



## Continued: Kazakhstan's Substitute Draft to Combat Coronavirus

**Source:** “Daniyar Aysarov, “Спецсборы военнообязанных во время ЧП. Как будут служить призывники (Special groups of draft eligible people at the time of the emergency situation. How the conscripted will serve),” *Inform Buro*, 7 April 2020. <https://informburo.kz/stati/specsbory-voennoobyazannyh-vo-vremya-chp-kak-budut-sluzhit-prizyvniki.html>

*The special groups of draft eligible people could last from 10 day to 3 months. The dates will be determined by local officials. On April 2, Kazakh President Qassym-Zhomart Toqaev signed a decree on the drafting of those who are eligible for special groups to combat the spread of the coronavirus. It is unknown how many will be conscripted, because the number of soldiers and the terms of service are established by local authorities. It is known that more than 500 volunteered...*

*Who will be drafted into the special group, how much will they receive and how will they serve...The army has categories of fitness for service:*

*“A” – is fit for military service*

*“B” – is fit for military service with minor restrictions*

*“V” – is limited for military service*

*“G” – temporarily unfit for military service*

*“D” – is not suitable for military service in peacetime, limited in wartime*

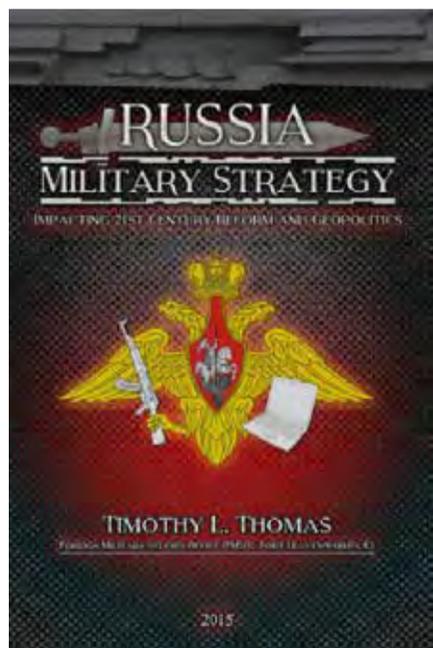
*It has been announced that the special groups will be only those eligible for category A*

*...The conscripts who have a job will receive the same salary as they get now...The plan is that the conscripts will serve close to their place of residence so that they can spend the night at home. The same benefits for military personnel will be provided for those conscripted into the special groups...*

*Because of the state of emergency in Kazakhstan, the spring draft was suspended. Therefore, a special appeal was required not throughout Kazakhstan, but in regions where there is help needed. The discharge of conscripts in the spring was also suspended...*

*The Deputy Chief of the General Staff of Kazakhstan, Ruslan Shpekbayev, told reporters that the special conscripts would patrol settlements, engage in sanitation and participate in the response to possible floods in the spring. “Those eligible for military service will not be transferred to other regions. They will serve at checkpoints, patrol, disinfect and guard facilities and participate in flood control” said Shpekbayev...*

*The Ministry of Defense said that the draft will be staggered, depending on need. In regions where military units are garrisoned, there may not be a draft. In regions where there are not enough resources of the armed forces to ensure the emergency and quarantine, special drafts will take place...There are plans to draft 100 in Nur Sultan and 200 in Almaty. The number of people planned to be called up in Shymkent is unknown...*



### 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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## COVID-19 in Spain

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying reference, from the Spanish-based media network *El País*, is an easily useable site with graphed data and an interactive map on the pandemic worldwide, with emphasis on Spain. Spain is a significant reference country as it is, at least according to *El País*, the country with the second greatest number of confirmed cases after the United States. At the time of the article, half of Spain was entering into a recovery phase, as the spread of the virus had been declining sharply. The country-by-country graphs indicate a wide range of apparent effects, and while the site does not attempt to explain the divergences, it looks to be due at least partly to varying testing and diagnostic reporting rubrics. Regardless, Spain was undoubtedly one of the hardest hit. As in other countries, the mortal victim cohorts tend to be older. Judging from *El País*, the medical challenge presented by the virus in Spain will have only lasted a couple of months. This data set about the virus in Spain, however, should be compared to another of this month's *OE Watch* articles on Spain, "Is Spain's Future Now Communist?" as the political and ideological (and likely therefore, geopolitical) outcome of the country's coronavirus experience may be far more consequential than the medical. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“In a month and a half, we have [gone] from a daily growth of 42% to less than 1 %...”***

**Source:** Mariano Zafra, Patricia R. Blanco and Luis Sevillano Pires, “Casos confirmados de coronavirus en España y en el mundo (Confirmed cases of coronavirus in Spain and in the world),” *El País*, 11 May 2020. [https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020/04/09/actualidad/1586437657\\_937910.html](https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020/04/09/actualidad/1586437657_937910.html)

*“The spread of the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, arising in the Chinese city of Wuhan at the end of 2019, continues to slow in pace. Even so, four million additional people in more than 185 countries of the world have been diagnosed with COVID-19. Of those, more than 1,400,000 now have been cured and 283,000 have lost their lives. Little by little, the countries most affected are beginning to de-escalate the confinement measures with light openings, always attentive that the number of new confirmed cases continues to decline.*

*Spain is the second country in the world with the most detected cases, behind the United States. The first positive case on Spanish soil was confirmed on 31 January, but it was in March that the diagnoses began to increase exponentially...*

*The stabilization of those cases, which continues in decline, led the administration this past 29 April to present a three-phase plan to leave the confinement, the step down beginning to be applied to half of Spain on 11 May...*

*Of the mortal victims in Spain, 95% are over 60 years old...*

*In a month and a half, we have passed from a daily growth of 42% to less than 1 %...”*

### Fangs of the Lone Wolf

Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars  
1994-2009

Dodge Billingsley  
with Lester Grau

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-q2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195587/download>



## Spain's Leftist Future and Ibero-American Connections

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying references are about post-pandemic planning in Spain and about Enrique Santiago, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). Together, the three articles provide a glimpse at high-level political intrigue involving Ibero-American far left political parties. They also warn that the future of Spain, or at least the current formal government planning for that future, is in the hands of people closely associated with communist party structures and ideology. The first reference asserts that Enrique Santiago is being funded by an old Cold War figure, Joel Max Marambio Rodríguez. Marambio is a Chilean national, said to have been a bodyguard of Chilean president Salvador Allende in the early 1970s. As the reference notes, Marambio was a close associate of Fidel Castro. Today, the wealthy businessman is known for supporting far-left movements financially, and any investment he makes in Enrique Santiago looks to result in a particularly high return. The current Spanish administration under President Pedro Sánchez is decidedly leftist, formed by the traditional left Spanish Socialists Workers' Party (PSOE) and the more far-left Unidos Podemos, the latter funded heavily by the late Hugo Chávez. The Sánchez administration recently empowered a commission to set a course into the post-pandemic. The PSOE and Unidos Podemos elected Santiago to the board, and he looks to have great influence. The second and third references marvel at his negotiating skills, giving him credit for having gained tremendous concessions from the Colombian government when he was negotiating on behalf of the FARC during the 2016 peace negotiations in Havana. The third reference stresses what Santiago's leadership evidently means in terms of ideology. If Enrique Santiago has his way, Spain will be moving further toward the left. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



President of Spain, Pedro Sanchez.

Source: European Parliament via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pedro\\_S%C3%A1nchez\\_2019\\_\(portrait\\_crop\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pedro_S%C3%A1nchez_2019_(portrait_crop).jpg), CC BY 2.0

***“The only measures that are going to work will have to confront the neoliberal model that has been in effect.”***

***-Enrique Santiago, Secretary General of the Communist Party of Spain***

**Source:** Segundo Sanz, “El nº 2 de la comisión para la reconstrucción ha sido apoderado del ‘Agente 007’ de Fidel Castro (The Number 2 of the commission for reconstruction has been empowered by Fidel Castro’s ‘Agent 007’),” *OK Diario and Colombian News*, 9 May 2020. <https://okdiario.com/espana/vicepresidente-comunista-comision-del-coronavirus-apodera-agente-007-fidel-castro-5578579>

*“The leader of the Communist Party of Spain, Enrique Santiago, elected by the PSOE and Podemos as vice-president of the Social and Economic Reconstruction Commission in response to the coronavirus, is empowered by Chilean millionaire Joel Max Marambio, convicted of corruption. A businessman who has done huge business deals in Cuba, he formed part of Fidel Castro’s tight circle of confidence, to the point that Joel Max Marambio was known on the island as the dictator’s ‘agent 007’...”*



## Continued: Spain's Leftist Future and Ibero-American Connections

**Source:** Enrique Santiago, de negociador de las FARC a reconstruir España (Enrique Santiago, from FARC negotiator to reconstruct Spain),” *Diario ABC and Colombian News*, 8 May 2020. [https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-negociador-farc-reconstruir-espana-202005080222\\_noticia.html](https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-negociador-farc-reconstruir-espana-202005080222_noticia.html)

*“Santiago was the representative of the FARC guerrilla in conversations in Havana that led to the signing of the peace accords with the Administration of Juan Manuel Santos with that guerrilla group. With great effectiveness he achieved having drug trafficking carried out by the FARC not be considered a crime but only a form of financing a political struggle...”*

**Source:** Editors, “Enrique Santiago o cuando el narcotráfico no es un crimen sino una forma de financiación de la lucha política (Enrique Santiago, or when drug trafficking is not a crime but a form of financing the política lstruggle),” *Periodistadigital and Colombian News*, 8 May 2020. <https://www.periodistadigital.com/politica/partidos-politicos/20200508/enrique-santiago-narcotrafico-crimen-forma-financiacion-lucha-politica-noticia-689404304884/>

*“[Enrique Santiago]: ‘The only measures that are going to work will have to confront the neoliberal model that has been in effect.’ It is time to question abusive consumerism and the model of production...’ Last September, Santiago participated in a talk organized by the journal Mongolia, and he spiced up the figures of Lenin, Nicolás Maduro, Santiago Carrillo [Past General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain] and Fidel Castro. For example, he referenced Lenin in this way: ‘He is absolutely vindicated -- from nothing he constructed an alternative state from where there had been a feudal country.’*



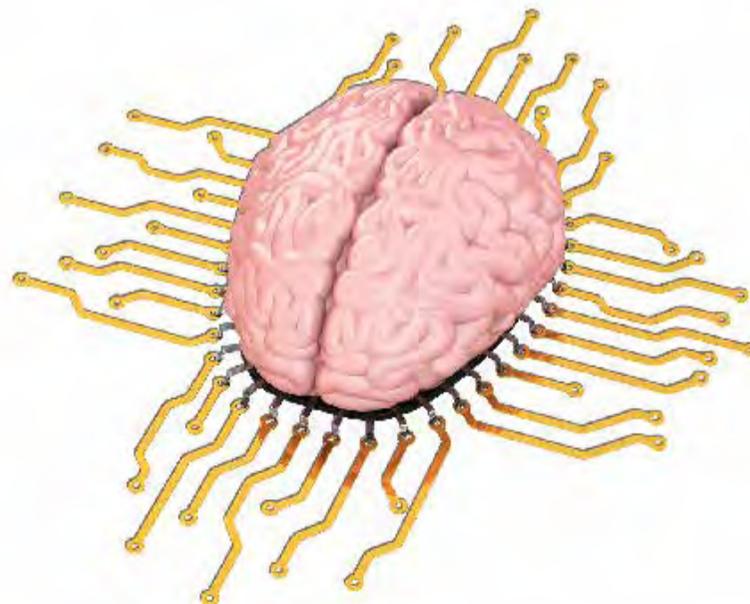
Enrique Santiago.

Source: Fernando Jiménez Briz via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:\(Enrique\\_Santiago\)\\_1\\_de\\_mayo\\_de\\_2018\\_IMG\\_0416\\_\(41134553744\)\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:(Enrique_Santiago)_1_de_mayo_de_2018_IMG_0416_(41134553744)_cropped.jpg), CC BY 2.0

## 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.





## Chinese 6G Technology to Drive the Future Battlefield

**OE Watch Commentary:** Fifth generation network technology (5G) is still in its infancy, yet China already has its sights set on gaining a foothold in 6G, which many experts estimate to be a decade away. With cutting edge and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum information currently in the research and development phase, and a changing battlefield to reflect that advancing technology, Chinese military analysts and strategists are already looking to harness 6G's potential in future wars. The first article extract, published in *People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, envisions how 6G will be used in future wars. It starts by describing some of the (theoretical) technical advantages of 6G over its predecessors. For example, 6G will have broader, multi-spectral band access than its predecessors. It will allow better cross-domain connectivity and coverage because it will extend beyond the current mobile technology, which relies on base stations, which causes blind spots in deserts, oceans, and other remote areas. It will allow a deep integration of network intelligence by incorporating artificial intelligence.

According to the article, the theoretical advantages of 6G technology translate to a wider range of military applications. For example, 6G is expected to fully integrate battlefield reconnaissance, intelligence networks, unmanned intelligence, and information processing. Combined with other technologies, such as block chain, artificial intelligence, and Dynamic Spectrum Sharing (allowing operators to use the same spectrum bands for different radio access technologies), 6G will improve the overall quality and efficiency of command and control. It will allow the command and control network to "achieve intelligent learning, mining, analysis and application of big data on the battlefield." It will achieve intelligent deployment of combat resources and give high-speed and accurate action orders. 6G will also provide real-time visualization of combat operations to all those who need it and afford a higher degree and efficient system of security and logistics.

While China is determined and seemingly optimistic about the future potential and capabilities of 6G, some foreign analysts question whether China is ready to take on such a feat. For example, the second article, published in the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*, features the opinions of two foreign experts. The first expert argues that China is still struggling to control corruption and improve the quality and education of its personnel force. The expert concludes that the Chinese military will be limited in its ability to absorb extremely advanced technology until it can reach its goals of recruiting, training, and managing an educated, competent and non-corrupt personnel force. The second, Yang Zi, a senior analyst with the China Programme at Nanyang Technological University's S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, says that China has been making clear progress in areas such as artificial intelligence, 5G, quantum technologies, unmanned systems, and supercomputing, "but overall the U.S. still has the lead in new technologies." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

**Source:** Xie Ruikun et al, "如果6G运用于未来作战 (If 6G is Used in Future Wars)," *People's Daily*, 14 April 2020. <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0414/c1011-31672935.html>

*Promoting the gradual application of 6G in the military field may be one of the key focuses of the military to adapt to the transformation of military affairs in the future.*

*The characteristics of 6G, such as mass connectivity, ultra-low latency, ultra-high network performance and other characteristics can be used to integrate users and networks as a whole, and at the same time, play a role in artificial intelligence and multidimensional data perceptual learning as well as autonomous processing functions. 6G ...can accelerate the implementation of intelligence network by leaps and bounds.*

*Compared to the previous mobile technologies, 6G has more advantages. The value to military applications is huge. If it is used in the military field on a large scale, it will certainly change the form of war.*

*...Through 6G, future unmanned reconnaissance equipment can be a key component of an intelligence reconnaissance network, battlefield mobile sensors, and a hub of intelligence information. It can be integrated into the intelligence reconnaissance network, form its own network and deal with intelligence information in a highly effective manner, thus realizing the integration of battlefield reconnaissance and intelligence network as well as the unmanned intelligence and information processing.*

*...The addition of technologies, such as 6G, artificial intelligence, block chain, Dynamic Spectrum Sharing and other technologies, will promote autonomous intelligent management of future operational command and control networks. Among these technologies, 6G will achieve high efficiency, high reliability and large-scale connectivity and other characteristics, to achieve efficient and accurate transmission of operational commands. Through 6G, the command and control network can achieve intelligent learning, data-mining, analysis and application of big data on the battlefield, achieve intelligent deployment of combat resources, give high-speed and accurate action orders, and improve command and control quality and efficiency.*

*... [6G] can allow efficient access to the combat network and high-speed transmission of troop positions, equipment, status and other information, to achieve efficient communication between various combat units in the war zone so they can visualize each other and command the situation of battlefield without delay. The visualization of operations can be achieved as well, eventually.*

*Through a 6G network, the integrated support information system can efficiently access the Command Information System, collect real-time information on battlefield weapons, equipment, personnel, etc. and quickly create personalized support programs to enable support resources (logistics) to reach the front line while optimizing the battlefield process work flow to achieve efficient and accurate security activities.*

**Source:** Kristin Huang, "China's Military Draws on 6G Dream to Modernise Fighting Forces and Plan Wartime Scenarios," *South China Morning Post*, 18 April 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3080235/chinas-military-draws-6g-dream-modernise-fighting-forces-and>

### **China's Military Draws on 6G Dream to Modernise Fighting Forces and Plan Wartime Scenarios**

*Timothy Heath, a senior defence researcher at the Rand Corporation, a US think tank, said despite China's ambitious plan, it was risky for Beijing to try to achieve too much at once. "The PLA is still building the basic organisation of a modern, joint military after decades operating as a low-skill, low-technology force," he said.*

*"It is also struggling to control corruption and improve the quality and education of the personnel force.*

*"Until the PLA has achieved its goals of recruiting, training and managing an educated, competent and non-corrupt personnel force, there will be limits to how much the military can absorb extremely advanced technology."*

*Yang Zi, a senior analyst with the China Programme at Nanyang Technological University's S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, said ...*

*"We have seen China making clear progress in [artificial intelligence], 5G, quantum technologies, unmanned systems and supercomputers. But overall, the US still has the lead in new technologies."*



# Chinese Researchers Demonstrate Mobile Quantum Satellite Base Station

**OE Watch Commentary:** In late December, a Chinese mobile quantum satellite ground station, the first of its kind in the world, successfully connected to Micius, a quantum testbed satellite 500 km above in orbit. The connection or “handshake” described in the accompanying article is the negotiation between two communication systems that allow data to be transmitted. Afterward it was able to exchange secret keys, the information used to encrypt and decrypt information in an encryption scheme. Passing this information through quantum links ensures their security.

Micius, also called Mozi after the ancient Chinese philosopher, is part of Quantum Experiments at Space Scale (QUESS), one of the scientific experiments under China’s space science Strategic Priority Program. The satellite was launched on 16 August 2016 by the Chinese Academy of Sciences with the goal of helping make breakthroughs in long-distance quantum communications.

According to Dr. Pan Jianwei [潘建伟], the main goals of the program are quantum key distribution from a satellite to ground station, a global-scale quantum communication network that uses satellites and fiber-optic cables, long-range entanglement testing involving two ground stations over 1,000 kilometers apart and a satellite, and ground-to-satellite teleportation (sending quantum information from one location to another).

Quantum Key distribution is a means of secure communication that takes advantage of the properties of quantum physics. In June 2017, China successfully entangled photons at two ground stations 1203 km apart, relayed through Micius. Successful links were later established between Beijing and Vienna. Chinese leaders see their communications as very vulnerable to interception, as evidenced by a campaign to divest Chinese networks of US-made servers and other equipment.

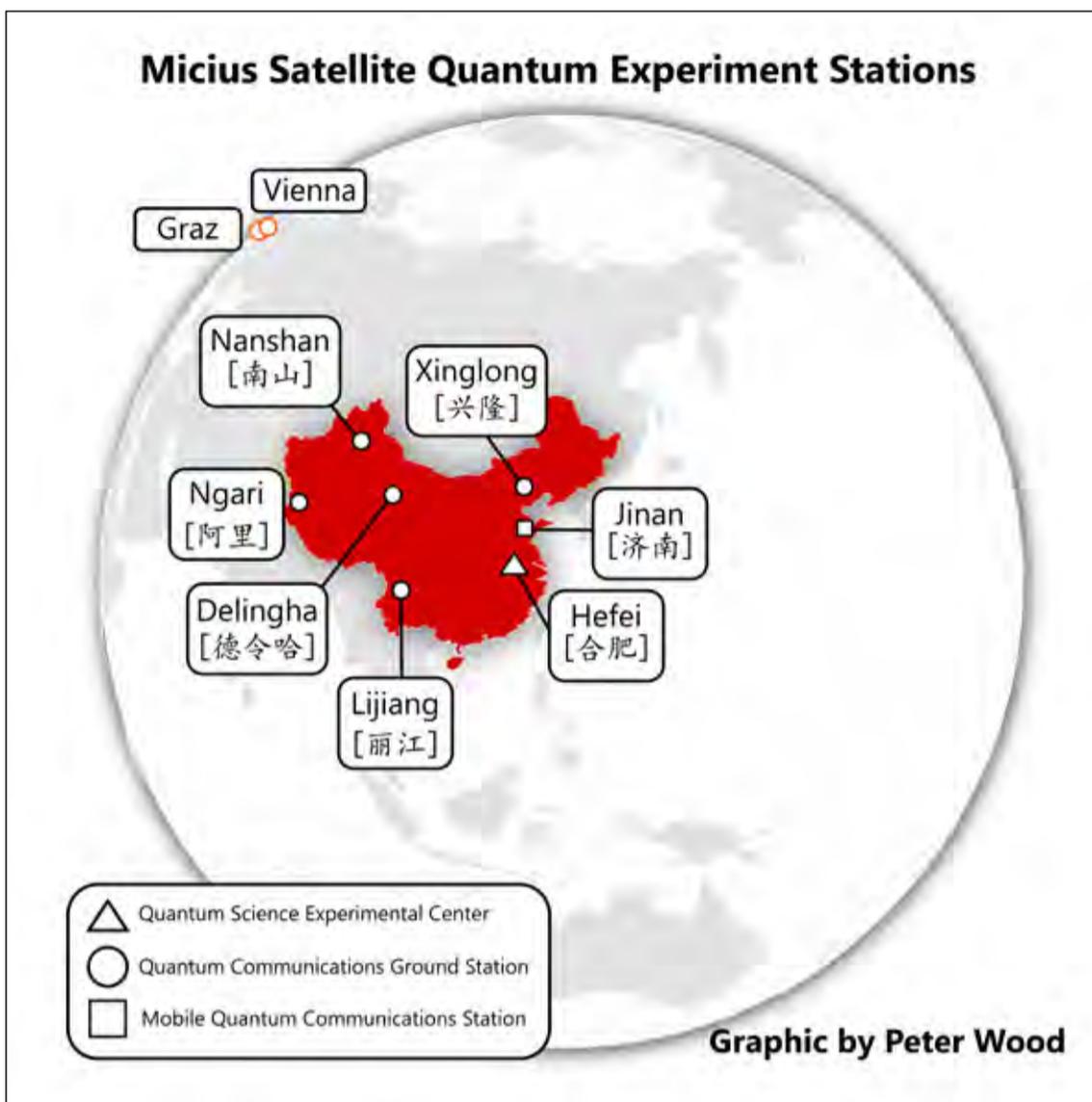
To communicate with the satellite, China has built a number of ground stations across the country as part of its experimentation with long-range quantum communications. The key research lab and coordinating center for the project are based in Hefei [合肥], Anhui province with ground stations in Nanshan [南山], Xinjiang, Ngari (Ali [阿里]) Tibet, Delingha [德令哈], Qinghai and Xinglong [兴隆], Hebei province. Austrian labs in Vienna and Graz are also part of the ground-station network.

Developed by the University of Science and Technology of China, QuantumCTek Co., Ltd. and the Jinan Quantum Technology Research Institute [济南量子技术研究院], the mobile station is based in Jinan, Shandong province.

China has several mobile satellite ground stations that support the national network, ensuring monitoring and communication with the growing number of satellite constellations. While the “bucket-size” telescope and accompanying transmission equipment are dwarfed by the radar dishes of the other mobile stations, the quantum base station nevertheless represents an important breakthrough.

As noted by Zhang Qiang [张强], the executive dean of the Jinan Institute, the new system is much smaller than the other ground stations used by the program in the past and opens the door to the commercialization of the technology.

As the second accompanying excerpt reports, in addition to the January deployment of the mobile station, in May, the QUESS program successfully transferred time-synchronization data securely using quantum communications. This is an important step toward building secure satellite navigation systems. China hopes to deploy the technology widely across many technological fields to improve the overall security of communications while making advances in the field of quantum physics. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**





## Continued: Chinese Researchers Demonstrate Mobile Quantum Satellite Base Station

*“This mobile quantum satellite ground station represents a breakthrough in the commercialization of quantum technology. The ground station used for the launch of Micius weighed more than a dozen tons. After thousands of experiments, the researchers successfully miniaturized the ground station, significantly reducing the manufacturing cost. The portable station can be loaded onto vehicles anytime and anywhere, giving it great commercialization potential in the future.”*

— *Zhang Qiang [张强], professor at the University of Science and Technology of China and executive dean of the Jinan Institute of Quantum Technology*

**Source:** “全球首个可移动量子卫星地面站与‘墨子号’成功握手 (World’s First Mobile Quantum Satellite Ground Station Successfully Executes ‘Handshake’ with ‘Micius’ Satellite),” *S&T Daily*, 2 January 2020. <http://scitech.people.com.cn/1/2020/0102/c1007-31531958.html>

*On 30 December 2019, between 23:31 and 23:39, on the roof of the Jinan Quantum Technology Research Institute, the mobile quantum satellite ground station emitted a red light, looking for a little green light passing through the sky. The “red” and the “green” “shook hands,” achieving satellite-to-ground linkup. The green light was emitted by the Micius quantum satellite that was launched in 2016. Today, with the transit of “Micius” and its subsequent handshake with the mobile quantum satellite ground station, a massive encrypted transmission of information was completed in a matter of minutes.*

*The first linkup of the world’s first mobile quantum satellite ground station with Micius lasted about eight minutes. Once the linkup is complete, Micius can transmit the secret key and the ground station in Jinan can receive it and conduct a secret key test.*

*The Jinan Quantum Technology Research Institute kicked off the miniaturized quantum communication satellite ground station system project in 2019; the ground station was completed on 24 December. The successful handshake test with the “Micius” quantum scientific experimental satellite marked the completion of China’s first miniaturized mobile quantum satellite ground station in Jinan.*

*This ground station is about the size of a paint bucket and weighs a little over 80 kilograms. Adding a 28 cm telescope and equipment turns it into a mobile quantum satellite ground station. This project was undertaken together by the University of Science and Technology of China, QuantumCTek Co., Ltd. and Jinan Quantum Technology Research Institute.*

*Zhang Qiang [张强], professor of the University of Science and Technology of China and executive dean of the Jinan Institute of Quantum Technology, explained that this mobile quantum satellite ground station represents a breakthrough in the commercialization of quantum technology. The ground station used for the launch of Micius weighed more than a dozen tons. After thousands of experiments, the researchers successfully miniaturized the ground station, significantly reducing the manufacturing cost. The portable station can be loaded onto vehicles anytime and anywhere, giving it great commercialization potential in the future.*

*At present, the Jinan Quantum Communication Test Network has been successfully connected to the “Beijing-Shanghai Main Line” and has become an important part of China’s wide-area quantum communication network.*

**Source:** “Chinese experts use quantum satellite to ensure time information security,” *Xinhua*, 14 May 2020. <http://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202005/14/WS5ebc9f35a310a8b2411558f9.html>

*Experts used China’s quantum satellite -- Quantum Experiments at Space Scale (QUESS) -- to verify quantum-secure time transfer for the first time, which laid a foundation for building a safe satellite navigation system.*



## Chinese Information on COVID-19 in the PLA

**OE Watch Commentary:** As of mid-May, the Chinese government maintained that its military was spared by coronavirus infections. The accompanying excerpt from the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* reported on 9 May that the Chinese defense ministry, “the world’s largest armed force – with about 2.3 million personnel – has had zero confirmed cases of COVID-19.” The article contrasted that with the rate of infections in both the US and Russian militaries, which had 4,000 and 1,000 cases respectively, at that time. Regardless of the validity of this claim, some analysts believed the force, as a whole, was being negatively impacted. Due to safety concerns, the PLA’s annual spring recruitment program was postponed until August. According to an Australia-based analyst cited in the article, this could be a problem because the PLA is still a conscription army and has a large turnover of soldiers every year. Therefore, “the late recruitment and training plan this year...has already affected combat effectiveness.”

The article offered some thought-provoking points, and questioned the validity of China’s claims of having zero military personnel affected. Foreign analysts argued that, even if China’s claims were true, they were unlikely to remain that way. For one thing, over 4,000 military medical personnel played an important role in China’s response to the COVID-19 breakout in Wuhan, which had been at the epicenter of infections prior to spreading across the globe. The article noted, “The idea that none of these personnel working on the front lines in Wuhan became infected by the novel coronavirus would be inconsistent with the experiences of countries from around the world.” It also pointed out a 17 February report in the *PLA Daily*, which reported that some soldiers were placed in quarantine, and claimed that this had led to rumors that the Chinese military had been affected by the coronavirus.

Finally, the article pointed out one advantage in China’s corner, compared to the United States: Chinese military operations (at least for now) are mostly limited to the mainland, unlike the United States, which “has a large [international] range of missions and tasks.” According to the author, this makes containment relatively less complicated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“The PLA played an important role in China’s response to the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan ... The idea that none of these personnel working on the front lines in Wuhan became infected by the novel coronavirus would be inconsistent with the experiences of countries from around the world...”***

**Source:** Kristin Huang, “Coronavirus Spares China’s Armed Forces but Disrupts PLA Modernization Plans,” *South China Morning Post*, 9 May 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3082877/coronavirus-spare-chinas-armed-forces-disrupts-pla>

### ***Coronavirus Spares China’s Armed Forces but Disrupts PLA Modernization Plans***

*According to China’s defence ministry, the world’s largest armed force – with about 2.3 million personnel – has had zero confirmed cases of Covid-19. In contrast, the US and Russian militaries, ranked second- and third-largest in the world, have reported more than 4,000 and 1,000 respectively.*

*“The PLA is still a conscription army and, given its large turnover of soldiers every year and the late recruitment and training plan this year, the coronavirus pandemic has already affected combat effectiveness,” said Adam Ni, director of the China Policy Centre, an independent, non-profit research organisation based in Canberra, Australia.*

*“The PLA played an important role in China’s response to the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan ... The idea that none of these personnel working on the front lines in Wuhan became infected by the novel coronavirus would be inconsistent with the experiences of countries from around the world,” he said.*

*More than 4,000 military medical workers were sent to Wuhan as part of China’s effort to contain the outbreak at ground zero – which included the rapid-built emergency field facility, the Huoshenshan hospital – and their efforts were highlighted in a documentary screened recently by state broadcaster CCTV.*

*... rumours were rampant that the Chinese military had been affected by the coronavirus, fueled by a report on February 17 by the official PLA Daily that some soldiers had been placed in quarantine and Yu Qiusong, captain of the Changzhou type 054A frigate, was isolating in a guest house. The news report did not mention why the personnel were in quarantine.*

*“The US is a globally distributed force while the Chinese military largely operates on the mainland. The US thus faces challenges in containing the disease that the Chinese military does not have to face ... and the US military has a large range of missions and tasks it carries out to counter threats to its allies and partners, as well as to US security. This complicates efforts by the US military to carry out disease control measures.”*



## China: Elevating the Status and Role of the People's Armed Police Force

**OE Watch Commentary:** During the 17th session of the Standing Committee of the 13th National People's Congress, officials submitted a draft amendment on China's Law on the People's Armed Police Force (PAP). The amendment seeks to boost the scope of responsibilities of the PAP, place it under centralized command, and obtain more resources. The accompanying two extracts from articles published in *Global Times* and *South China Morning Post* respectively, discuss the proposed changes (which are pending approval as of mid-May), and some of the motivations behind them.

According to the first article, the scope of responsibility of the PAP, which previously had covered domestic affairs, such as rescue, disaster relief, and anti-terrorism, will now extend to maritime law enforcement. The PAP, which the report states fell under the State Council until 2018, when it was consolidated with China's Coast Guard, will now fall under a command held by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Central Military Commission, both of which are chaired by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The second article points out that the PAP controls the country's coast guard, and that China's move to boost the power of the PAP and the role of the coastguard in maritime law enforcement come amid renewed tensions with neighboring states in the South China Sea. The amendment calls for the armed police to join a national intelligence-sharing network and to get more funding "commensurate with its duties and development." As the second article mentions, the amendment is aimed at giving the party more control over the armed police, which now has more important duties than it did in the past. This is consistent with other steps China has been taking over the past five years toward the modernization and restructuring of its armed forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**



A squad of the People's Armed Police stands in formation in the courtyard of the Forbidden City, in Beijing, PRC in 2007.

Source: BrokenSphere via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:People%27s\\_Armed\\_Police\\_squad\\_2.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:People%27s_Armed_Police_squad_2.JPG), CC-BY-SA 3.0

***“The amendment aimed to give the party more control over the armed police, which had more important duties than in the past.”***

**Source:** Zhang Han, “China’s Armed Police to Join Maritime Law Enforcement: Draft Amendment,” *Global Times*, 27 April 2020. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1186904.shtml>

### ***China’s Armed Police to Join Maritime Law Enforcement: Draft Amendment***

*A draft amendment to China’s Law on the People’s Armed Police Force (PAP) has added sections about organization and command, and extended the troops’ scope of responsibilities to cover domestic affairs as well as maritime law enforcement...*

*The main addition in the amendment is a new chapter on “Organization and Command,” and the chapter “Missions and Duty” was divided into two chapters, “Mission” and “Function and Power.”*

*In the reforms, command of the PAP is jointly held by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Central Military Commission. The status of the armed police force was no longer subordinate to the State Council, China’s cabinet, as of 2018, when China reformed the dual command structure.*

*In March 2018, civilian functions like armed police gold force, forestry and public security forces (border control and firefighting) were severed from the PAP, and the China Coast Guard was consolidated with PAP.*

**Source:** Kristin Huang, “Beijing Seeks Boost for Armed Police, Coastguard as Tensions Rise in South China Sea,” *South China Morning Post*, 27 April 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3081789/beijing-seeks-boost-armed-police-coastguard-tensions-rise-south>

### ***Beijing Seeks Boost for Armed Police, Coastguard as Tensions Rise in South China Sea***

*China is moving to boost the power of its armed police and the role of its coastguard in maritime law enforcement at a time of renewed tensions with its neighbors in the South China Sea.*

*China’s 1.5 million-strong armed police is a paramilitary force mainly responsible for internal security, riot control, anti-terrorism, law enforcement and protecting maritime rights. The country’s coastguard, whose vessels are increasingly seen in the disputed waters of the South China Sea, is controlled by the armed police.*

*The amendment seeks to move the armed police directly under the command of the Communist Party’s Central Committee as well as the Central Military Commission (CMC), both of which are chaired by President Xi Jinping. It has been under CMC control since 2017.*

*It calls for a more efficient organizational and command system, and for the armed police to join a national intelligence-sharing network. The armed police would also get more funding “commensurate with its duties and development”, according to the report.*

*The revision now awaits review and approval by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress.*

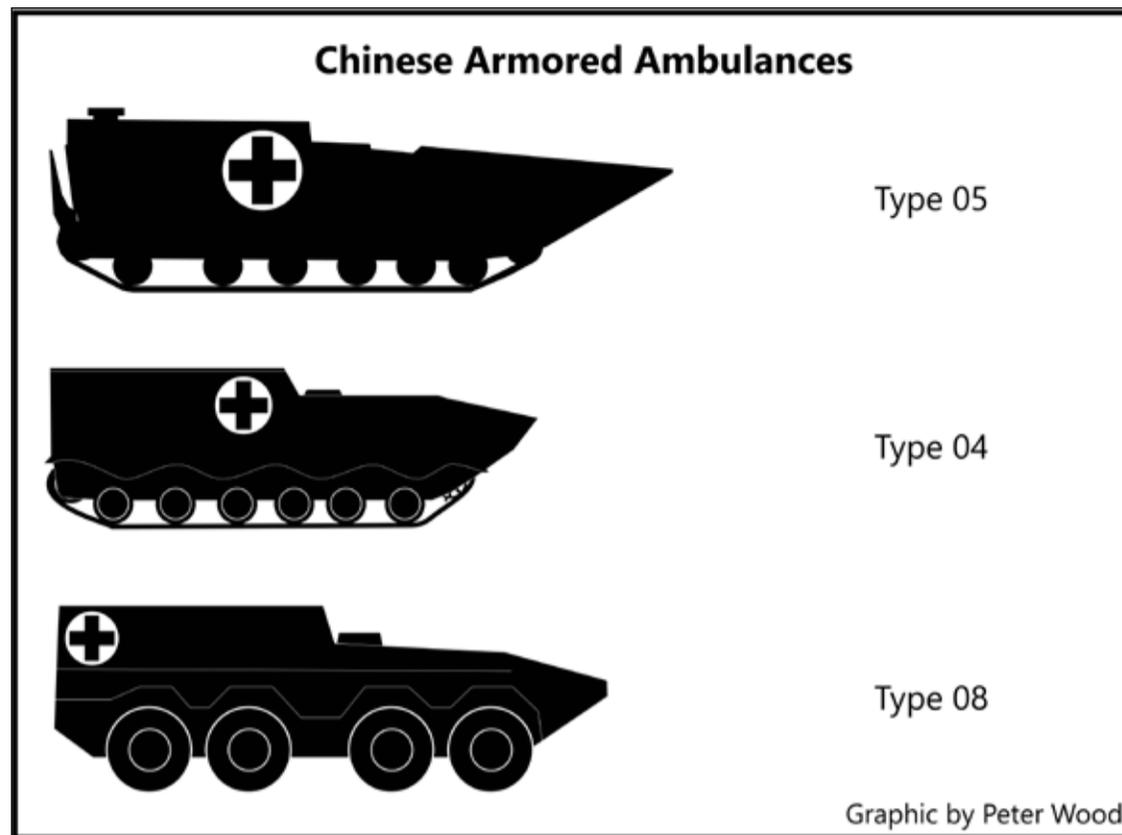
*Peng Peng, vice-president of the Guangdong System Reform Research Society, a think tank, said the amendment aimed to give the party more control over the armed police, which had more important duties than in the past.*



## A Look at the PLA's Combat Medical Capabilities

**OE Watch Commentary:** While attention has recently focused on PLA medical personnel mobilized to address the COVID-19 pandemic, the accompanying article from the Shanghai-based *Xinmin Evening News* discusses the types of equipment used by the PLA's medical teams. The article notes the improvements to the equipment over time, particularly after the PLA's experiences with conflicts in 1974 and 1979 made it clear that they needed dedicated armored vehicles, ships and aircraft.

For the army, its experiences in the 1979 war with Vietnam highlighted the need for a dedicated armored ambulance that could safely transport wounded personnel to the rear areas. As explained in the article, successive generations of armored personnel chassis were converted to this role, with the most recent generations featuring larger compartments, and superior medical equipment. Wheeled (Type 08) and amphibious (Type 05) variants have also been deployed, the latter with the PLA Navy Marine Corps.



In 2014, the PLA held its first large-scale exercise at the Zhurihe Combined Arms Training Base in Inner Mongolia to test how combat medics and supporting vehicles would perform in modern, informationized conditions. Mission-2014 [卫勤使命-2014] focused on realistic tests of large-scale use of combat ambulances, and joint operations and vehicle airdrops. In recent years, the Type 04 and Type 08 armored ambulances have participated in the “Combined Aid,” [联合救援] series medical training exercises held with China and Germany in 2016 and 2019.

Experience in the 1970s also shaped views about the need for dedicated medical facilities aboard ships or more specialized hospital ships. In 1974, during a clash with South Vietnam over the Paracel Islands in the South China sea, wounded personnel were hundreds of nautical miles away from medical facilities on Hainan Island, and due to the lack of required multiple shifts between vessels before arriving at their destination. In 1981, a passenger ship was converted into the first hospital ship Nankang [南康]. China's first large-scale hospital ship, the Peace Ark [和平方舟], entered service in 2008 and has deployed multiple times globally on humanitarian missions.

The PLA has also converted the Y-9 medium transport aircraft into a medical rescue aircraft that flies missions to man-made reefs in the South China Sea and areas of the Tibetan plateau. Other Chinese media coverage of these missions noted that these aircraft, paired with the deployment of helicopters either based on islands or aboard ships, mark a significant increase in capabilities. Other incidents reported mention that personnel from remote garrisons on these features would be required to be transported via helicopter from the island to a ship, and sometimes to a second ship in a relay before landing in Hainan. More recently the Z-18 heavy-lift helicopter has also been converted into a dedicated medical rescue variant.

With at least three classes of armored vehicles, specialized medical rescue ships and aircraft as well as large-scale training exercises, it is clear that improving its combat medical capabilities is a priority for the PLA. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

***“Since 2000, accompanying the large-scale deployment of a new generation [of] armored vehicles, it was determined that the previous generation of armored ambulances cannot meet current requirements for maneuverability or provide adequate medical services. A new generation of armored ambulances was shown for the first time during the “Medical Mission-2014” exercise in 2014.”***



## Continued: A Look at the PLA's Combat Medical Capabilities

**Source:** “Wang Xiaomeng [王笑梦] Zhang Shaohua [张韶华], “战场救护神 - 解放军卫勤保障装备撷英 (Amazing Battlefield Rescue – Selections of PLA Medical Service Equipment),” *Xinmin Evening News* [新民晚报], 10 February 2020. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-04/24/c\\_1124411852.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2019-04/24/c_1124411852.htm)

*Nationwide, the “people’s war” against the Coronavirus is ongoing. Medical personnel from the People’s Liberation Army are waging an intense fight on the frontlines with the virus, showing their iron resolve. People are also curious: What kind of equipment is used by our military medical personnel? Are they as important as the better-known tanks and warships?*

*Before 1979, our military did not have armored ambulances. During the Sino-Vietnamese War (that began in February 1979), it was difficult to locate the wounded or remove them from the front line when found. To fill this gap, our military developed the WZ750 armored ambulance based on the Type-81 tracked armored command vehicle. The vehicle has two crew, a driver and the captain (who also crewed a machine gun), and could carry two medical personnel, a doctor and a medical assistant, and four seriously injured laying down or eight slightly injured in the sitting position. The vehicle is equipped with four stretchers and two standard first-aid kits. The medical crew was equipped to stop bleeding, provide oxygen, provide blood transfusions or IV drips and set fractures.*

*The WZ750 is an emergency vehicle and based on a smaller chassis so its internal space is not very large. To better meet the requirements of realistic combat scenarios, in the mid-1980s, China successively developed the WZ751 armored ambulance on based on the 85-type chassis, and then the WZ753 based on the Type 89. Both vehicles featured greater indoor space, as well as high-power air-conditioning and heating to maintain the interior temperature in extreme weather conditions, and greatly improve passenger comfort. Additionally, our military developed an amphibious armored ambulance using the Type 77 amphibious transport vehicle.*

*Since 2000, accompanying the large-scale deployment of a new generation armored vehicles, it was determined that the previous generation of armored ambulances cannot meet current requirements for maneuverability or provide adequate medical services. A new generation of armored ambulances was shown for the first time during the “Medical Mission-2014” exercise in 2014. The new ambulance was based on the chassis of the tracked Type 04 infantry fighting vehicle, which had a longer continuous track than previous vehicles. A longer chassis means that the ambulance cabin can be larger and carry more medical equipment. The new vehicle was designed to better carry out combat medical missions in “informationized” conditions; wounded soldiers’ conditions are reported to the field hospital during transport to allow them to prepare procedures or have doctors perform remote diagnoses. Our military has also developed amphibious armored ambulances and wheeled armored ambulances based on the Type 05 amphibious assault vehicle and Type 08 wheeled armored transport vehicles.*



**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>



## China's COVID-19 "Letter Diplomacy"

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been quick to capitalize on its handling of the coronavirus and is directing its various influence organizations to diplomatic inroads around the world. As explained in the excerpted article, on 11 March, for example, the International Liaison Department (ILD), also known as the International Department, sent letters to the leaders of over 110 political parties in more than 60 countries, introducing China's experience and practices in preventing and controlling the COVID-19 outbreak.

Established in 1951, the ILD is a central organization within the CCP. Organizations within CCP operate in parallel or within the ministries of the State Council but hold greater power and make important decisions. While the ILD played a much more limited role during the Cold War, liaising with Communist or socialist parties, it has since become the CCP's direct line to political parties worldwide. These meetings often go hand in hand with outreach from the United Front Work Department, China's most well-known organization for exercising political influence at home and abroad.

While its officials sometimes have backgrounds working in the Foreign Ministry, including its current head, Song Tao [宋涛], it is wrong to think of the ILD as subordinate. China's Ministry of Defense, for example, is a minor office compared to the CCP and State Central Military Commissions. The membership of both organizations is identical, with authority over the PLA ultimately laying with the CCP organization. Not surprisingly, Song Tao and the ILD have been major players in China's relations with North Korea, representing the CCP's direct contact with the ruling Workers' Party of Korea.

The department describes itself as "focused on [the] development of healthy and stable relations with other countries" and "striving to build a network of parties and governments and people across all levels of society." Its goal is to "comprehensively introduce our Party's philosophy of governance and policy," and "Tell China's story and convey China's voice," promoting the Party's image globally.

Promoting China's response to the virus is a natural outgrowth of these goals, and it appears to be having an effect. The article notes that as of mid-March, Xi Jinping and the CCP Central Committee had received over 500 messages of condolence and letters of sympathy from 300 political parties and organizations from 120 countries. Just as the CCP's United Front Work's cultivation of business and cultural groups globally helped China acquire necessary protective equipment to deal with the virus in the early months of this year (often to the consternation of countries that saw their domestic supplies evaporate), the ILD actively engages with the political parties of other countries to help set the tone of diplomatic relations and normalize the CCP's view of governance.

There is, however, a broader picture. The excerpted article from March also notes that beyond sharing experiences with the virus, the ILD is promoting the CCP's vision for a "community of shared future for mankind" [人类命运共同体], an umbrella for China's push for an international system that supports rather than opposes its "national rejuvenation." At the end of April, Zhou Li [周力], former deputy head of the ILD wrote in *Kunlun Policy Online* [《昆仑策网》], an independent but pro-government online journal, that in response to US efforts to "contain China, the primary task in establishing a united front under the New Situation is to consciously plan and unite more countries to contain and resist the unilateralism and power politics that the United States recklessly promotes." To achieve this goal, he believes, China will need to be more active in promoting its vision of global affairs, and go beyond "letter diplomacy." **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



Song Tao, 2019.

Source: Karl Norman Alonoz for the Presidential Communications Operations Office, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Song\\_Tao\\_2019\\_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Song_Tao_2019_(cropped).jpg), Public domain

***“Since the outbreak, various political parties around the world have paid great attention to the prevention and control efforts in China and offered full recognition and active support. Many political parties and dignitaries from around the world have called and written to the International Liaison Department to express their condolences and support. To date, more than 500 messages of condolence and letters of sympathy have been sent to General Secretary Xi Jinping and the CCP Central Committee by 300 political parties and organizations from 120 countries.”***



## Continued: China's COVID-19 "Letter Diplomacy"

**Source:** “中联部创新” 致信外交” 通过政党渠道分享中国战“疫” 经验 (International Liaison Department's innovative use of “letter diplomacy” through channels to political parties to share China's experience combating the COVID-19 outbreak),” *International Department of the CCP Central Committee*, 13 March 2020. [https://www.idcpc.org.cn/bzhd/smwz/202003/t20200313\\_137707.html](https://www.idcpc.org.cn/bzhd/smwz/202003/t20200313_137707.html)

*On 11 March, the International Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee sent letters to the leaders of more than 110 political parties in more than 60 countries, introducing China's experience and practices in preventing and controlling the COVID-19 outbreak.*

*The International Liaison Department said that this “letter diplomacy” represents the first time since the COVID-19 outbreak that China has systematically introduced its practices and experience in combating the epidemic to foreign parties through political party channels, and is an important initiative of the CCP to actively establish a new-type of inter-party relations with political parties around the world that seek common ground while reserving differences, respect each other and learn from each other.*

*According to reporters from the International Liaison Department, in the letter, Minister Song Tao outlined the current prevention and control efforts in combating COVID-19 in China, comprehensively sharing China's takeaways and methods with respect to a number of areas. Highlights include: General Secretary Xi Jinping's personal orders, which resulted in the rapid establishment of an efficient joint prevention and control mechanism; the control of sources of infection and the cutting off of transmission channels; the mobilization of national efforts to support the hardest-hit areas; the reliance on science and technology to promote prevention and control of the epidemic; the balancing of prevention and control efforts with the overall economic and social development needs; and the strengthening of international coordination and cooperation.*

*The International Liaison Department stressed that the Communist Party of China has always put the safety and health of the people first, and General Secretary Xi Jinping has exercised command and made a series of major decisions on epidemic prevention and control in a timely manner, providing direction and impetus to the work. With the concerted efforts of the whole country, the spread of the epidemic in China has been basically curbed, the situation of prevention and control is gradually improving, and the order of production and life is restored at an accelerated pace.*

*The International Liaison Department points out that, while fighting the coronavirus outbreak, China has been sharing information about the epidemic with the international community in a timely manner in an open, transparent and responsible manner and has actively engaged in international cooperation to combat the pandemic, an effort which has been received positively by the World Health Organization and the international community. In the face of the grim situation of the rapid spread of the virus globally, the CPC is ready to work with political parties around the world to strengthen exchanges and close communication, share experience in combating epidemics, coordinate measures to combat the virus, maintain regional and international public health security, promote common prosperity and development in all countries of the world and promote the building of a community of human destiny.*

*It is understood that since the outbreak, various political parties around the world have paid great attention to the prevention and control efforts in China and offered full recognition and active support. Many political parties and dignitaries from around the world have called and written to the International Liaison Department to express their condolences and support. To date, more than 500 messages of condolence and letters of sympathy have been sent to General Secretary Xi Jinping and the CCP Central Committee by 300 political parties and organizations from 120 countries. At present, the situation of epidemic prevention and control in China is gradually improving, and it is necessary for the Chinese Communist Party to inform all parties of the positive progress of epidemic prevention and control in China and respond to the concerns and support of all parties.*

*In addition, the Communist Party of China empathizes with many countries in the world, as the virus continues to spread around the world. The letter highlights a series of practices adopted by China to promote the prevention and control of the epidemic and economic and social development in an integrated manner, in an effort to share its experience with political parties in a timely manner and provide relevant lessons for countries to prevent the spread of the epidemic. This reflects the Communist Party of China's high level of responsibility for global public health and safety and its mission to build a community of shared future for mankind.*



## Chinese Views of Public Opinion Warfare

**OE Watch Commentary:** In late April, the editor of the *Journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* Lin Yueqin [林跃勤] wrote an article laying out how China could improve the effectiveness of its foreign messaging. The accompanying passages from that article highlight her suggested actions to “win the public opinion war,” particularly during the current pandemic.

Against the background of the coronavirus and its intensification of tensions between China and other countries, Lin argues that in response to foreign media attacks “we must dare to speak up and ‘draw the sword’ [亮剑], to counter provocative, defamatory, slanderous accusations.” Specifically, Lin calls for Chinese media to “prepare” for attacks from foreign media by studying how it works; monitoring US media and foreign public opinion 24-hours a day to be prepared to deliver responses at a moment’s notice; improve public trust through improved transparency (in some areas); and diversify use of non-traditional media including social media. Lin also calls for a mobilization of “China-friendly” scholars to write articles on foreign platforms, improve empathic communication and use statistics to create the impression of impartiality, improve training and recruitment for foreign communications, including hiring foreigners to help improve fluency.



CGTN logo.

Source: CGTN via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CGTN.png>, Public Domain

It should be noted that the article does not represent an articulation of official policy, but it is a call to action. In fact, China already engages in many of these practices: *Global Times*, *China Daily*, *CCTV*, and others all have foreigners writing op-eds, delivering TV broadcasts and acting as editors. There is active engagement with China scholars who are interviewed for comments. There are also a number of publications that are clearly connected to United Front organizations, but are able to recruit foreign academics to publish with them. While some of these articles are critical of China, their work is interspersed with that of Chinese authors connected to political or influence work, sanitizing the more politically-driven work and presenting a “fair” perspective. The author specifically calls for expansion of this “sympathetic communication.”

Chinese Foreign Ministry officials, once silent on social media, have become quite active. Hua Chunying, the FM spokesperson, even engages with online spats with her counterparts in other countries, something that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago.

Beyond the new platforms and upgraded websites, the suggestions described in the article fit naturally into Chinese leaders’ understanding of information warfare, including public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare—collectively better known in English as the “Three Warfares.” One military textbook describes the “main task” of public opinion struggle as to “unify the ideological will of (your own countries’) military and civilians.” Later passages describe seizing initiative as a priority to quickly defeat enemy narratives domestically, restricting dissemination of enemy information, and “shocking” the enemy.

Other texts make it clear that Chinese leaders view international competition as “systems confrontation”—China’s hard and soft power pitted in a struggle with other nations. The tools suggested by Lin, then, are simply part of a modernization program for that particular part of the Chinese arsenal.

Particularly over the past two decades, China has vastly improved its ability to project its voice into other countries. One of the most visible media is *China Global Television Network (CGTN)*, the international channels of China’s state-run *China Central TV* network. Its channels create content for various regions, with a political twist. The much older *China Radio International (CRI)*, which dates to the 1940s, for example reports and broadcast in over 40 languages and has nearly 70 overseas affiliate radio stations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

***“In response to the dramatic increase in foreign media’s discussions of China and anti-China sentiment during major public incidents, we should consider establishing a response mechanism (network) for monitoring foreign public opinions with the joint participation of government media, private media, media work associations, diplomatic departments, important enterprises, think tanks, etc.”***



## Continued: Chinese Views of Public Opinion Warfare

**Source:** 林跃勤 (Lin Yueqin), “着力提升因应外部对华舆论攻击能力 (Enhancing [China’s] Ability to Respond to Public Opinion Attacks from Abroad),” *Journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* [中国社会科学报], 24 April 2020. [www.cssn.cn/zk/wjyya/202004/t20200424\\_5118468.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/zk/wjyya/202004/t20200424_5118468.shtml)

*In the aftermath of the coronavirus outbreak, some overseas media outlets, especially media from the United States, launched a new round of public opinion attacks on China, which has severely hampered the Chinese, as well as global efforts, against the pandemic. In response to attacks of this nature, we must dare to speak up and ‘draw the sword’ [亮剑], to counter provocative, defamatory, slanderous accusations from overseas media and their methods of “shirking responsibilities.” We should also seek to understand the mechanism behind the spread of negative public opinion during major emergencies and craft our responses. We must enhance China’s outward communication capability and influence in service of the goals of maintaining China’s international image, strengthening China’s national soft power, promoting international cooperation, improving our responses to public health crises, and building a community of shared future for mankind.*

*The fundamental focus areas for winning the public opinion war during a pandemic include the following:*

*First, raise awareness of the need to respond to a public opinion crisis in the event of an emergency. In the face of the aggressive insults against China and anti-China public opinion and sentiment from the United States and others, in order to rectify the situation and defend our reputation, rights and interests, we need to take stock of the situation, gain an in-depth understanding of the characteristics and trends of the attacks against us by the United States media and other media, think deeply about them, and respond to them in a rational and appropriate manner.*

*Second, establish a coordination mechanism for monitoring information transmission during major public incidents. In response to the dramatic increase in foreign media’s discussions of China and anti-China sentiment during major public incidents, we should consider establishing a response mechanism (network) for monitoring foreign public opinions with the joint participation of government media, private media, media work associations, diplomatic departments, important enterprises, think tanks, etc. This mechanism will enable the round-the-clock monitoring of the dynamics of major foreign media such as those in the United States, which will in turn enable quick and powerful responses and counter-attacks to statements that denigrate, slander and attack us, triggering negative international perceptions. Such a mechanism must cover a wide area, including the sources of the negative information, so as to stop or reduce the continuous fermentation of the negative impact caused by foreign media outlets.*

*Thirdly, the role of media supervision should be used to enhance trust, dispel doubts and enhance the country’s capacity to respond to public events. In response to the foreign media’s criticism of our shortcomings, such as slow handling of the epidemic at the beginning, ineffective measures, concealment of incident reports, suppression of whistle blowers, substandard export of PPEs and other medical supplies, and the high rate of error in testing kits, our media should, on the one hand, objectively and impartially describe the real situation to the outside world and not cover up, deny or take sides over the shortcomings that have been proven to exist. Our media should tell the international audience that the Chinese Government is constantly improving its methods, enhancing its pandemic prevention capacity, strengthening cooperation with WHO and other countries, sharing information and experience, and providing assistance, so as to clarify doubts and counter unfounded accusations. On the other hand, it is also necessary to inform the relevant government departments, medical institutions and business organizations of the shortcomings exposed in the process of epidemic prevention and foreign assistance, so as to improve the system, optimize policies, strengthen supervision, and improve product and service quality.*

*Fourth, to promote the construction of a diversified body of media capable of international communications. In view of the fact that pluralistic voices are one of the major trends in international communication, international audiences are more inclined to accept voices from unofficial media. In order to adapt to the trend of pluralism, marketization and socialization of communication, especially in the context of the restriction placed on Chinese state-owned media institutions by the United States, In addition to efforts to strengthen the state media’s foreign influence, we need to consider supporting and strengthening the internationalization of non-state-owned media outlets and giving full play to the role of non-mainstream media in China’s foreign influence campaign. These private media outlets include platforms such as private radio and television, publishing houses, online platforms, and social platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and TikTok. We should help build these private media outlets into internationally recognizable brands capable of countering platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We should also encourage and mobilize enterprises, organizations, think tanks, experts and scholars, as well as foreign experts and scholars friendly to China, to speak out and write articles on foreign communication platforms.*

*Fifth, the capacity and level of sympathetic communication should be improved through innovation in external communication methods and approaches, so as to establish an objective, fair and credible media image. In response to the various smears, accusations, denunciations and “dumping of the pot” by the United States media, we must be adept at grasping their main points and logical flaws and forcefully refute them on the basis of facts, data and the authoritative claims of international organizations, international forums and rational and impartial public opinion in the United States. ...*

*Sixth, we should strengthen training for external campaign talents. We should cultivate a team of communication talents who are familiar with the laws of media operation and trends of public opinion outside China and who are skilled in writing commentaries in foreign languages; employ members of the foreign media or think-tank experts who have extensive media experience and who share China’s philosophy and are friendly to China, and improve the localization level (including editing) of Chinese media in foreign markets.*

...



## China's COVID-19 Information Campaign is Backfiring in Europe

**OE Watch Commentary:** Following the coronavirus outbreak, China launched an aggressive, global information campaign, in an effort to influence the narrative through its government-controlled broadcasters, publications, and social media. To this end, it also sent aid and medical expertise to many countries. However, there are signs that some of these initiatives may be backfiring in parts of Europe. The accompanying passages from European sources discuss China's misinformation campaigns and highlight calls in certain European capitals (UK and Spain) to hold China accountable, and even rethink their engagement with China.

The first accompanying passage is from *EUvsDisinfo*, a European project established in 2015 to address Russia's "disinformation campaigns affecting the European Union, its Member States, and countries in the shared neighborhood." In a late-April report discussing all misinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic, the report notes evidence "of a coordinated push by official Chinese sources to deflect any blame for the outbreak of the pandemic and publicizing announcements and deliveries of bilateral assistance..." The report also points out that "Chinese officials and state media try to curtail any mentions of Wuhan as the origin of COVID-19... Some state-controlled social media channels continue to spread the theory of the outbreak in Wuhan being linked to US military representatives, indicating a continued intent to spread confusion about the origin of the virus."

The report calls out covert Chinese operations on social media, including a network on Twitter "involved in a coordinated influence campaign" with ties to the Chinese government. It notes the discovery of "a coordinated operation of Twitter bots in Italy amplifying messages of the Chinese embassy and attacking the EU. Thousands of tweets with pro-China hashtags published in a two-week period in March came from bots." Also, it highlights a report that Chinese state media has circumvented social media platforms' political ad rules and bought advertising that praised China's handling of the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and attacked the US.

While this effort may be working in some countries (the report notes the findings of an Italian polling firm that shows an increase in Italians who consider China as friendly), it is backfiring in others. As the second passage from the notable British newspaper *The Guardian* reports, "the UK Parliament is now full of PRC-skeptics." It notes that the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee recently published a report critical of the Chinese authorities' approach to data and set up the China Research Group (CRG), "to inform the debate on Beijing's economic and diplomatic policies." The article notes "they are concerned about the transparency of China's strategic investments in UK, amongst other issues." This Member of Parliament is also "focusing on rethinking Britain's engagement with China," and the CRG put forward an idea to hold China accountable for the misinformation around COVID-19.

Similarly, a Spanish Member of the European Parliament recently wrote a commentary in the *New Europe* entitled, "Europe debates: Is China the new global threat?" calling out China for lying and misinformation about the outbreak, and holding it directly responsible due to its leadership keeping silent and misleading the world. He expands this to other concerns with China, focusing on China's stealing of intellectual property.

It has not helped that China's medical masks have turned out to be defective, and have been rejected by Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. As the passages note, the current climate has led to the reconsideration of many other issues related to China, ranging from intellectual property, to its interference in the Hong Kong judiciary, to its activity around Taiwan and in the South China Sea. This would suggest that China's aggressive public diplomacy around the pandemic might be backfiring in parts of Europe. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

***“In a published letter to First Minister Raab, Tugendhat [a UK member of Parliament] outlines an idea to hold China accountable for the misinformation around Covid-19..., demanding investigations into China's interference in the Hong Kong judiciary and the recent sea/air military activity around Taiwan...”***



## Continued: China's COVID-19 Information Campaign is Backfiring in Europe

**Source:** “Eeas Special Report Update: Short Assessment of Narratives and Disinformation around the COVID-19/Coronavirus Pandemic (Updated 2-22 April),” *EUvsDisinfo.eu*, 24 April 2020. <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/eeas-special-report-update-2-22-april/>

*At the same time, we see continued and coordinated push by some actors, including Chinese sources, to deflect any blame for the outbreak of the pandemic and highlighting bilateral assistance. Many reports confirm a high level of coordination between different parts of the Chinese system in messaging and amplification of messages across different languages and communication channels, including the use of overt and covert tactics...*

*Chinese officials and state media try to curtail any mentions of Wuhan as the origin of COVID-19, with new domestic restrictions on publishing COVID-19 related research in China. Some state-controlled social media channels continue to spread the theory of the outbreak in Wuhan being linked to US military representatives, indicating a continued intent to spread confusion about the origin of the virus.*

...

*There is also significant evidence of covert Chinese operations on social media. ProPublica uncovered a network on Twitter involved in a coordinated influence campaign with ties to the Chinese government. The Daily Telegraph found Chinese state media circumventing social media platforms' political ad rules and buying advertising that praised China's handling of the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and attacked the US. According to the Daily Telegraph, “the ads are part of a worldwide propaganda campaign, coordinated across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and traditional media, attempting to depict China as a global leader in the fight against Covid-19 and drown out accusations that it made the crisis worse by trying to cover up its own outbreak.”*

*Formiche has found a coordinated operation of Twitter bots in Italy amplifying messages of the Chinese embassy and attacking the EU. Thousands of tweets with pro-China hashtags published in a two-week period in March came from bots.*

...

*Italian polling firm SWG finds that the share of respondents saying they considered China as friendly to Italy went up to 52 percent in March from 10 percent in January, while the share of respondents indicating they have trust in EU institutions went down to 27 percent in March from 42 percent in September.*

**Source:** “UK Parliament goes from Eurosceptic to China-sceptic,” *The Sunday Guardian Live*, 2 May 2020. <https://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/uk-parliament-goes-eurosceptic-china-sceptic>

*China is now centre stage. Instead of Eurosceptics, Parliament is now full of PRC-sceptics.*

*...Tom Tugendhat, MP, is actively challenging the government's and especially the Foreign Office's approach to relations with China. As Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee, on April 6, the Committee published a report entitled, “The FCO's role in building a coalition against COVID-19”, which is critical of the Chinese authorities' approach to data and WHO's procrastination. The report recommends a science led “G20 for Public Health” and a leading role for the FCO in reforming how worldwide data is shared and verified, and to prepare the response for a next pandemic.*

*Tugendhat has also set up the China Research Group (CRG), likely comprising many of the powerful ERG members. This is a collection of MPs who seek to inform the debate on Beijing's economic and diplomatic policies. It seems they are concerned about the transparency of China's strategic investments in UK, amongst other issues. Tugendhat is focusing on rethinking Britain's engagement with China. On 27 April, the CRG began a daily newsletter circulating their accumulation of international, political, economic news links about China. In a published letter to First Minister Raab, Tugendhat outlines an idea to hold China accountable for the misinformation around Covid-19 that has resulted in the pandemic, demanding investigations into China's interference in the Hong Kong judiciary and the recent sea/air military activity around Taiwan, and to know how UK will support Taiwan in the future. And regarding China's military activities in the South China Sea, Tugendhat is encouraging a G7 representation, outreach to Japan and ASEAN for security co-operation.*

**Source:** Herman Tertstet, “Europe debates: Is China the new global threat?” *New Europe*, 10 April 2020. <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/europe-debates-is-china-the-new-global-threat/>

*The ongoing global coronavirus pandemic has had punishing global consequences with the worst supposedly yet to come. And all of this because China not only failed to contain but refused to admit the severity of the situation.*

...

*Intellectual property is another area under threat from the Chinese Communist Party. There had been countless reports in the media before the Coronavirus Epidemic of the extent to which Chinese manufacturers were going to steal the intellectual property of western clients...*



## Philippine Insurgents Disrupt Army's COVID-19 Response

**OE Watch Commentary:** Although militants loyal to Abu Sayyaf and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have often commanded the most attention among insurgents in the Philippines, the Communist New People's Army (NPA) is still a highly active rebel group. The excerpted article discusses one of the latest NPA attacks on an infantry battalion that had been protecting employees of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The employees were delivering stipends to families affected by COVID-19 during the country's lockdown. The NPA opened fire on the soldiers near a village and killed two soldiers after a one-hour long gun battle.

The article quotes the commander of the infantry battalion, Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio, who stated that the ambush was particularly unfortunate because it caused violence in a community suffering from COVID-19. The soldiers were described as heroic for their role in assisting to alleviate the pandemic's effects before they lost their lives. Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio vowed to avenge the two soldiers and capture the NPA rebels who conducted the attack. With around 7,000 cases and 500 deaths in the Philippines, attacks that undermine the country's pandemic response will likely be heavily condemned, possibly leading to a loss of further support for the NPA. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



NPA Flag.

Source: Jolle via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NPA.png>, CC BY 3.0

***“Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio, acting commanding officer of the 91st Infantry Battalion, said the attack was ‘unfortunate,’ criticizing the rebels for bringing violence to a community that is struggling with COVID-19.”***

**Source:** “NPA attack on troops securing COVID-19 aid distribution kills 2 soldiers,” *News Info Inquirer*, 22 March 2020. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1262803/npa-attack-on-troops-securing-covid-19-aid-distribution-kills-2-soldiers>

*Two soldiers were killed while three others were wounded in an attack on Tuesday (April 21) by gunmen believed to be New People's Army (NPA) rebels during the lockdown in the town of Maria Aurora. The soldiers from the Army's 91st Infantry Battalion were securing the area as employees of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) were distributing cash to beneficiaries of the government's Social Amelioration Program. The program was part of government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and aimed at helping poor households cope with movement restrictions during the lockdown.*

*According to a report of the Public Information Office of the Army's 7th Infantry Division, NPA rebels opened fire at soldiers en route to the village of Diaat, killing one soldier and wounding another who died later in a hospital. The soldiers returned fire and engaged rebels in an hour-long gun battle. Lt. Col. Reandrew Rubio, acting commanding officer of the 91st IB, said the attack was “unfortunate,” criticizing the rebels for bringing violence to a community that is struggling with COVID-19. “Sooner or later, we will catch these bandits and for sure they will pay for the crimes they have committed,” he said.*



## Coronavirus Shutdown Complicates Southern Thailand Conflict

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), meaning “National Revolutionary Front,” is an Islamist independence movement and one of the most powerful rebel groups in northern Malaysia and Pattani in southern Thailand. On 2 May, the Thai military killed three BRN members in Pattani. While Thai authorities affirm that the insurgents were preparing an attack during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, the operation was controversial due to various reasons detailed in the excerpted article from Thailand’s *Chiang Rai Times*.

According to the article, in April, the BRN declared that they were ceasing all activities on humanitarian grounds because of the coronavirus pandemic; the killings were the first act of violence since then. Further, the article notes the attack on the insurgents occurred just as they were breaking their fast, which was a sensitive time to conduct an operation. Nevertheless, the Thai military claimed they received intelligence on suspicious strangers moving into a village and that one of the suspects had participated in an August 2016 bombing in Thailand that killed four and injured over 30 people. The other two suspects had also been involved in criminal and insurgent activities.



Pattani mosque.

Source: Ukwaenterprise via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pattani\\_mosque.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pattani_mosque.jpg), CC BY SA 2.0

According to the article, the Thai military also justified its actions by noting that it was the insurgents who were initially planning to conduct attacks, despite it being Ramadan. They further noted the soldiers involved in the operation were specifically tasked with preventing bombings and that the ceasefire declared by the BRN was irrelevant. The BRN spokesperson nevertheless countered that the government was exploiting the coronavirus-related shutdown to launch raids against the insurgents and that doing so was inhumane. As a result, the BRN has threatened to resume attacks.

Amid this war of words, the article recalled that 7,000 people have died in Thailand’s Deep South since the insurgency reignited in January 2004. Despite Ramadan and the coronavirus shutdown, the violence evidently has not abated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

**“BRN spokesman Abdul Karim Khalid blamed the government for taking advantage of the COVID-19 shutdown across the region to launch the raid on the suspected rebel hideout.”**

**Source:** “Security Forces Kill 3 Suspected Insurgents in Thailand’s Deep South,” *Chiang Rai Times*, 2 May 2020. <https://www.chiangraitimes.com/thailand-national-news/security-forces-kill-3-suspected-insurgents-in-thailands-deep-south/>

*Thai security forces shot and killed three suspected insurgents during a raid in Thailand’s deep south on Thursday. Authorities allege the men were planning to mount an attack during the fasting month of Ramadan. The killings of the suspects were the first act of violence since BRN (Barisan Revolusi Nasional, or National Revolutionary Front) rebels declared in early April that they were ceasing “all activities” on humanitarian grounds because of the coronavirus pandemic. But the group warned it would resume operations if Thai government forces attacked its fighters.*

*The raid took place before dusk in Pakaruesong, a village in Nong Chik district, as residents of Thailand’s mainly Muslim Deep South were preparing to break their fast at the end of the seventh day of the holy month, officials said. “Prior to the shootout, we received intelligence that a group of insurgents took a break in the area before they planned to exploit Ramadan to launch an attack,” Maj. Gen. Piyapong Wongchan, the chief of police in Pattani, told reporters. “As officials were circling the house and calling them out, the perpetrators opened fire first,” Piyapong said, adding that the three men in the house were killed and one police officer was injured in the gun battle.*

*Piyapong said arrest warrants had been posted for all three men for their alleged involvement in several crimes. Investigators alleged that one of the men, Yusof Mometoh, had participated in an August 2016 bombing in southern Thailand outside of the Deep South, one of several bombings over two days that killed four and injured more than 30 people.*

*More than 7,000 people have died in the Deep South since the insurgency reignited in January 2004. After the BRN declared the ceasefire on April 4, Maj. Gen. Pramote Prom-in dismissed the declaration as “irrelevant” to military efforts to curb violent activities in the southern border region. In a YouTube posting on Thursday, BRN spokesman Abdul Karim Khalid blamed the government for taking advantage of the COVID-19 shutdown across the region to launch the raid on the suspected rebel hideout.*



# The Focus of Pakistan's 2020 Green Book

**OE Watch Commentary:** Pakistan's "Green Book" is an annual publication put out by the country's National Defense University (NDU) with contributions from military and civilian authors on security topics of interest for the armed forces and policymakers in Pakistan. The NDU published the 2020 Green Book in February; prompting interest from neighboring India. The accompanying excerpted article from *The Print*, an English-language news website in India, provides an Indian perspective on a few of the Green Book's essays.

The article points out how Pakistan's Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa stated that the "Balakot airstrike and the scrapping of Articles 370 and 35A by the Narendra Modi government are two significant events that will have a lasting imprint on the geopolitics of this region." The author mentions that the Green Book is put out "as an internal publication, which, as a matter of principle, is kept confidential from the public," but notes that some of it is "available on the website of Pakistan's National Defence University." It appears that the author is referencing the version available online.

The article notes that other essays in the Green Book discuss the situation in Kashmir, including one from retired Lieutenant General Raza Muhammad Khan, a "former Corps Commander and former president of National Defence University," who wrote that "non-state actors will emerge again in Kashmir" and that they "could be unpredictable and unrestricted." Another piece in the Green Book that is highlighted in the article is one on Kashmir by a journalist who looked at how the Pakistani government should conduct information warfare and that "there should be a focused goal of extracting authentic information from stakeholders in Kashmir." She specifically notes how "if executed properly and a local uprising occurs inside IOJK (Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir), it will make it extremely difficult for India to keep selling the terrorism card on IOJK" and that "only a native uprising will be just and politically defensible for Pakistan on international forums."



Kashmir Region November 2019.

Source: CIA via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kashmir\\_Region\\_November\\_2019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kashmir_Region_November_2019.jpg), Public Domain

Overall, the article represents one of the few sources examining the contents of the latest Green Book. It provides a look at how the situation in Kashmir continues to be an important security issue for the government of Pakistan and how it could impact India over the next several months. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“In its latest edition... the Pakistani Army chief has singled out the Balakot air strikes and Kashmir losing its special status as the significant events of 2019.”***



## Continued: The Focus of Pakistan's 2020 Green Book

**Source:** Snehesh Alex Philip, “Balakot, Article 370 move changed geopolitics of region: Pakistan Army chief in ‘Green Book’,” *The Print*, 27 April 2020. <https://theprint.in/india/balakot-article-370-move-changed-geopolitics-of-region-pakistan-army-chief-in-green-book/409585/>

*The Balakot airstrike and the scrapping of Articles 370 and 35A by the Narendra Modi government are two significant events that will have a lasting imprint on the geopolitics of this region, Pakistan Army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa has said in the “Green Book” of his force.*

*The Green Book 2020, the latest edition published by the Pakistan Army featuring essays by serving officers and others, focuses on the implications of these events from diverse perspectives and dimensions.*

*The Green Book is published by the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Pakistan Army as an internal publication, which, as a matter of principle, is kept confidential from the public...Some of the publications are, however, available on the website of Pakistan’s National Defence University.*

*In its latest edition, a copy of which was accessed by ThePrint, the Pakistani Army chief has singled out the Balakot air strikes and Kashmir losing its special status as the significant events of 2019.*

*“Year 2019 witnessed two significant events which will have lasting imprint on the geopolitics of this region; first, the unwarranted Balakot Strike by Indian Air Force on 26th February and second, the unilateral annexation of Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir by Mr Modi on 5th August, through abrogation of Article 370 and 35A,” Gen Bajwa has written...*

*Lieutenant General Raza Muhammad Khan (ret), former Corps Commander and former president of National Defence University, Islamabad, has in his essay said non-state actors will emerge again in Kashmir, “whose response could be unpredictable and unrestricted”.*

*...The non-state actors refer to terror groups created, financed and supported by the Pakistan Army and its intelligence wing — ISI.*

*...Farzana Shah, a Peshawar-based journalist, has called for taking the “war into non-kinetic domains” — information/cyber warfare, electronic warfare (EW).*

*In her article in the Green Book, she said there should be a focused goal of extracting authentic information from stakeholders in Kashmir, “most importantly from the general public facing the brutalities of Indian oppressive forces”.*

*She argued that once information is gathered, the Foreign Office must disseminate it with a proper narrative of the state of Pakistan.*

*“A single video clip or picture can change the perception of India, which it has built so painstakingly over the years,” Shah has written...“If executed properly and a local uprising occurs inside IOJK, it will make it extremely difficult for India to keep selling the terrorism card on IOJK,” Shah said. “Burhan Wani (Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist) was a local hero, India could not blame his action on Pakistan. Only a native uprising will be just and politically defensible for Pakistan on international forums. Even such an uprising will need support in the information domain.”*

*The Print had reported on 22 April that heightened terror-related activities are expected in Kashmir this summer and that a new terror proxy has been formed by Pakistan to give an indigenous spin to it...*



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>



## China's COVID-19 Diplomacy in Saudi Arabia and Egypt

**OE Watch Commentary:** Governments across the Middle East and North Africa are relying on Chinese equipment, technology and expertise to contain COVID-19. Of particular note are Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's largest economy, and Egypt, its most populous country. Their recovery paths will set the tone for the region's broader post-pandemic trajectory and China is emerging as the go-to foreign partner for both.

Saudi and Egyptian media have been largely positive on China's role in the pandemic. The first accompanying excerpt, posted on the Egyptian government media website and relying extensively on reporting from China's *Xinhua News Agency*, lists the many ways in which China and Egypt are collaborating to combat the pandemic. The positive view of China's pandemic response is also prevalent – though not universal – in Saudi media, where it is further reinforced by media appearances and Arabic-language opinion pieces authored by Chinese diplomats, such as the accompanying opinion piece from China's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, published in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*.



*Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation participants.*  
Source: President of Russia Website, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60393>, CC by 4.0

There are also material reasons for the success of the “shared fight” narrative. Egypt's economic ties with China are on the rise, and China is a major investor in several of President Sisi's mega-projects. The countries are establishing joint ventures to combat COVID-19, and as of mid-May, China had sent two shipments of aid to Egypt, with a third, “larger one” expected soon. In Saudi Arabia, an immediate concern at the time of writing is whether the Hajj will proceed and what special measures will be taken if it does. A key symbol of Saudi prestige and a vital revenue source for the city of Mecca, the Hajj begins in late July this year. In April, the Saudi government inked a \$265 million deal with China's Beijing Genome Institute (BGI) for COVID-19 detecting equipment. The deal's outcome will influence the fate of the 2020 Hajj and Saudi Arabia's economic recovery more broadly, not to mention relations between the two countries.

Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other governments across the region can be expected to rely on new technologies to implement social control measures once COVID-19 has been contained. Building on already established relationships, China is likely to be viewed as a favorable partner in this endeavor. The Chinese government's political and technological know-how will further enable the growth of these relationships, especially in Egypt, where additional Chinese capital may be necessary to finish President Sisi's ambitious New Administrative Capital and other mega-projects currently on hold. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“China and the Kingdom will continue to help each other to cope with the epidemic and set an example for a joint response to the crisis...”***

**Source:** “Xinhua: Chinese-Egyptian Relations Growing in Strength and Stability During the Coronavirus Fight,” *Egyptian State Information Service*, 20 April 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y8kj2ppt> شينخوا: العلاقات الصينية المصرية تزداد قوة ومتانة وسط مكافحة “كورونا”

*According to the New China News Agency (Xinhua), as the entire world has fought the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) since early this year, bilateral relations and mutual trust between China and Egypt have grown in strength and sustainability, continuing to enhance the bonds of affection and friendship, not only at the governmental level but also at the level of civil society and between Chinese and Egyptian friends... President Sisi expressed his confidence that the joint fight against the disease will result in strengthening friendship between the two countries. In a message sent to his Chinese counterpart in early February, President Sisi showed Egypt's keenness to help China in any way possible.*



## Continued: China's COVID-19 Diplomacy in Saudi Arabia and Egypt

### Source:

Chen Weiqing. "We Must Stand Together, Through Good and Bad, to Protect Global Health Security," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 23 March 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yb8x4klx>

علينا التضامن في السراء والضراء لحماية أمن الصحة العالمية

*On March 19, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz gave a televised speech. I would like to register my great appreciation for the highly responsible measures taken by the Saudi side during the fight against the epidemic... I am fully confident that the kingdom is now on the right path to fight the epidemic, and that the dawn of victory will finally emerge. China and the Kingdom will continue to help each other to cope with the epidemic and set an example for a joint response to the crisis.*

Source: "China gifts Egypt second batch of medical supplies against coronavirus," *al-Masry al-Youm/Egypt Independent*, 12 May 2020.

<https://www.egyptindependent.com/china-gifts-egypt-second-batch-of-medical-supplies-against-coronavirus/>

*Egypt's Health Ministry announced on Monday that it had received a second batch of medical supplies from China to aid against the coronavirus outbreak. Minister of Health Hala Zayed thanked China's government and people for the gift, which reflects the close bond the two nations share... [Chinese Ambassador Liao] Liqiang said that the Chinese government will send a third batch of medical supplies larger than the first and second batch.*

Source: "Saudi Arabia and China sign \$265m deal to fight coronavirus," *Arab News*, 27 April 2020. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1665366/saudi-arabia>

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1665366/saudi-arabia>

*"The large number of tests provided for in this agreement clearly indicates that the Kingdom is in a race against time to diagnose cases and to work to isolate them in a way that reduces the risks from this pandemic," said Dr. Abdullah Al-Rabeeh, chairman of the Saudi negotiating and purchasing committee... The equipment will include the Huo Yan laboratory, a mobile modular air dome structure constructed to support screening and detection capabilities. The inflatable lab can be transported by air as standard freight on any commercial passenger plane. "The Huo Yan laboratory is an important step toward cooperation between our two countries in fighting against the pandemic," the ambassador said. Saudi Arabia has also purchased test kits and chemical reagents from the US, Switzerland and South Korea.*

## 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>



## Domestic Drone Production in Saudi Arabia and the UAE

**OE Watch Commentary:** Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE have recently restructured their domestic defense industries to focus on producing high-value, advanced technology platforms including UAVs. For Saudi Arabia, domestic military manufacturing is now licensed by the General Authority for Military Industries (GAMI), whose mandate includes helping the kingdom achieve its goal of over 50% of military spending being localized by 2030. GAMI has thus far granted licenses to 25 Saudi companies, many of them operating in new technology sectors. The Emirate of Abu Dhabi, meanwhile, consolidated its high-tech military production efforts into a conglomerate called EDGE, which was established last year.



Karayel Tactical Drone.

Source: Bks5669 via Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kareyel.jpg>, CC 4.0

At the Unmanned Systems Exhibition (UMEX) held in Abu Dhabi last February, an EDGE company focused on UAV technology, the Abu Dhabi Autonomous Systems Investments Company (ADASI), unveiled its “Garmousha” vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) drone. The Garmousha is ADASI’s first 100% Emirati product and can carry twice the payload of the al-Sabr S-100, a locally manufactured version of the Austrian Camcopter S-100 that ADASI has been producing under license for several years. The UAE Armed Forces recently signed an agreement with ADASI for an unspecified number of Garmoushas and a new round of S-100s. To date, the UAE has lost five S-100s in the ongoing Yemen conflict.

In Saudi Arabia, GAMI recently teamed up with a local UAV company called INTRA Defense Technologies to establish a domestic drone manufacturing plant. INTRA, which was created in 2013 and is among the local companies licensed by GAMI, operates Turkish Karayel UAVs on behalf of the Saudi Armed Forces. One of them was shot down in Yemen earlier this year. According to a tweet from the director of GAMI, the new manufacturing plant will produce six UAV systems for the Saudi military by early 2021 and 40 within the next five years, presumably a Saudi variant of the Karayel. Per the head of INTRA, “60 percent of the project’s operations will be handled by Saudi enterprises, and 60 percent of its output will be destined for export.” Saudi Arabia’s domestic military drone program may lag slightly behind that of its neighbors in Abu Dhabi, but its ambitions are expansive and its timeline compressed. INTRA’s strategy, according to its website, is “Technology transfer to build a modern industry in a record period of time.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“Autonomous capabilities for us is an essential part for us to protect our troops, to protect our army and move them away from harm’s way...”***

**Source:** “UAE’s first locally-made drone unveiled at Umex,” *The National*, 23 February 2020. <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/uae-s-first-locally-made-drone-unveiled-at-umex-1.983259>

*The Garmousha, named after a kind of falcon, is “one of many” drones “coming down the line” for Edge, according to the chief executive. However, this first one marks a significant milestone as it is equipped with the technology platform upon which all future drones — big or small — will be designed. [Edge chief executive] Mr Al Bannai, who founded the Abu Dhabi cybersecurity contractor DarkMatter and Axiom telecoms in the 1990s, said the platform “is flexible to accept different kinds of payloads depending on the mission,” whether for military, surveillance or private sector operations. “We are a country that does not have a population of 100 million. Autonomous capabilities for us is an essential part for us to protect our troops, to protect our army and move them away from harm’s way.”*

**Source:** @GAMI\_KSA, *Twitter*, 27 April 2020. [https://twitter.com/GAMI\\_KSA/status/1254790585069830145](https://twitter.com/GAMI_KSA/status/1254790585069830145)

*[Announcing the] launch of activities for developing, manufacturing and localizing UAV systems in coordination between the General Authority for Military Industries and INTRA Defense Technologies, which has obtained an industrial license from the authority and aims to launch 6 unmanned aircraft systems in 2021 and 40 systems within 5 years.*

**Source:** “Saudi unmanned aircraft systems set for 2021 launch,” *Arab News*, 28 April 2020. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1666506/business-economy>

*INTRA President Salman bin Nasser Al-Shathri said 60 percent of the project’s operations will be handled by Saudi enterprises, and 60 percent of its output will be destined for export.*



## The Future of Turkey's Drone Technology

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Turkish military operates about 130 UAVs, mostly developed and manufactured by the Turkish defense industry. It has successfully utilized these drones in its aerial campaigns against Kurdish groups and regime forces in Syria as well as Kurdish militants in Iraq. These indigenous drones, especially the Bayraktar TB2 and ANKA have proven their effectiveness in the battlefield. Turkey has signed deals with other countries to export them as well. The accompanying article from state-owned *Anadolu Ajansı* highlights further steps to improve Turkey's UAV capabilities in terms of "invest[ing] in smarter technologies, heavier platforms, and more innovative" concept of operations (CONOPS).

As the article states, in terms of smarter technologies, Turkey's Undersecretariat for Defense Industries unveiled a project named Global Positioning System Independent Autonomous Navigation System Development (Kerkes) in 2019 to manufacture drones with more autonomous capabilities. Under this project, Turkey's defense industry intends to produce mini drones "with deep learning technologies, autonomous navigation without relying on GPS-based systems... and smart targeting features in complex battlegrounds." The article states that with respect to developing mini drones with aforementioned advanced technological capabilities, domestic new generation mini drones Kargu, Togan, and fixed-wing Alpagu "can offer more flexible and smarter concepts of operations as the nation's defense technological & industrial base (DTIB) capitalize on autonomy, deep learning, and swarming algorithms."



Bayraktar TB2 UAV, Teknofest 2019.

Source: Kingbjelica via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar\\_TB2\\_S-%C4%B0HA\\_Teknofest\\_2019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar_TB2_S-%C4%B0HA_Teknofest_2019.jpg), CC-BY-SA-4.0

While the Bayraktar TB2 and ANKA have shown their combat effectiveness with their combat payloads, three other drone systems have heavier platforms. First, with a payload of nearly 3,000 pounds, the Akıncı (Raider) is designed and produced by Baykar Makina. Akıncı will have the capability to carry munitions such as "the SOM-A indigenous cruise missile with a range of over 155 miles and MK-82 and MK-83 bombs." Second, the Aksungur will have the capability to carry out long-term surveillance, signals intelligence, and maritime patrol missions. Aksungur, developed by the Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) has an over 1650 pound carrying capacity, an upgrade from the over 440 pound capacity of the earlier model ANKA. Finally, with a faster platform, the Gökşungur will be Turkey's first supersonic drone.

The author states that the Syrian civil war provided opportunities to state and non-state actors to test new CONOPS. One concept that Turkish and Russian militaries have mastered is "using unmanned aerial systems as artillery-spotters" in Syria. In fact, most recently the Turkish Armed Forces utilized this CONOPS in its operation in Idlib by deploying the TB2 and ANKA-S drones "in collaboration with multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) and howitzer." The second CONOPS is integrating the mini drones with the larger UAVs platforms. However, the author states that the Turkish defense industry is far from achieving this. The last concept is integrating air-to-air indigenous missiles Gökdoğan and Bozdoğan with the Akıncı drone. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***"Turkey's unmanned systems vision is investing in smarter technologies, heavier platforms, and more innovative... concept of operations..."***

**Source:** Dr. Can Kasapoglu, "Turkey's robotic warfare future in the skies," *Anadolu Ajansı*, 07 May 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-turkey-s-robotic-warfare-future-in-the-skies-/1832430#!>

*Ankara's drone proliferation efforts are likely to introduce true capability leaps. Briefly, Turkey's unmanned systems vision is investing in smarter technologies, heavier platforms, and more innovative CONOPS (concept of operations).*

*Autonomy and swarming loom large as the two key words one needs to grasp for envisaging future robotic warfare. In this respect, Project Kerkes remains the leading effort of the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries, Turkey's main procurement body. Unveiled in 2019, the ambitious project is centered on producing mini drone swarms with deep learning technologies, autonomous navigation without relying on GPS-based systems -- or in jammed environments --, and smart targeting features in complex battlegrounds.*

*Turkey's mini loitering munitions are promising with respect to their future roles. Turkey's new generation mini drone family, principally consisting of rotary-wing Kargu, Togan (the latter a surveillance platform) and fixed-wing (Alpagu), can offer more flexible and smarter concepts of operations as the nation's defense technological & industrial base (DTIB) capitalize on autonomy, deep learning, and swarming algorithms.*

*Turkish defense firms, for some time, have been working hard to field heavier systems. The Turkish military's principal unmanned aerial vehicles, Bayraktar TB-2 and Anka, have some 55kg and 200kg combat payloads respectively. Nevertheless, they carry Roketsan-manufactured small & smart solutions, such as the MAM-L, which has been a boost for their combat effectiveness.*

*In the 2020s, the Turkish Armed Forces' forthcoming platforms will offer something really different. The Akıncı (Raider) deserve utmost attention in this respect. Designed and produced by Baykar, the makers of the Bayraktar TB-2, the Akıncı will enjoy a payload of 1,350kg...*

*The other game-changer UAS will be Aksungur, especially with respect to naval balance of power... Last, having furthered the experience harvested from the Aksungur project, TUSAS is now working on a faster platform, the Gokşungur.*

*The Syrian battle-space has long been a warfighting laboratory. All the belligerents, states and non-states, have learned key lessons from almost a decade of fighting. Artillery & drone fusion is one of these lessons. Russian and Turkish militaries have digested the importance of using unmanned aerial systems as artillery-spotters...*

*The second notable project is the integration of Alpagu fixed-wing loitering munitions with the Akıncı high-end UAS... Finally, Turkish drone proliferation roadmap involves some exotic features too. The Akıncı will carry indigenous air-to-air missiles Gokdogan and Bozdogan...*



## Turkey's Competing Interests with Gulf Nations

**OE Watch Commentary:** In the early 2000s, Turkey had strong political, economic, and military ties with several states in the Persian Gulf, which deteriorated after the Arab Spring. The accompanying articles shed light on Turkey's relations with Gulf states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

The first article delves into the evolution of Turkey's good relations with the Gulf states from the early 2000s until 2013 when Turkey and some of these states found themselves supporting opposite sides of the developments in Egypt. That year also marked the end of these countries acting as one block. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain formed an unofficial alliance to have a uniformed policy, with the UAE spearheading the opposition to Turkish policies in the Middle East. However, Turkey maintained its relations with Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. Since the Saudi-led blockade on Qatar in June 2017, Turkish-Qatari relations have significantly expanded with Turkey deploying more military personnel to Qatar to counter-balance the Saudi-led blockade.



Turkish soldiers conduct patrol on outside Manbij, Syria.

Source: Voice of America via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish\\_soldiers\\_conduct\\_patrol\\_on\\_outside\\_Manbij,\\_Syria.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkish_soldiers_conduct_patrol_on_outside_Manbij,_Syria.jpg), Public Domain

According to the article, several developments changed the trajectory of Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In 2017, when Turkey started working with Russia and Iran to resolve the Syrian conflict, it effectively ended its cooperation with Saudi Arabia in Syria. The UAE took this opportunity to convince Saudi Arabia to move away from Turkey. In addition, right after Turkey's support for Qatar during the Saudi-led blockade, Turkey immediately operationalized a planned military base in Qatar and deployed more soldiers. Turkey's support of Qatar further agitated Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Muhammed bin Salman (MBS) did not seem to show any interest in engaging with Turkey. Over time, these states started countering Turkey in many theaters in the region, especially in Syria.

The article also delves into the activities of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Syria to counter-balance Turkey's presence there. They supported Kurdish groups, specifically the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and its military wing the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which Turkey considers terrorist organizations. The UAE even hosted Mazloum Kobani, the commander-in-chief of the SDF after Turkey issued an Interpol red notice for his arrest. Anytime Turkey launched an operation into Syria, the UAE and Saudi Arabia condemned Turkey for violating the sovereignty of Syria, and lobbied the League of Arab States to do the same. Furthermore, after Turkey's operations in Syria, the UAE and Bahrain resumed their diplomatic relations with Damascus to provide support to the Syrian government. More recently, as the second passage notes, the UAE is reported to have offered \$3 billion to Damascus, to not comply with the ceasefire deal Turkey signed with Russia to end hostilities in Idlib. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***“While Saudi Arabia and the UAE are spending their political and military energy in Syria against Turkey, they are also trying to get the upper hand in the Libyan theater...”***

**Source:** Dr. İsmail Akdoğan, “Körfez’ in Türkiye karşıtı politikalarında yeni sahne Suriye (Syria is the new stage in Gulf policies against Turkey),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 21 April 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/korfezin-turkiye-karsiti-politikalarinda-yeni-sahne-suriye/1812837>

*The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have moved their anti-Turkey activities to Syria with the aim of breaking Ankara's influence. Turkey has reshaped the regional equation through its successful military operations.*

*... The level of cooperation previously achieved continued for a while in the atmosphere created by the 2011 Arab uprisings but could not survive any longer. While Turkey and the Gulf countries initially acted in unison by supporting dissidents in Libya and Syria, they were discreetly competing in Tunisia and Egypt. The military coup in Egypt in July 2013 was a turning point in revealing disagreements between Turkey and some Gulf countries...*

*Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain have become countries acting together as a block in the Middle East against Turkey... The first reason for this is Turkey starting the Astana negotiations with Russia and Iran in January 2017 to find a political solution to the Syrian conflict. Ankara's direct talks with Moscow and Tehran meant that its partnership with Riyadh ended in Syria... Second, Turkey's support for its ally Qatar during the blockade that was put in place in June 2017...*

*The third is the change of administration in the USA in January 2017... Improving relations with Saudi Arabia to take active responsibility for controlling Iran... Fourth, in June 2017, it was removing the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayif and appointing Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS) [as crown prince]...*

*Turkey's cross border operations to limit the operational environment of terrorist organizations PYD/YPG naturally disappointed Saudi Arabia and the UAE who are in close cooperation with these organizations... The anti-Turkey Gulf block... changed strategy to start a dialogue with Damascus.*

*... While Saudi Arabia and the UAE are spending their political and military energy in Syria against Turkey, they are also trying to get the upper hand in the Libyan theater...*

**Source:** “Abu Dhabi crown prince urged Assad to break ceasefire,” *Anatolian Agency*, 13 April 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/abu-dhabi-crown-prince-urged-assad-to-break-ceasefire-/1803450>

*Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed agreed to pay \$3 billion to the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria to break the cease-fire in the country's northwestern province of Idlib, according to a media report.*



## Turkey's Involvement in Syria and Libya Stokes Regional Rivalry

**OE Watch Commentary:** Turkey has recently stepped up its involvement in Libya by dispatching unmanned aerial vehicles, military hardware and deploying thousands of fighters from Syria. Turkey supports the UN-recognized Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) against General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA). Its involvement in Libya, coupled with its operations in Syria, have stoked regional rivalry and animosity towards Turkey. The accompanying article provides insight into how Turkey's actions in these two military theaters are impacting its relations with other regional actors.



Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 Drone.

Source: Bayhaluk via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar\\_TB2\\_Runway.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bayraktar_TB2_Runway.jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0

According to the article, Turkey's adversaries in Syria and Libya are cooperating to curb its military interventions in these countries. In early March, Khalifa Haftar visited Damascus to join their efforts against Turkey while fighting between Turkish and Syrian forces were ongoing in Idlib. This meeting paved the way for the LNA to open an embassy in Damascus to combat "Turkish aggression in the two countries." The author sees this as an indication that the Syrian and Libyan conflicts are becoming intertwined (see: "Oil, Fighters, Mercenaries and Diplomats: Increasing Flows Between Libya and Syria," *OE Watch*, April 2020). While Turkey has deployed some of its proxies to Libya to fight against the forces of General Haftar, some Syrian contractors loyal to Assad were dispatched to Libya "to fight alongside the LNA." Both General Haftar and Assad are seeking "ways to leverage their new relations against Turkey." The COVID-19 global pandemic has not seemed to affect Turkey's operations in Libya. While the dialogue between LNA and Damascus has not been solidified as an official alliance, the article points out that it has "the potential to become a significant obstacle in the way of Ankara's military objectives in both countries." The relationship between the LNA and Assad "raises the possibility of diplomatic and economic, as well as military, cooperation down the road."

The Libyan theater has also become a competing ground between Turkey and the UAE, which has been providing support to the LNA. While the UAE has been providing the LNA with armed Chinese-made Wing Loong II drones to launch strikes against the GNA, Turkey has deployed its indigenous Bayraktar TB2 drones alongside military advisors to support the Tripoli-based GNA. The UAE is not only countering Turkey's ambitions in Libya, but it is also supporting Turkey's adversaries in Syria and has called on Turkey to end its hostilities in both countries. The UAE resumed its diplomatic relations with Damascus and has provided support to Assad against Turkey's military interventions in Syria. In addition to the UAE, Turkey has found itself on the opposing side of the Libyan conflict with Russia as well. Russia has been sending Syrian fighters and Russian mercenaries to Libya using the Khmeimim Air Base to deploy military hardware alongside fighters to Libya. It is unclear how long Turkey will be able to sustain these wars, given that it has allocated most of its military resources and capabilities to these two fronts. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***“Turkey may face additional obstacles to its military interventions in Syria and Libya as a result of increasing cooperation between its adversaries in these two war-torn countries.”***

**Source:** Paul Iddon, "What cooperation between Syria's Assad and Libya's Haftar means for Turkey," *Ahvalnews.com*, 01 May 2020. <https://ahvalnews.com/syria-libya/what-cooperation-between-syrias-assad-and-libyas-haftar-means-turkey>

*Turkey may face additional obstacles to its military interventions in Syria and Libya as a result of increasing cooperation between its adversaries in these two war-torn countries.*

*As Turkey was bombing Syrian forces in Idlib earlier this month, a delegation from General Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which is fighting the Turkish-backed Libyan administration in Tripoli, visited Damascus. The LNA delegation announced the opening of an embassy in the Syrian capital as part of joint efforts to combat what it called Turkish aggression in the two countries.*

...

*In January, Turkey began to deploy Syrian militiamen it had previously used as proxies in Idlib to Libya to fight on the side the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli. A few hundred Syrian contractors have also reportedly been hired from Syrian militias loyal to President Bashar al-Assad to fight alongside the LNA.*

...

*Cordial relations between Damascus and the Benghazi-based LNA in eastern Libya have not yet translated into any substantial military cooperation against Turkey. They do, however, have the potential to become a significant obstacle in the way of Ankara's military objectives in both countries.*

*"With advice and help from Moscow, Abu Dhabi and Cairo, it is likely that both Benghazi and Damascus will increase their cooperation against the Turkish presence in both countries..."*

*Benghazi and Damascus could coordinate attacks against the Turkish military and its militia proxies in both countries to divide and stretch Turkey's attention as well as its resources.*

...

*The establishment of formal representations between Damascus and the LNA raises the possibility of diplomatic and economic, as well as military, cooperation down the road...*

*Abu Dhabi is also a leading backer of the LNA in the Libyan conflict, supplying the group with armed Chinese-made Wing Loong II drones that have bombed Tripoli.*

*Ankara also sent military advisors to help the GNA repel LNA sieges of Tripoli and delivered armoured vehicles and armed Bayraktar TB2 drones to help give its ally an edge over its Benghazi-based adversary.*

*...the new arrangement reached in March means that Abu Dhabi has committed itself to reward Damascus and Haftar against Turkey.*



## Morocco and Tunisia Drawn into Middle East Geopolitical Competition in Libya

**OE Watch Commentary:** For the past five years, the countries of North Africa have remained relatively neutral in the competition between the UAE-Egypt-Saudi Arabia axis and the Turkey-Qatar one. Escalation in Libya and the coronavirus pandemic, however, are creating a new strategic landscape in which the countries of the Maghreb, particularly Morocco and Tunisia, are being increasingly drawn into Middle East geopolitical competition. In Tunisia, acrimony is growing between supporters and opponents of Turkish involvement in Libya, while in Morocco, relations with the UAE are becoming increasingly strained.

In late April, the Tunisian defense ministry issued a rather stark statement denying “malicious rumors” claiming that “foreign forces are using Tunisian territory as a staging ground for military operations.” The “malicious rumors” claimed that Turkish forces were using a Tunisian airbase to launch drones in support of the GNA’s campaign against Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA), and though



*Tunisian Armed Forces members wait for the President of Tunisia Kais Saied's arrival during the Tunisia International Aerospace & Defense Exhibition in Djerba, Tunisia, March 4, 2020.*

Source: U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Apolonia L. Gaspar, <https://www.africom.mil/media-room/photo/32647/tunisian-air-show-develops-aerospace-and-defense-partnerships>, Public Domain

there was no supporting evidence, the claims were embraced by opponents of Turkish involvement in Libya, many of them also advocates of deepening relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE and/or supporters of the LNA in Libya. The excerpt from *al-Quds* quotes a Tunisian politician opposed to a proposed Turkish-Tunisian investment agreement, which he views as threatening to Tunisian national sovereignty. Turkish use of Tunisian territory to send COVID aid to the GNA in Libya and Tunisian president Kais Saied’s expressions of support for the GNA (and by extension Turkey) are additional indicators of growing Turkish interest in Tunisia.

Moroccan-Emirati relations have been deteriorating for several years, according to the accompanying analysis from *al-Araby*, a Qatari-affiliated publication. By the author’s estimation, the UAE and Morocco have been at odds since late 2017, when Morocco announced it would take a neutral position on the Saudi-Emirati spat with Qatar. A one-time close partner of the UAE, Morocco officially suspended its participation in the Saudi-Emirati Yemen campaign in early 2019. Since then, Moroccan-Emirati acrimony has gradually increased, according to the article’s author. It flared in mid-April, after an Emirati-Israeli plan to evacuate Israeli citizens was blocked by the Moroccan government, which then accused Emirati-linked networks of spreading disinformation about its response to COVID-19. A Twitter account that purports to report from within Emirati intelligence claimed, in early May, that the UAE had offered Morocco cheap oil and business opportunities in Libya in exchange for supporting the LNA, but the King of Morocco had rejected the offer. Qatari-backed media outlets have, not surprisingly and likely to Emirati chagrin, been diligent in highlighting any and all indications of Moroccan-Emirati tensions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“These irresponsible allegations that try to undermine Tunisia’s sovereignty and national security are false...”***



## Continued: Morocco and Tunisia Drawn into Middle East Geopolitical Competition in Libya

**Source:** وزارة الدفاع الوطني: تونس ليست منطلقا لعمليات عسكرية في المنطقة  
 “Tunisia is not a Regional Military Staging Ground,” *Defense Ministry of Tunisia*, 28 April 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yd65belq>

*To inform the public on the malicious rumors circulated by some unofficial websites, which claim that foreign forces are using Tunisian territory as a staging ground for military operations, the Ministry of National Defense confirms that these irresponsible allegations that try to undermine Tunisia’s sovereignty and national security are false. It also confirms that Tunisia exercises absolute sovereignty over all its lands by land, sea and air and does not allow any foreign forces to use its lands to carry out military operations.*

**Source:** تعزيز التبادل التجاري مع تركيا وقطر يثير انقساما سياسيا في تونس  
 “Strengthening Commercial Exchange with Turkey and Qatar Causes Political Rift in Tunisia,” *al-Quds*, 30 April 2020. <https://www.alquds.co.uk/-/تعزيز-التبادل-التجاري-مع-تركيا-وقطر-يث-الانقسام-السياسي-في-تونس>

*Two draft laws related to commercial exchange and joint investment between Tunisia and Turkey and Qatar have created a political controversy within the Tunisian parliament and the country’s political class. While some welcome the agreements and the support they provide to the affected Tunisian economy, others contend that they will create dependency and target Tunisian sovereignty... Mabrouk Korchid, a member of parliament for the Tahya Tounes party... said in a video posted to his Facebook page in regards to the two agreements: “Turkey has an agenda of colonial settlement; its agreement violates the principles of Tunisian sovereignty.” He also called on parliamentarians to reject this agreement because it “is harmful to Tunisia and directly allows Turkish citizens and institutions to own property in Tunisia, even agricultural land.”*

**Source:** المغرب والإمارات... البرودة والجفاء  
 “Morocco and the UAE... Coldness and Estrangement,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 22 April 2019. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/2020/4/22/-/المغرب-والإمارات-البرودة-والجفاء>

*Moroccan-Emirati relations have entered a new stage, about to turn the coldness and estrangement that has been going on for more than a year into a confrontation, after Morocco decided weeks ago to reduce its diplomatic representation on Emirati soil, by recalling its ambassador in Abu Dhabi and the consul in Dubai. This is an unprecedented step in the history of relations between the two countries. The strong relations and strategic partnership that put the UAE at the forefront of Arab countries investing in Morocco has turned into a chapter from the cold war on all fronts against the kingdom’s interests. This dates to late 2017, after Rabat declared its commitment to neutrality in the Gulf crisis and the offer by the Moroccan monarch, Mohammed VI, to play a mediating role between Doha and the four blockade countries, in order to quell the crisis between the Gulf brothers... A few days ago, by a unilateral decision, the UAE tried to evacuate Israeli tourists stuck in Morocco due to the coronavirus crisis, without coordination or consultation with the host country. In order to cover up its failure, it then launched a massive electronic attack on social networks, promoting claims that the situation was unstable due to the state’s inability to deal with the coronavirus epidemic... Regionally, the UAE worked against Morocco in the Libyan crisis, and was at the forefront of countries that scuttled Morocco’s diplomatic efforts by obstructing the implementation of the terms of the political agreement signed in the Libyan city of Skhirat in December 2015.*

**Source:** الملك محمد السادس يرفض عرضا مغريا من ولي عهد أبو ظبي حول ليبيا  
 “King Mohammed VI Rejects Tempting Offer on Libya from Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi,” *al-Ayam* 24, 3 May 2020. <https://www.alayam24.com/articles-265138.html>

*A Twitter account called “without a shadow” claimed that King Mohammed VI rejected a tempting offer made by Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, in order to get him to agree to support the retired Libyan Major General, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. “Without a shadow,” who identifies himself as an officer in the Emirati intelligence, said, “Mohammed bin Zayed offered the Moroccan king Libyan oil at an attractive price and promises to establish projects for Moroccan companies. The same account added, “This will be in exchange for Morocco’s support for Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. The King of Morocco has completely rejected the offer.”*



## Debating Why Turkey is Delaying S-400 Activation

**OE Watch Commentary:** Turkey had initially announced that it would activate the S-400 surface-to-air missile systems in April, but that has not happened. The batteries were delivered to Turkey in the summer of 2019, with the missiles following in the fall. Turkish officers who would be in charge of operating the systems have already received their training in Russia. Turkish analysts observe that COVID-19 could be one reason Turkey is delaying the activation, but the Turkish President's spokesperson stated that the deployment would ultimately move forward. However, this announcement led to speculation as to whether the delay is due to Turkey's desire to avoid repercussions from its NATO allies. The accompanying articles from Turkish and Middle Eastern sources debate the possible reasons behind the delay.



5P85PM TEL for S-400 Missile System.

Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin via Vitalykuzmin.net, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/April-22th-Alabino/i-Vc8kzd/A, CC-BY-NC-ND-4.0>

As the first article from pro-government *Hürriyet Daily News* states, before the COVID-19 global pandemic, Turkey was determined to complete setting up S-400 missile systems and make them operational, despite the strain it would cause to its relationship with Western allies. Turkish officials repeatedly stated that “it was a done deal.” However, the author notes that this was in a pre-COVID-19 world. Now, in light of the potential economic and political changes to the global world order, Turkey may be more reluctant to do so. The country was already facing acute economic problems and COVID-19 has exacerbated its economic decline. It might be hoping to generate cash flow to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 from its Western allies. In this case, politics is very much intertwined with the economy for Turkey, given the risk of devastating sanctions from the United States if it activates the S-400.

The second article from *Al-Monitor*, a news site with analysts from the Middle East, states that “even though the coronavirus pandemic is cited as the reason, the decision is utterly political” given that Turkey has not disrupted any of its other military operations. The author provides four factors that have forced Turkey to delay the activation of the S-400s. First, Turkey's economy is worsening and Ankara is hoping for a currency swap with the Federal Reserve to mitigate the declining economy. The second factor is the need to balance Russia and Iran in Syria by remaining “in the good graces” of its NATO allies. Turkey has risked face-off with Russia and Iran over the situation in Idlib, so it desperately needs to refrain from further straining its relations with its NATO allies. Another factor might be the Turkish President's personal relationship with the US President who “made it clear that activation was a redline for Washington, and he could no longer defend Ankara if the systems were activated.” Finally, domestic politics may be playing a role: “Activating the S-400s at present risks triggering public pressure... to move the systems to the Syrian border to protect Turkish troops” deployed to Idlib, which might spark a new crisis with Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

**Source:** Serkan Demirtas, “Delaying S-400s: A short-term or long-term move by Turkey?” *Hürriyet Daily News*, 29 April 2020. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/serkan-demirtas/delaying-s-400s-a-short-term-or-long-term-move-by-turkey-154285>

...according to sources, presidential spokesman İbrahim Kalın admitted that the activation of the S-400 systems will be postponed due to COVID-19 at an online meeting with the members of the European Council of Foreign Relations (ECFR) in mid-April. Second, a story run by Reuters, quoting an anonymous senior Turkish official, who suggested Turkey will postpone the activation due to the coronavirus has never been denied by Ankara.

The official underlined that there is “no going back on the decision to activate the S-400s...”

A Turkish decision to purchase, deploy and activate the S-400 systems from Russia has long been at the core of Turkey's strained relationship with the United States and the Western partners at NATO. Despite sanctions and threats from its allies, Turkey has always underlined that “it was a done deal” and there would be no step back from the procurement of the Russian system.

... Many analysts and experts predict that the pandemic will have drastic impacts on the world order both in terms of politics and economy and Turkey's decision to delay the activation of the Russian systems would be very much related to this fact.

On top of the concerns is the economy.

The second concern stems from the fact that the activation of the systems will leave no room for maneuvering for U.S. President Donald Trump who has been using his power to waive the sanctions against Turkey through the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)...

The third is about the future setting of the world order. Many analysts predict that the post-pandemic world will likely observe a new Cold War, pitting the U.S. against China with substantial impacts on the global security balance as well as trade and economy...

The question is now whether this is a short-term or long-term postponement?

**Source:** Metin Gürcan, “Turkey's S-400 delay is about more than just the economy and COVID-19,” *Al-monitor*, 23 April 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/04/turkey-russia-usa-s400-delay-is-more-than-economy-covid19.html>

...the S-400s remain unpacked at Murted Airfield Command. The way Ankara chose to disclose the “delay” was a low-key statement to Reuters. “There is no going back on the decision to activate the S-400s, [but] due to COVID-19 ... the plan for them to be ready in April will be delayed,”...

Obviously, the reason for Ankara's decision to delay the activation of the S-400 regiment, made up of four batteries worth \$2.5 billion, is not technical. And even though the coronavirus pandemic is cited as the reason, the decision is utterly political. Tellingly, the pandemic has not disrupted any Turkish military operations either at home or in Syria and Iraq. It has had no impact in military terms that requires postponing the activation of the systems.

The delay is driven by at least three other factors: namely, Ankara's shifting geostrategic orientation in Syria in a bid to balance Iran and Russia, and its need to remain in the good graces of US President Donald Trump, its sole ally in Washington, and manage public perceptions at home.

In Syria, Turkey's face-off with its partners Russia and Iran in Idlib in February showed how Turkish and American interests have become more aligned in the Syrian war.

Another factor has to do with the personal relationship between Erdogan and Trump... “When Trump hosted Erdogan... He made it clear that activation was a redline for Washington...”

...Activating the S-400s at present risks triggering public pressure led by the opposition to move the systems to the Syrian border to protect the Turkish troops in Idlib.

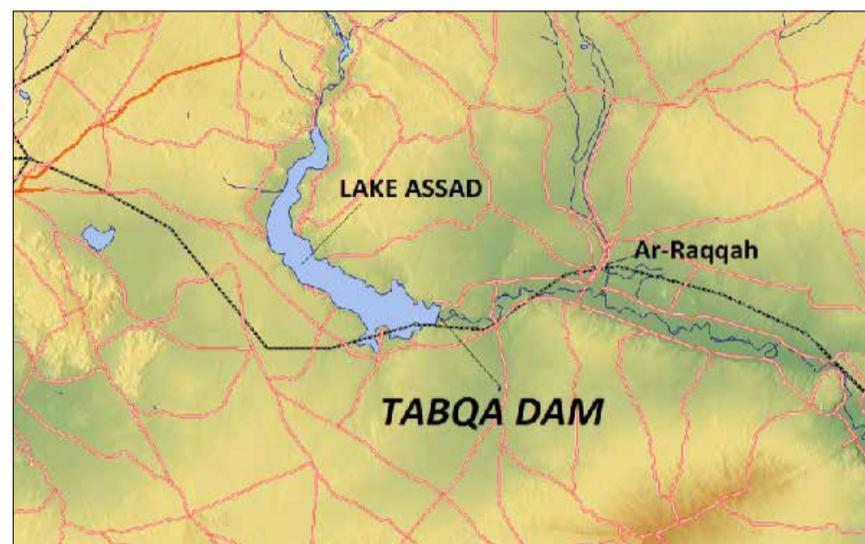


## Weaponizing Water in Syria

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying articles from Kurdish sources discuss the water situation in northern Syria, how and why water is being “weaponized” and the impact of this on locals. As the first article explains, the Alouk Water Station in the Syrian city of Ras al-Ayn (or Serêkaniyê in Kurdish) is a major potable water supply for a large swath of northern Syria including al-Hasakah, Til Timir, al-Howl camp and al-Arishah camp. The article reports that after Turkish and Turkish-backed forces took over control of this water station in October 2019, Turkish-backed armed groups have cut off water six times, to nearly half a million residents, putting their health at risk during the current global pandemic. Some have referred to this as the “weaponization of water.” The status of the health care system in the region is already dire because of the ongoing conflict.

According to *Kurdistan 24*, a news network broadcasting from the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, there are several reasons why Turkish-backed armed groups have cut off the water. First, these groups have used water as a means to apply political pressure on the self-declared Kurdish-led autonomous administration in northern Syria. Second, as a result of Russian mediation, “in exchange for securing water flow,” the Kurdish-led autonomous administration has committed to provide “electricity to the Turkish-occupied areas.” These armed groups cut off water to demand a supply of “higher levels of power.” The Energy Directorate of the autonomous administration accused Turkey of reducing water from its dams which impacts the energy output of the self-declared autonomous Kurdish administration in Syria.

The second article from *Hawar News*, a news site closely monitoring developments in Syria, states that the water directorate of the autonomous administration has been searching for an alternative water supply to the Alouk water station, as the lack of water could jeopardize their readiness to combat COVID-19. The article quotes Sozdar Ehmed, a co-director of the Hasakah water directorate, saying that they have reached out to Turkish officials through Russia, but talks have not yielded any results. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Tabqa Dam.

Source: Modified by Dr. Blofeld via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tabqa\\_Dam.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tabqa_Dam.png), CC-BY-3.0

**Source:** Wladimir van Wilgenburg, “Turkey, for sixth time, cuts water supply to 460,000 civilians in north Syria” *Kurdistan24.net*, 07 May 2020. <https://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/8a40cc0c-f0bc-4429-8618-e8820338e6a6>

*For the sixth time since October, Turkish-backed armed groups on Wednesday cut the flow from the Alouk reservoir that supplies water to areas in northeastern Syria’s Hasakah province that are controlled by the Kurdish-led local government, depriving some 460,000 civilians in the region of the essential resource.*

*The local Hawar News Agency reported that workers had not entered the Alouk water station for ten days and the reason for the action was not immediately clear.*

...

*“It was then restored, only to be cut off three times in February and March as a means of applying political pressure on the AANES (Autonomous Administration of North and East of Syria), and cut off again by Turkish shelling of the waterpipe at the end of March.”*

...

*The Alouk water station is near the border town of Ras al-Ain (Serekaniye), which Turkey and its militant proxies took over in October during Turkey’s so-called Peace Spring Operation.*

*Under Russian mediation, though, Kurdish-led authorities in northeastern Syria have been providing electricity to the Turkish-occupied areas in exchange for water flow, but Turkish-backed groups have continued to repeatedly cut off water, demanding higher levels of power.*

*Furthermore, the Energy Directorate of the Autonomous administration in Hasakah on Monday accused Turkey of reducing water flow from Turkish dams, which limited the number of hours of electricity in northeastern Syria coming from dams under administration control.*

**Source:** “Gerîmendetiya Avê dest bi projeya alternatîfa stasyona Elokê kir (The Water Authority has launched an alternative project to Alouk station),” *Hawar News*, 24 March 2020. <http://www.hawarnews.com/kr/haber/gemendetiya-av-dest-bi-projeya-alternatfa-stasyona-elok-kir-h29709.html>

*Hasakah Water Directorate Co-Chair Sozdar Ehmed announced that they are looking for alternative water resources and stated that despite efforts, the Alouk water station has not resumed operations after it was taken out of service by the Turkish military and its gangs.*

...

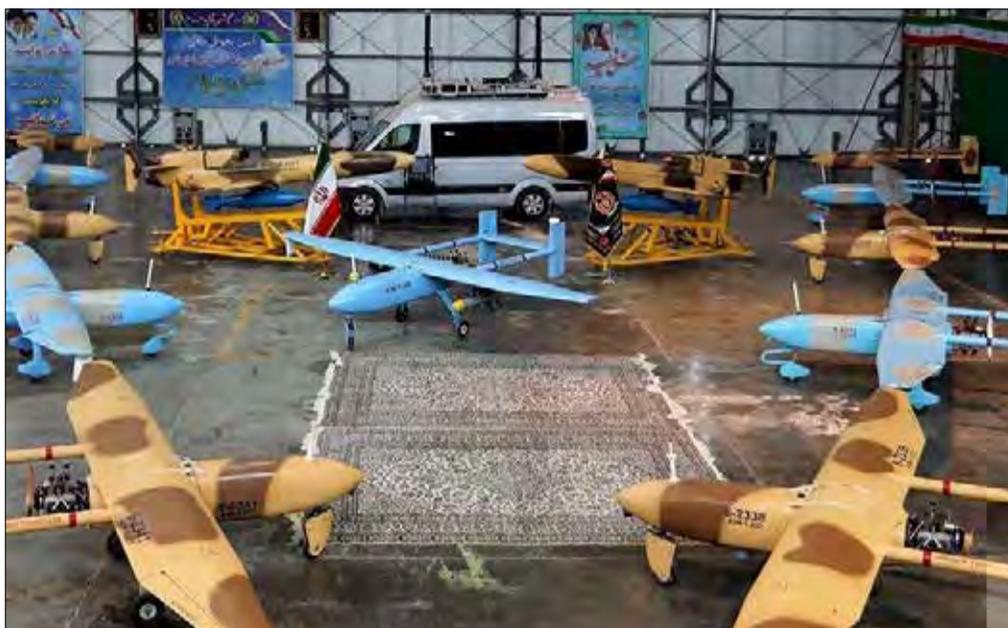
*Sozdar stated that negotiations were held with the Turkish state through Russia. Sozdar noted that no results could be obtained from the negotiations and the public still does not have water. She said Turkish state officials deceived Russian officials, “The officials said that the station employees will be allowed to enter the station during the talks but the employees were later not allowed.”*

## Iran Improves its UAV Technology

**OE Watch Commentary:** Iran’s Armed Forces and Ministry of Defense recently showcased a series of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to the public. On 20 April, *Tasnim News Agency*, linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), posted a report and video of the UAVs in use, as shown in the first accompanying source. They also unveiled an air-to-air missile that can be affixed to the Ababil-3 UAV. According to the report, the missile uses a thermal image seeker as its guiding system, similar to the “Spike” missile.

*Khabar Online*, another Iranian-state news source, detailed a series of UAVs and their specifications. The latest production is the Atlas UAV, which is reportedly an improved version of the Ababil-3. Some of the latest improvements to the Atlas include a new landing gear design. The report explains that the front landing gear uses hydraulic technology and the rear wheels have undergone changes to improve the drone’s taxi ride on the runway. In the fuselage, the drone is equipped with tiers to carry bombs, pylons under its wings so that it can carry vertical series bombs, and an “auto take-off land” system, in which take-off and landing operations are done automatically. The Atlas also has a laser sensor under the fuselage to use with the automatic landing and take-off system. The report also noted the Jet Naseh UAV, which is a series of drones produced by the Qods Ministry of Defense Industries. The Jet Naseh has a turbo jet engine and is reportedly modeled after the U.S. MQM 107 UAV.

The Iranian government has had a UAV development program for years, with these activities representing a continuation of their ongoing efforts. The reverse engineering of foreign UAV technologies and designs by the Iranian program is a common occurrence. Iranian UAVs have been provided to Hizballah in Lebanon, Shia militias in Iraq and Syria, and Houthi rebels in Yemen to support their proxy activities and for field combat testing of the Iranian systems. Typically the provision of these systems is limited to less advanced UAV designs but Hizballah has, at times, been provided with more advanced models. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**



*Khabar Online.*

Source: Khabar Online, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1379562/زوجه-مش-ترا-دی-س-ان-ش-ب-ار-اک-ی-رم-آ-DB%۰۰۱-م-وی-ک-م-ا-د-پ-ه-پ-ی-ن-اری-ه-ن-وم-ن>

***“During the presentation of these drones, they released a video of them in use and firing missiles. Some of the drones have air-to-air missiles with solid fuel rocket engine and wings that can be opened from inside the body in the style of anti-tank missiles.”***



*Iranian UAV Launching A Missile.*

Source: Tasnim News Agency, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1399/02/01/2247479/ملی-ف-ک-ت-ا-پ-ت-ه-ت-ف-ر-ش-ی-پ-ی-اه-ک-ش-وم-ه-ب-ی-ن-اری-ی-اه-د-پ-ه-پ-زی-ه-ت-ن-اری-ه-ر-ز-ض-دی-ج-ک-ش-وم-ز-ا-م-ی-ن-س-ت-ش-از-گ>

## Continued: Iran Improves its UAV Technology

**Source:** “Nemoneh Irani pahpad MQM 107 Amrika-e ra beshnaseed/Artesh mojehez beh een 4 pahpad tehjmeh shod + ax (See the Iranian copy of the U.S. MQM 107 UAV – Army equipped with 4 aggressive UAVs + photos),” *Khabar Online*, 19 April 2020. <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1379562/زه-ج-م-ش-ت-ر-ا-د-ی-س-ا-ن-ش-ب-ا-ر-ا-ک-ی-ر-م-آ-DB%۰۷%۱-م-ا-و-ی-ک-م-ا-د-ی-ه-پ-ی-ن-ا-ر-ی-ا-ه-ن-م-ن>

### **Atlas UAV**

The drone, which is actually an optimized version of the Ababil 3 drone, was a new drone that was delivered to the Army Air Force. The main structure of this drone is similar to Ababil 3, but changes have been made in some parameters of this drone. The first change that can be seen is the different design of the UAV's landing gear compared to Ababil 3.

The UAV's front landing gear uses hydraulic technology, and its rear-wheel drive vehicles have undergone changes to improve the drone's taxi ride on the runway.

In the fuselage, the drone is equipped with bomb-laying pylons under its wings so that it can carry vertical series bombs. Therefore, the structure of the atlas body is strengthened.

The Atlas is also equipped with a laser sensor under the fuselage to use the automatic landing and take-off system, which helps the drone detect the exact location of the landing runway.

### **Jet Naseh UAV**

Jet Naseh is modeled after the U.S. MQM 107 and has a flight duration of less than an hour, speed of Mach 0.7, and recovered by a parachute. The jet engine is the Tolo 4 mini-jet engine.



Tasnim News Agency.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1399/01/30/2245982/ت-ج-م-ش-ت-ر-ا-د-ی-س-ا-ن-ش-ب-ا-ر-ا-ک-ی-ر-م-آ-DB%۰۷%۱-م-ا-و-ی-ک-م-ا-د-ی-ه-پ-ی-ن-ا-ر-ی-ا-ه-ن-م-ن>



# Khamenei Orders Investigation into Naval Accident

**OE Watch Commentary:** During military exercises in the Gulf of Oman on 10 May, an errant missile fired from an Iranian navy ship struck the Iranian supply ship Konarak, killing 19 sailors. Video showed the ship still burning as it was towed into Chahbahar.

That Ayatollah Ali Khamenei would send both a message of condolence and order an investigation, as excerpted here is logical. According to the Islamic Republic’s constitution, the Supreme Leader, after all, is not only the political and religious leader of Iran but also the commander-in-chief both of the regular Iranian military and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

The Konarak is one of 12 Hendijan-class ships. Built in the Netherlands, it has been in service for over 30 years. It is armed with 20 millimeter-caliber cannons and four anti-ship cruise missile launchers. Iran generally uses Hendijan-class ships for naval surveillance, reconnaissance, mine-laying, and drone-launching.

Both the Konarak and the ship that allegedly launched the missile were part of the regular Islamic Republic of Iran Navy (IRIN) as opposed to the IRGC Navy. Unmentioned in Khamenei’s remarks is that this is the third major Iranian Navy accident in recent years. In 2018, for example, the Damavand destroyer hit a breakwater while docking and sank in the Caspian Sea port of Bandar Anzali, killing three sailors (see: “Iran: Warship Sinks after Mishap,” *OE Watch*, March 2018). In 2016, after publicly declaring their intention to sail into the Atlantic, an Iranian flotilla was forced into port in Durban, South Africa, for emergency repairs that lasted several months, during which sailors had to beg for food in the streets.

The Konarak incident is the second major accident under the watch of Hossein Khanzadi who took over the leadership of the IRIN in November 2017. While the IRGC is generally the more elite force within the broader Iranian military, there is a more distinct division of responsibility within the navy in which the IRGC has primacy in the Persian Gulf, shares responsibility in the Strait of Hormuz, and the IRIN is dominant as a means of projecting power in the northern Indian Ocean and beyond. As such, this mishap coming so soon after others suggests that the IRIN is increasingly unable to meet the demands that Iranian strategists put upon it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Photographs of those killed in the 10 May 2020 friendly fire incident onboard the Iranian naval support vessel Konarak in the Sea of Oman.  
Source: Islamic Republic News Agency, <https://img9.irna.ir/d/r2/2020/05/11/4/157119107.jpg>

## “The martyrdom of Navy sailors was very painful for me.”

**Source:** “Peyam-e Taslit-e Rahbar-e Enghelab dar pey Shahadat-e Jame’e az Daryadelat Niru-ye Darya-ye Artesh dar Hadiseh Shanavar Konarak (Message of Condolence from the Leader of the Revolution after the Mass Martyrdom of the Navy Sailors onboard the Konarak),” *Khamenei.ir*, 12 May 2020. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=45596>

### Message of Condolence

*His Excellency, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, sent a message of condolence to Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army, regarding the mass martyrdom of navy sailors in the grievous accident on the Konarak, and he asked God Almighty to provide patience and comfort to the families of the grieving families and healing to the victims of this accident.*

*The text of the message of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution is as follows:*

*In the Name of God, the compassionate, the merciful:*

*Major General Mousavi, commander of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran:*

*The painful incident for the Konarak vessel, which resulted in the martyrdom of a number of Navy sailors, was very painful and sorrowing for me. Although, those hardworking sailors who lost their lives in doing their difficult and honorable duty will be compensated, God willing, with divine reward. However, the pain of losing loved ones for their families, and the loss of these sincere, hardworking youth for the naval forces is immense and difficult to bear.*

*I give my condolences to their grieving families, and I ask God to grant them patience and calm. Furthermore, I ask God to heal those who have been injured. I ask the officials in charge to investigate this incident thoroughly to identify those who are potentially at fault, and take all necessary measures to prevent such damaging, tragic incidents from happening again.*



## Iran: Prosecute Cybercriminals

**OE Watch Commentary:** The excerpted letter from a collection of clerical leaders which appear on *Gerdab.ir*, an Iranian website dedicated to news about cyberspace and cyber strategy, discusses increasing frustration among clergy in Qom with the continued penetration of the Internet into Iranian society. The leaders wrote to the head of the judiciary “asking the judiciary to prosecute the perpetrators of the disaster of cyber vulgarity and crime.”

For more than a decade, the Iranian government has talked about creating a national intranet (see: “Iran: Comprehensive Legal System for the Country’s Internet and Cyberspace,” *OE Watch*, October 2017). Recent unrest has sparked greater concern, especially with regard to the potential for young Iranians to use social media and phone apps to organize civil unrest (see: “Telegram Giving Data to US and Israel,” *OE Watch*, March 2018). The Iranian military has discussed a greater role in constructing the national intranet (see: “Iran: Armed Forces Ready to Take Over Internet,” *OE Watch*, October 2019) and Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi, Iran’s minister of Information and Communications Technology, has claimed progress (see: “Iran: Progress on National Intranet,” *OE Watch*, July 2019).



An Internet Café on Vanak Square, Tehran.

Source: HamshahriOnline.ir <https://images.hamshahriOnline.ir/images/2018/5/18-5-12-181717page02.jpg>

That seminary leaders in Qom—among the most conservative elements in the Islamic Republic’s political spectrum—would complain about the Internet does not surprise. What is significant is their castigation of both Jahromi and the Supreme Cyberspace Council for dereliction of duty. Politics may be involved in both cases: Jahromi, at 38-years old the youngest minister in Iran’s cabinet, is widely discussed as a potential presidential contender. More interesting is the criticism of the Supreme Cyberspace Council because Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei appoints its members.

That the letter is addressed to Ebrahim Raisi is significant as he is not only the head of the Judiciary, but one of the top contenders to replace the 81-year-old Khamenei upon his death. The letter’s signatories may therefore be urging Raisi to make control over the Internet a wedge issue and push Iran in a more conservative direction.

The letter continues not only to condemn Telegram and Instagram specifically—accusing Instagram in particular of twisting young people’s minds, but also says that independent social media poses a security threat and alleges that the Islamic State terrorists who attacked the Iranian parliament (June 2017), the shrine of Imam Khomeini (June 2017), and the military parade in Ahvaz (September 2018) had all used Iranian social media unhampered, a charge which seems unlikely but which would still put Jahromi and incumbent politicians on the defensive. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

**“Authorities have an obligation to remove the enemy from cyberspace.”**

**Source:** “Amalat-e Valangari Fezayi Mojazi Keshavar ra Mohakameh Konid (Prosecute Cybercriminals),” *Gerdab.ir*, 30 April 2020. <https://gerdab.ir/fa/news/29459>

### **Prosecute Cybercriminals**

*According to Gardab, the Assembly of Representatives of Students and Scholars of the Seminary of Qom, the Coordinating Council of Cultural Centers of the Seminaries and more than 400 professors, students and scholars of seminaries from 65 cities across the country wrote a letter to the head of the judiciary asking the judiciary to prosecute the perpetrators of the disaster of cyber vulgarity and crime.*

*The text of this letter is as follows:*

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful:*

*In the presence of Ayatollah Raisi, the esteemed head of the Judiciary, may he be blessed with greetings and congratulations on the occasion of the arrival of the blessed month of Ramadan and the spring when the Quran was revealed, Imam Khamenei at the beginning of his speech marking the beginning of the [Persian] year, introduced cyberspace as one of the areas in which it is vital to find strength. Obviously, fulfilling this important task is the responsibility of the responsible institutions and, of course, this is not the first time that His Holiness has made this request to the authorities.*

*The lack of regulation of cyberspace, a large part of which is in the hands of the enemy, has allowed it to become a slaughterhouse for teenagers and young people and the enemy is striking at the country, and so authorities have an obligation to remove the enemy from cyberspace.*

*He also compared the vulnerability in cyberspace with chemical weapons, and said,*

*Today, television, radio, the Internet, social networks, all kinds of cyberspace devices are being used against our public opinion. The communications sector has a responsibility to pay attention to this part of the country. We have also mentioned these in face-to-face meetings in which we emphasize that now we say they should pay attention so that they do not become a tool for the enemy to use like they once did with chemical weapons against the people! They must know their duty and take it seriously....*

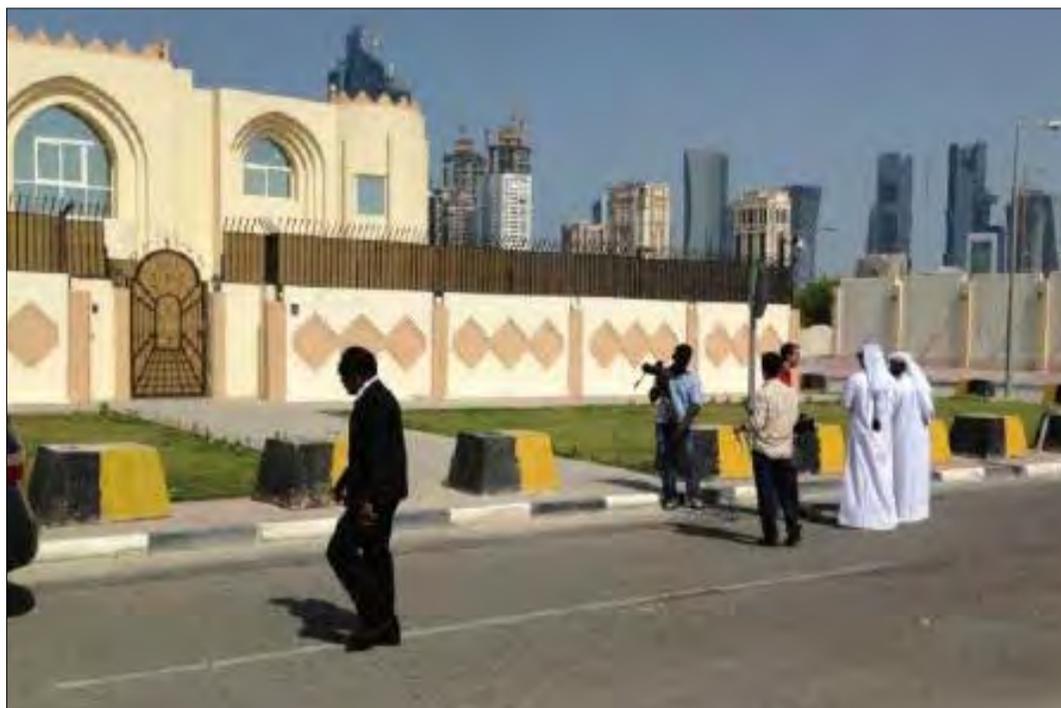
*Unfortunately, His Holiness’s outspoken grievances against the Ministry of Communications and the Supreme Council of Cyberspace at the General Assembly also failed to oblige these institutions to perform their legal duties....*



## Iran Talking to the Taliban

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Islamic Republic of Iran's relationship with the Taliban has long existed in the shadows, while Iran's official enmity toward the Taliban is public and dates from the August 1998 Taliban massacre of Iranian diplomats and intelligence officers stationed at the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. That incident nearly led to war between Iran and the Taliban in 1999. That enmity was one of the reasons why Iran cooperated with the broader international coalition in ousting the Taliban and supporting the Bonn process which culminated in a new, post-Taliban Afghan government in 2002.

As US influence grew in Afghanistan, however, Iranian military officials responded by re-establishing ties to the Taliban including allowing Taliban commanders to utilize Iranian banks and the smuggling of Iranian weaponry to the Taliban. Esmail Qaani who assumed leadership of the Qods Force, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' elite external operations group, upon Qassem Soleimani's death in January 2020, was in charge of Qods Force operations in Afghanistan including Iranian ties with the Taliban until then.



*The Taliban Office in Doha, Qatar.*  
Source: Ana.ir, <https://ana.ir/fa/news/33/31802>

The excerpted report from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs brings Iran-Taliban ties into the open. While the United States and its NATO efforts to advance a peace process with the Taliban is discussed in Western press, the Iranian government is undertaking its own efforts to establish diplomatic rather than simply intelligence and military ties. That Mohammad Ebrahim Taherian, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's special envoy, is both speaking to the Taliban representation in Doha, Qatar, and meeting with senior Afghan officials in Kabul suggests that Tehran may also be seeking to play a mediating role, not in concert with that of the United States and its Resolute Support partners. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

***“The two sides exchanged views on international negotiations.”***

**Source:** “Tamas Teliphoni Namiyandeh-e Vizheh-e Vazir-e Amor-e Kharjeh-e Kashavarman ba Moghamat Daftar-e Siyasi Taliban dar Qatar (Phone Call of the Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Our Country to the Political Office of the Taliban in Qatar),” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 6 May 2020. <https://mfa.gov.ir/portal/newsview/594140/>

### ***Phone Call of the Foreign Minister's Special Envoy to the Taliban***

*Mohammed Ebrahim Taherian, special representative of our Minister of Foreign Affairs, examined current developments in Afghanistan in a telephone conversation with officials of the Taliban political office in Qatar.... During the telephone conversation, the two sides also exchanged views on future developments in international negotiations and comprehensive efforts to prevent the widespread spread of the coronavirus in Afghanistan...*

*Mr. Taherian has traveled to Kabul in recent weeks to meet with the country's leaders, including Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, to present the Islamic Republic of Iran's positions and proposals for resolving the current political problems in the country, and our country's readiness to provide comprehensive assistance.*



## Threat of Coronavirus Complicates Yemen Ceasefire Discussions

**OE Watch Commentary:** Unlike surrounding neighbors in the Middle East, Yemen and its people have so far been spared from the spread of coronavirus. However, the threat of the pandemic is already having an impact on the country's political and military situation by complicating discussions over a new ceasefire in the country's long-running war between Houthi rebels in the north and the Saudi-backed Yemeni government in the south. Writing for the Saudi-owned *al-Majalla*, political commentator and analyst Ahmad Salim highlights the ways a lack of trust between both sides of the conflict has hampered attempts to implement a temporary truce--one partly aimed at creating space to deal with the threat of the coronavirus pandemic. Salim highlights the accusation by Houthi Minister of Health, Taha al-Mutawakkal, that, "if a single person is afflicted with coronavirus in Yemen it will be the fault of both the United Nations and the Saudi-led Arab coalition."



Saudi Arabian soldier from the First Airborne Brigade with a UAE soldier, 2016.  
Source: Saudi88hawk via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saudi\\_Arabian\\_soldier\\_from\\_the\\_First\\_Airborne\\_Brigade\\_with\\_a\\_UAE\\_soldier\\_2016.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saudi_Arabian_soldier_from_the_First_Airborne_Brigade_with_a_UAE_soldier_2016.jpg), CC by 4.0

However, Salim accuses the Houthi leadership of exploiting the threat of coronavirus to force a ceasefire that is less about dealing with coronavirus and more aimed at recouping from recent battlefield losses suffered by Houthi insurgents. Indeed, Salim notes that the Houthis recently broke a previous ceasefire implemented by the Saudi-backed coalition and continued to launch drone strikes against the coalition even as they themselves called on the international community to implement another ceasefire. And, at the time of Ahmad Salim's article, Yemen had yet to see its first official case of coronavirus. This, Salim argues, suggests that the Houthis' call for a coronavirus ceasefire is just one in a pattern of instances where the group's leadership has used ceasefires and truces to rearm and regroup--never to work towards a more lasting peace. If the coronavirus pandemic does spread to Yemen, the political distrust between the two sides of the conflict is likely to further weaken the country's ability to respond. **End OE Watch Commentary (Dennis)**

***“The pandemic is a gift to the Houthis who are constantly seeking an excuse to reorganize and plan new attacks against the Saudi-led coalition that is supporting the legitimate Yemeni government. To date, there is no documented case of the coronavirus in Yemen.”***

**Source:** Ahmad Salim, “ي عرشل ا فل احتل ا مام مه ر ئ اس خ ف ي زن ف ا ق ي ال «ان و ر و ك» ب ن و غ ر ذ ت ي ن و ي ث و ح ل ا” (Blaming Coronavirus, Houthis Seek Ceasefire in an Attempt to Stem Losses Inflicted by Saudi-backed Coalition),” *al-Majalla*, 10 April 2020. <https://arb.majalla.com/node/85241/>  
[ي عرشل ا فل احتل ا مام مه ر ئ اس خ ف ي زن ف ا ق ي ال «ان و ر و ك» ب ن و غ ر ذ ت ي ن و ي ث و ح ل ا](https://arb.majalla.com/node/85241/)

*“Every time there is a crisis, or the Houthi militias suffer yet another loss, we hear their leaders plead with the international community to implement a ceasefire between them and the international coalition headed by Saudi Arabia. We have seen this again as Muhammad Ali al-Houthi--a member of the so-called Supreme Political Council--called on the United Nations Security Council to intervene and halt the war that the legitimate, Saudi-supported Yemeni government is currently waging against Houthi insurgent groups. Yet those same Houthi groups continue to launch attacks targeting civilians and Yemeni Army formations.*

*This comes at a time when the Saudi and Emirati-formed coalition has already announced an all-encompassing ceasefire in Yemen that will last two weeks with the option to extend. The ceasefire went into effect on April 9th, 2020.*

*Coalition leadership stated that the purpose of the ceasefire was to lay the groundwork to invite United Nations special envoy, Martin Griffiths, to Yemen in order to mediate meetings between the legitimate Yemeni government and the Houthis. Colonel Turki al-Maliki, spokesperson for coalition forces, said that this was an opportunity to coalesce and unite efforts to arrive at a permanent and lasting ceasefire in Yemen and to, “come to an agreement on direct, tangible, and significant steps to decrease suffering by the Yemeni people.”*

*Houthi militias never let crises go to waste; they continually use them as a pretext for ceasefires and truces that allow them to regroup and recover from battlefield losses. The spread of the coronavirus pandemic throughout the world is their most recent excuse for calling for a stop to the war--a war in which they are suffering heavy losses of both men and ammunition from battles around both Sirwah and Qaniyah.”*



## Boko Haram's Strategic Initiatives to Increase Funding



Chadian soldier at target practice.

Source: SGT Derek Hamilton/AFRICOM/Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Marksmanship\\_training\\_in\\_Chad\\_during\\_Flintlock\\_2017\\_170306-A-KH850-007.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Marksmanship_training_in_Chad_during_Flintlock_2017_170306-A-KH850-007.jpg), Public Domain

(because there had not been significant fishing there for several years), ISWAP could claim that the fishermen's large catches were a sign of "Allah being pleased with the war" the insurgents were waging, providing propaganda to recruit new fighters. Second, ISWAP made and continues to make large sums of money from the farming and fishing enterprises through levies they impose. This money, as the article notes, fuels ISWAP's activities in northeast Nigeria.

Many of the locals who were living in squalid IDP camps were quite anxious to return to their fishing and farming activities even though it was the insurgents that had initially driven them away. Now they could resume their previous work and make a living. Additionally, ISWAP provided security, basic medical care, and even arbitration services, enabling the terrorist organization to improve its image.

It is difficult to assess how much military actions have damaged ISWAP's operations. Overall it appears Nigerian forces have tended to do relatively little to interrupt ISWAP's economic activities. The article describes the Nigerian military actions in Nigeria as "tokenism" that focuses on seizing fish from traders that was on its way to market. Recent activity by the Chadian military in Chad, however, has reportedly been significantly more disruptive, and maybe even permanently ended ISWAP's economic activities in that area. Thus, Chad appears to be trying to end the relationship between ISWAP and Chadian farmers and fishermen, whereas in Nigeria and Niger, according to sources, it is business as usual. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“The new conditions of the lake served ISWAP in two ways: cobbling together an economy under its control and creating a strong basis for recruiting new fighters into its fold.”***

**Source:** Ahmad Salkida, "How Boko Haram Sustain Operations Through International Trade in Smoked Fish," *Premium Times (Nigeria)*, 26 April 2020. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/389916-how-boko-haram-sustain-operations-through-international-trade-in-smoked-fish.html>

*Because the structures of both the production and trade had collapsed, the ISWAP leadership sent emissaries to various camps of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Borno State requesting them to return to their farms, fishing and trading under their watch, HumAngle was told.*

*The individuals and households in IDPs camps who heeded the call of ISWAP seem not taken in by any of the views. "It was difficult to choose between hunger where there is safety such as in an IDPs camp and the abundance of food, where life can end any minute," said Adamu Baga, who just fled the Island in April to Diffa in Niger Republic.*

*But in 2015 the insurgents took strategic steps to control and re-order trade in both products. They encouraged local fishing among the communities by the banks of the lake and created a new regime of levies and secure routes for fish traders to reach designated markets.*

*The new conditions of the lake served ISWAP in two ways: cobbling together an economy under its control and creating a strong basis for recruiting new fighters into its fold. They described the renewed aquatic life in the lake as a strong pointer that Allah had been pleased with the war they had been waging and was rewarding them on the instant with this symbolic manna from heaven.*



## Communications to Counter Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin



The Lake Chad Basin.

Source: Aymatth2 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chad\\_River\\_Basin\\_relief.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chad_River_Basin_relief.svg), CC BY-SA 3.0

**OE Watch Commentary:** Communicating a government's messages to rural populations, especially to those susceptible to extremism, that show a country's leaders are concerned with improving people's lives, is deemed a critical aspect of programs to prevent radicalization. However, as the accompanying excerpted article and study from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* notes, finding the proper message as well as medium can be quite difficult. Several obstacles exist to effective government communications in rural areas, including poor telecommunications infrastructure, such as a lack of relay towers; low availability of credit, thus hindering the ability of people to purchase cell phones; high levels of illiteracy making printed material essentially irrelevant; as well as language and cultural barriers.

The accompanying article focuses mainly on the countries that span the Lake Chad Basin as well as Côte d'Ivoire in looking not only at the problems of government communications in rural areas but also potential solutions. One of the most important factors regarding that messaging is that a government needs to emphasize what it is doing with regards to poverty and unemployment, as those are two of the biggest factors that are believed to drive people to embrace extremism. However, if the people hear the message but don't understand it, the effort is futile, and thus translators must be utilized when appropriate to ensure all local people not only have access to a message but also comprehend it.

Because of the lack of communications infrastructure, including cell towers and cell phones, in the Lake Chad Basin, innovative ways must be found to convey the government's messages. Theater groups presenting plays promoting respect among different ethnic groups – an important message where a great deal of the conflict is ethnic related - is one method to disseminate information. Another is to have former militants openly discuss the disillusionment that drove them to defect from an extremist group.

Being cognizant of the roles gender and culture play in communications is also critical. For example, women in many societies do not sit among men during public discussions, and thus having a woman speak to other women is often a preferred method of communication. As for men, the study associated with the article found they would have a difficult time sharing their emotions in public, and thus messaging delivered via radio or television, where available, would be better for them. However, when people are impoverished, the extremist narrative can be compelling regardless of gender. It is up to the government to provide an effective counter-narrative that reaches the people in a way they can comprehend.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“Communications strategies play a vital role in violence prevention and peace building initiatives.”***

**Source:** Isel van Zyl, “Preventing Violent Extremism: The Role of Communications,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 31 March 2020. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/pb-138.pdf>

*Communications strategies play a vital role in violence prevention and peace building initiatives. The term ‘communications strategies’ covers a variety of activities including messaging campaigns, theatre shows, dialogues, group discussions and preaching by religious leaders.*

*Poverty and unemployment are believed by the respondents in the study to be the biggest drivers of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin and Côte d'Ivoire.*

*Challenges persist regarding the development of relevant indicators that measure the outcomes of communications strategies.*

*The lack of capacity to develop relevant content and the dearth of knowledge regarding the best medium to use remain significant challenges for local civil society organizations (CSOs).*



## Somalia: Ethiopia's Influence Rises as Kenya Prepares to Leave AMISOM

**OE Watch Commentary:** Kenya, which is part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), is looking to withdraw its forces from Somalia by 2021. Meanwhile, as the accompanying excerpted article from the South African website *The Conversation* notes, Ethiopia, also a member of AMISOM, is seeing its influence rise in the war-torn country.

Kenya's initial foray into Somalia was in 2011 in an act-of self-defense (according to Kenya) with the reported objectives of stopping al-Shabaab from launching cross-border attacks and improving Somalia's internal security. The following year it convinced Ethiopia to join in the fight, and the combined forces redeployed under AMISOM. While AMISOM can point to several significant successes over the years, including greatly weakening al-Shabaab's ability to hold Somali cities, it has not been able to entirely eliminate the terrorist organization's threat to the fragile Somali government. Additionally, al-Shabaab has launched three major attacks on Kenyan soil (on the Westgate Mall in 2013, on Garissa University in 2015, and on the Dusit Hotel Complex in 2019). In conjunction with numerous smaller attacks, many in Kenya are anxious for their armed forces to leave Somalia so as not to further antagonize al-Shabaab.



A Kenyan gunner assigned to AMISOM.

Source: AMISOM/Wikimedia/Flickr, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM\\_Kismayo\\_Advance\\_13\\_\(8049969190\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM_Kismayo_Advance_13_(8049969190).jpg), Public Domain

Should Kenya actually follow through with its withdrawal, there will be several adverse consequences. One is that it will mean a loss of influence in Somalia, thus providing Ethiopia with the opportunity to fill that void. While the two countries fought together in Somalia, more recently tensions have arisen between the two. Ethiopian forces have been supportive of the Somali government, including targeting opposition members. This use of force is particularly worrisome in Jubaland, a southern region of Somalia that Kenya has been trying to develop as a buffer zone against al-Shabaab, but over which the Somali government wants to exert increasing control. However, Jubaland's leader is a Kenyan ally, and Kenya does not want him replaced.

There are other consequences if Kenya withdraws from Somalia, including the view of its allies that it cannot be trusted to stay a difficult course. Still, the article notes, even if Kenya does withdraw from AMISOM, it will probably eventually be able to repair its relationship with Ethiopia with regards to regional policies, though that will likely be on Ethiopia's terms. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“It has become clear that [Somali President] Farmajo is willing to draw Ethiopian forces as well as the Somali National Army into his quest to consolidate power by appointing political allies. This has pitched Ethiopia against Kenya, and created tension.”***

**Source:** Stig Jarle Hansen, “What Kenya stands to lose and gain by withdrawing from Somalia,” *The Conversation* (South Africa), 1 May 2020. <https://theconversation.com/what-kenya-stands-to-lose-and-gain-by-withdrawing-from-somalia-133640>

*Kenya has achieved a lot since it intervened in 2011. Its intervention was a “game changer”, contributing to a momentum that led to al-Shabaab losing all major Somali cities. But it has fallen short of its goals to subdue al-Shabaab and end terrorism in Kenya. And it will leave a Somalia where its rivals are gaining power and challenging Kenyan national interests.*

*It has become clear that Farmajo is willing to draw Ethiopian forces as well as the Somali National Army into his quest to consolidate power by appointing political allies. This has pitched Ethiopia against Kenya, and created tension. Ethiopian forces have recently intervened in support of the Somali government in Mogadishu, targeting the enemies of the Farmajo government. That government has been increasingly willing to use military force against the opposition (as well as the Somali media, and against the regional state of Jubaland, led by Kenyan ally Ahmed Mohamed Islam “Madobe”).*

*The government of Somalia's president, known as Farmajo, has increasingly been at odds with Kenya. The two countries are currently in a diplomatic row over their shared maritime border.*



## Al-Shabaab in Somalia Turns to Criminal Activities in Kenya for Funding

**OE Watch Commentary:** With the loss of a sizable amount of land in Somalia, and with infighting between two of its leaders over finances, al-Shabaab is increasingly turning to Kenya to help raise the funds necessary to keep the terrorist organization going. As the accompanying excerpted article from Kenya's *Daily Nation* explains, the group's main activities related to this financial endeavor are extortion, illegal taxation, and robbery. The crimes are reportedly committed by Kenyans who were recruited by Somalis, trained in Somalia, and then sent back to Kenya to carry out their illegal activities.

Without that infighting between the two al-Shabaab leaders, the terrorist organization would not have become so reliant on criminal activities in Kenya to fund their various terrorist attacks in Somalia. The dispute between al-Shabaab's leader, Ahmed Diriye, and its head of finance, Mahad Karate, has turned bloody, and can be explained, in part, by ethnic tensions. Karate, who is supported by his Habagedir clansmen, refuses to share money with Diriye, who is mainly supported by the Rahawein. Diriye, unable to pay his troops, has initiated a purge against Karate's followers. In return, Karate is purportedly planning an attack on Diriye's supporters. Meanwhile, those Somali terrorists who lack pay are teaming up with Kenyan al-Shabaab supporters to prey upon Kenyans living near the Somali border.



*Al-Shababb hostages rescued in Kismayi, 30 May 2014.*

Source: AMISOM via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2014\\_05\\_30\\_AL\\_SHABAAB\\_HOSTAGES\\_RESCUED\\_IN\\_KISMAYU-6\\_\(1431009325\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2014_05_30_AL_SHABAAB_HOSTAGES_RESCUED_IN_KISMAYU-6_(1431009325).jpg), Public Domain

Kenyan police note that these extortionists can be quite violent, with some extortion techniques involving the placement of IED's. Those who refuse to give in to the extortion demands have been assassinated, which not only silences the dissenter's voice but instills fear in others who might have considered resisting. The end result has been that large sums of money from Kenya continue to flow to al-Shabaab in Somalia even while it struggles with internal conflict. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“Local Al-Shabaab terrorists are leading a vicious extortion ring for the Somali-based terror organization within Kenyan borders...”***

**Source:** Nyambega Gisesa, “Shabaab crafts new ways to replenish funds,” *Daily Nation (Kenya)*, 26 April 2020. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Shabaab-crafts-new-ways-to-replenish-funds-/1056-5534812-o20563/index.html>

*Local Al-Shabaab terrorists are leading a vicious extortion ring for the Somali-based terror organisation within Kenyan borders, a security report seen by the Sunday Nation indicates.*

*The Kenyans were recruited by the group and trained in Somalia before being deployed in the northern counties of Wajir, Mandera and Garissa to lead in the extortion of locals through which they fund Al-Shabaab activities across the border in Somalia.*

*Some of the Kenyans named in the report spearheading the extortion rackets, and who are wanted by the police, include Maalim Yusuf Hassan Abdullahi, Abdirashid Ibrahim, aka Osman Noor, Ahmed Dabar, Issack Okolla and Mohamed Bilal Olow. These men are believed to be operating in Garissa, Mandera and Wajir counties.*



## Al-Shabaab Kidnaps Professionals to Utilize Their Skills

**OE Watch Commentary:** While terrorist groups are notorious for kidnapping individuals to demand high ransoms, al-Shabaab uses this tactic in other ways as well. As the accompanying excerpted article from the Kenyan news site *Daily Nation* reports, in the past year, al-Shabaab abducted 11 professionals in northern Kenya and took them to Somalia to utilize their skills. According to a senior Kenyan security officer, the Somali-based group is particularly interested in medical professionals and teachers, though the latest victim was a mechanic.

Al-Shabaab also appears interested in abducting security personnel. In January, they raided a Kenyan village, forcing five captors onto a pickup truck that was then driven towards Somalia. They eventually abandoned four of their detainees but continued on with a Mr. Mohamed Salat, who reportedly could divulge security information that would be of interest to the terrorists.

Ransom requests are not totally out of the picture when professionals are kidnapped. When two Cuban physicians were abducted in April (resulting in the killing of a police officer escorting the doctors), elders attempted to negotiate for their release. Unfortunately, they returned empty handed as al-Shabaab had set too steep a ransom for an agreement to be reached.

One result of these abductions is that prominent Kenyans living near the border have relocated elsewhere, out of concern of being the next victim. Their fear is compounded by Kenyan police not having permission to cross the border to look for them should they be kidnapped. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



*Al-Shabaab fighters.*

Source: Tasnim News Agency, <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2016/10/30/1226232/al-shabaab-terrorists-seize-town-from-somali-government>, CC BY 4.0

***“Somalia-based militant group Al-Shabaab has ramped up kidnappings as a way of beefing up its pool of professionals and gathering intelligence.”***

**Source:** Manase Otsialo, “Kenya: Al-Shabaab Steps Up Kidnap of Experts to Aid Agenda,” *All Africa/Daily Nation (Kenya)*, 12 April 2020. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202004130160.html>

*Somalia-based militant group Al-Shabaab has ramped up kidnappings as a way of beefing up its pool of professionals and gathering intelligence.*

*According to the officer, Shabaab targets mostly non-locals, who are believed to be cooperative once under its control.*

*“Nobody is sitting pretty at home along the border. Al-Shabaab will come for you hoping to get information or just to cause pain to your family,” he said.*

*“Our work as police ends at the border ... I am not in a position to account for the fate of the Cuban doctors, but we have a team working on it,” [Inspector-General of Police] Mr Mutyambai said.*



## The Impact of COVID-19 on African Security

**OE Watch Commentary:** The African Union’s “Silencing the Guns by 2020” initiative was supposed to end major conflicts on the continent. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* claims, this ambitious plan is being derailed in part by the coronavirus pandemic. Not only did the pandemic disrupt plans to help bring peace to troubled areas, it has actually increased the likelihood that some conflicts will be exacerbated, particularly in already fragile areas. The article notes, “the regions expected to be most affected are the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Central African region, eastern Congo, the Horn of Africa, Sudan, South Sudan and Libya.”



AMISOM and Somali National Army in a military operation.

Source: AMISOM/Wikimedia/Flickr, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM\\_%26\\_Somali\\_National\\_Army\\_operation\\_to\\_capture\\_Afgoye\\_Corridor\\_Day\\_4\\_23\\_\(7319789764\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM_%26_Somali_National_Army_operation_to_capture_Afgoye_Corridor_Day_4_23_(7319789764).jpg), Public Domain

The harm caused by the disease, especially in regions already experiencing conflict, is significantly related to the economic disruption it causes. Conflict often occurs over scarce resources and in areas with low employment. Thus, with experts reporting that the pandemic leads to increased food scarcity and diminishing employment opportunities, the conditions that often lead to conflict are aggravated. Meanwhile, crisis management systems in place meant to deal with the factors leading to conflict are being sorely tested.

The African Union is studying ways to mitigate the impact of the disease, especially in fragile states with large numbers of restless, unemployed youths. The hope is to at least prevent the loss of gains that were made so far under the “Silencing the Guns by 2020” initiative. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“The pandemic is exposing weaknesses in governance, as youth unemployment and restlessness rises in already fragile countries.”***

**Source:** Fred Oluoch, “Pandemic Disrupts Plan to End Wars,” *The East African*, 11 May 2020. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/africa/Pandemic-disrupts-plan-to-end-wars/4552902-5547210-12ee93uz/index.html>

*The pandemic is exposing weaknesses in governance, as youth unemployment and restlessness rises in already fragile countries.*

*“Silencing the Guns”, the continental programme to end civil wars in Africa by the end of this year, has been disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic.*

*Experts said that acute food scarcity, increased gender-based and sexual violence, diminishing economic opportunities, which has led to lost livelihoods as a result of the pandemic, were more severe in countries with ongoing conflict...*

*“Covid-19 will do more harm in regions experiencing conflicts. We must deal with security in the wake of the pandemic,” said Andrews Atta Asamoah, a senior research fellow with the Institute of Security Studies.*

*The regions expected to be most affected are the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Central African region, eastern Congo, the Horn of Africa, Sudan, South Sudan and Libya.*



## Mali Struggles to Fight Pandemic

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 10 May, Mali President Kéita addressed the nation in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic. The state of the union-like speech was long overdue, according to a lengthy treatise by Bamako-based *Center for Research, Political, Economic and Social Analysis (CRAPES)*, published in the *Mali Tribune* and then *Malijet* news outlets. In it, the authors admonished the government to take the opportunity of the pandemic crisis to build a better Mali.

As the excerpted passages demonstrate, underlying the call for better governance, the piece is loaded with statistics that reveal why Mali will be hard-pressed to do anything substantial to make the country a better place in the face of the virus that forced the country's borders to close on 18 March. It is notable, perhaps obvious, that the problems mentioned are the same broken foundations that the country has been teetering upon even before the current health crisis. War in the north, an anemic economy, food insecurity, and Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) have threatened to take down the current government.



Pre-pandemic Bustling Bamako Airport.  
Source: Photo by Dodge Billingsley

International organizations estimate 4.3 million people in Mali will require humanitarian assistance in 2020 and over one million will suffer severe food insecurity during the rainy or lean season from June to August this year. There were over 200,000 IDPs as of December 2019, mostly refugees moving from the north and central regions into the capital and further south. Currently there are many refugee camps in the capital that, in effect self govern, and are cramped and overcrowded with no access to the medical safeguards needed to reduce infections and flatten the curve.

The lucky ones have been able to circumvent the refugee camps and enter into fragile alliances in many villages across the south, often on a trial-like basis. The village of Bassa south of the capital is emblematic of several villages in the area, which have taken in refugees. Ten families, about 100 people, have settled in the village with the permission of the village chief and his council. The newcomers signed a contract with the village stating they will abide by the laws of the village and be governed by the local leadership. So far, according to both the refugees and a village spokesman, there have been no issues, but the newcomers arrive with very little or nothing, putting increasing pressure on the local food supply until they can effectively grow and harvest their way out of starvation.

These are taking place against the backdrop of additional statistics from the publication. The authors claim with reasonable data that as much as 70% of the economic activity of the state, more than 60% of gross domestic product, and 95% of all jobs created, are part of the informal economy, the bulk of which will be difficult to shut down because the general population is simply too poor to have any other option than to work.

For some, their businesses and livelihood disappeared when the government closed all borders and commercial flights in and out of the country on 18 March. The Bamako Airport, normally thriving with drivers, porters, money changers and many others is a snapshot of the 70% of the country that feeds and clothes itself via the informal economy. Those professions have been completely wiped out for the time being.

To keep Mali from slipping into an economic abyss, the government will implement massive state intervention. Nationwide health initiatives like the “One Malian, One Mask” program which will distribute 20 million washable masks are being undertaken. Restrictive measures have been put in place to keep those with means from hoarding and stockpiling essentials that could lead to or exacerbate shortages of necessary staples.

These conditions do not suggest that Mali deserves any special attention. As the authors state, “COVID-19 spares no high, middle or low income countries.” It is also difficult to say that the pandemic will cause the government to collapse or turn the country to anarchy. However, Mali is already a sick and fragile nation. It ranks as one of the worst economic countries on the African continent. It is more likely that the pandemic will only exacerbate these conditions rather than create the conditions for a renewal that the authors hope for. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

***“The restrictive measures presented as one of the most effective solutions to slow down the chain of transmission without accompanying measures, understood and shared by economists, are a chimera in Mali: between the risk of catching COVID-19 and survival, the choice is quickly made. Hence the need for state intervention.”***



## Continued: Mali Struggles to Fight Pandemic



Roadside market south of the capital highlights the informal nature of the businesses that produce a substantial amount of Mali's GDP.

Source: Photo by Dodge Billingsley

**Source:** “Economie: La résilience du Mali à l’épreuve de la crise du Covid-19 (The Economy: Mali’s Resilience to the test of the Covid-19 Crisis),” Center for Research, Political, Economic and Social Analysis and published by Mali Tribune and MaliJet, 12 May 2020. [https://malijet.com/actualite\\_economique\\_du\\_mali/242871-economie-la-resilience-du-mali-a-l-epreuve-de-la-crise-du-covid-.html](https://malijet.com/actualite_economique_du_mali/242871-economie-la-resilience-du-mali-a-l-epreuve-de-la-crise-du-covid-.html)

*The President, in his speech insists on the “reorientation of certain budgetary allocations starting at the top of the State” to cope with this expense. This poses a real concern in terms of strategy of opportunity cost in a country where everything is a priority (health, education, security, etc.). The reorientation strategy should therefore be carried out with a view to improving collective well-being rather than for the benefit of a privileged few in the Republic. For example, the payment of teachers’ salary arrears even by strikes could, beyond easing this social front, be seen as a fairer and more equitable measure for the benefit of people of all social strata. And no matter, the discourse on the rationalization of the state budget has always been made by the same authorities, but by examining only governance over the period 2013-2018, spending has suffered an average increase of more than 13%, ... the overall situation of the country is only getting worse.*

*Going beyond skepticism about the sustainable and effective nature of these measures, a big difficulty arises as to their sufficiency. This crisis, beyond its cyclical aspect, poses, in the most obvious way, another more thorny structural problem. Indeed, our health services are in a terrible situation, even in the abyss. Nursing staff, in addition to their limited number, suffer from a shortage of necessary skills. There is limited or even non-existent care materials in some hospitals. Now is the time to think about and design a large-scale investment plan for the health sector, ranging from training, through recruitment, construction of hospitals to the availability of equipment. This is why the current crisis becomes an opportunity for Mali to straighten its governance, to raise its head for the well-being of the populations.*



## The EU Suspends Training Mission in Mali due to COVID-19



Logo of European Union Training Mission, Mali.

Source: European Union, vector works by TUBS via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EUTM\\_Mali.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EUTM_Mali.svg), Public domain

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to the excerpted article from the Spanish news source *La Razon*, the European Union (EU) training mission in Mali has decided to suspend its mission after one of the Spanish soldiers tested positive for COVID-19, out of concern the virus could become widespread. While that soldier was placed in isolation and received medical attention, the situation shows how COVID-19 is affecting EU military support efforts overseas.

The EU mission's Public Information Office affirmed that the decision was "temporary and necessary" and was a precautionary measure. There is no intention to permanently end the training mission given that there is no end in sight to the war in Mali and the EU maintains an interest in stabilizing the country. Nevertheless, when the mission will recommence is unclear. The article notes that the mission had implemented measures to reduce the possibility for contagion in coordination with the Malian Armed Forces and World Health Organization advice, but this was not sufficient to prevent the initial infection of the Spanish soldier. As a result of the virus, the EU has also reoriented its mission toward addressing the health and hygiene of its personnel and partners, particularly Malian soldiers, including taking their temperatures daily. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“This decision is ‘temporary and necessary’ and is taken as a precautionary measure with the aim of protecting both operational personnel, the Malian Armed Forces and the local population.”***

**Source:** “La UE suspende su misión de entrenamiento en Mali, en la que hay 300 militares españoles (The EU suspends its training mission in Mali, in which there are 300 Spanish soldiers),” *La Razon*, 8 April 2020. <https://www.larazon.es/espana/20200408/jkqkmgirpzig43ksorzvuh3dil4.html>

*The European Union made the decision to suspend the activities of its training mission in Mali (EUTM MALI) after one of the members of the international contingent tested positive for coronavirus. This pausing of activities implies that the nearly 300 Spanish soldiers who participate in the training of Malian soldiers had to suspend their activities. As explained by the mission's Public Information Office in a statement, this decision is 'temporary and necessary' and is taken as a precautionary measure with the aim of protecting both operational personnel, the Malian Armed Forces and the local population.*

*For the EU, the only priority now in this operation is the health of its personnel and partners, and stressing that all of the military comply with hygiene measures and take their temperatures daily. Currently, the Spanish contingent deployed in Mali is made up of about 300 troops and most are in the “Boubacar Sada Sy” Training Center in the town of Koulikoro, about 60 kilometers from Bamako. They are scheduled to return to Spain in mid-May, when they will have to be relieved.*



## Chad Considers Withdrawing from Regional Military Cooperation

**OE Watch Commentary:** In late March, Chadian president Idriss Déby announced the launch of a military campaign against Boko Haram after the group killed 92 Chadian soldiers on Chadian territory. However, according to the excerpted passage, on 10 April, Déby abruptly announced that the campaign was over. Furthermore, he expressed resentment that no other country had helped Chad in its counter-Boko Haram campaign and thus asserted that Chad would no longer send its forces to other countries to participate in military operations.



Chadian Army pick-up in Diffa.

Source: Idriss Fall (VOA) via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chadian\\_Army\\_pick-up\\_in\\_Diffa.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chadian_Army_pick-up_in_Diffa.jpg), Public Domain

The article notes that Déby's statement came amid plans for Chad to send a battalion to the Niger-Mali-Burkina tri-border area to combat Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) fighters. Nevertheless, the author suspects that Déby may still send that battalion and his statement may be bluster. One reason why Déby may feel under pressure to end foreign operations, however, according to the article, is that he is coming under criticism domestically for not protecting Chad enough, which resulted in the unprecedented Boko Haram attack in March. This may also explain why the article noted that Chad reported killing 1,000 Boko Haram members, although that was most certainly an overestimate.

Déby also promised never to allow Boko Haram to occupy "a single centimeter" of Chadian territory again. The article also indicates that Déby expects Nigeria and Niger to increase the intensity of their operations and reoccupy all of Boko Haram's territories on their sides of Lake Chad once Chad's campaign halts. Considering the widespread scope of the Boko Haram insurgency however, this is a tall order. (Also see: "Chad's President to Lead Military Operations against Boko Haram," *OE Watch*, May 2020) **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

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***"We fought alone, on the borders of Lake Chad without the contribution of the countries which are supposed to help us."***

**Source:** "Déby: 'aucun soldat ne participera à une opération militaire en dehors du Tchad' (Déby: 'no soldier will take part in a military operation outside of Chad')," *Alwihda Info*, 10 April 2020. [https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Deby-aucun-soldat-ne-participera-a-une-operation-militaire-en-dehors-du-Tchad\\_a85623.html](https://www.alwihdainfo.com/Deby-aucun-soldat-ne-participera-a-une-operation-militaire-en-dehors-du-Tchad_a85623.html)

"As of today, no Chadian soldier will participate in a military operation outside of Chad. We are capable of defending our territorial integrity," the head of state said Thursday in remarks reported by the Presidency. He made the statement during a meeting at the Lake with the military leaders who led Operation Anger in Boma, before returning to N'Djamena. "We fought alone, on the borders of Lake Chad without the contribution of the countries which are supposed to help us. The Chadian soldiers died for the cause of the member countries of the LCBC and the Sahel," said Idriss Déby, specifying that his mission to the Lake has "come to an end". However, it has not been specified whether the deployment of a Chadian battalion in the tri-border area (Niger-Mali-Burkina Faso), initially planned for the end of March, would be definitively compromised. France had asked for Chad's support to restore calm in this area.

The deadline for neighboring countries Niger and Nigeria is until April 24 to reoccupy their liberated territories. After this time, Chad will leave these areas to return to secure only its territorial boundaries. In eight days of military operations, the Chadian army has neutralized more than 1,000 terrorists, across five areas of operations.



## Mozambican Civilians Unprotected from Insurgent Attacks

**OE Watch Commentary:** Mozambique has become one of the hotbeds of insurgents loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The excerpted Portuguese article from a Mozambican news source documents how civilians are struggling as a result of the insurgency. In particular, the article suggests that Mozambique's armed forces have been too apathetic, resulting in a series of insurgent attacks on villages in the north of the country.

According to the article, villagers were forced to sleep in the bush after an attack that led to the torching of houses and a Catholic church. Insurgents also robbed banks and stole food from people. The villagers reported that the insurgents shouted that Islam was the only religion and that Christian villagers should become Muslim. They also occupied the local government building for a period of the time. This indicated an ideological element to the attack beyond the insurgents' affiliation to ISIS itself.

Civilians are in despair and believe that Mozambique's military has been too slow to defend their villages. One villager asks where the military is and implies that because of the natural resources in northern Mozambique, the government cares not about civilians but only about wealth. In total, the article reports that seven villages were attacked, but it was not clear how many people were killed or injured. Unless Mozambican armed forces improve their preparedness to combat the ISIS-loyal insurgents and demonstrate their commitment to protecting civilians' lives and property, the article gives little reason to expect a reversal in the course of violence afflicting the north of the country. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Msumbiji Cabo Delgado.

Source: Kipala via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Msumbiji\\_Cabo\\_Delgado.PNG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Msumbiji_Cabo_Delgado.PNG), Public Domain

***“The people of that village are still hiding in the woods because of these terrorists who have been causing terror and panic in Cabo Delgado since October 2017.”***

**Source:** “BA’s desfilam em Muidumbi, queimam igreja católica e destroem bens públicos (BA’s parade in Muidumbi, burn Catholic church and destroy public goods).” *Moz 24 Horas*, 13 April 2020, <https://www.moz24h.co.mz/post/ba-s-desfilam-em-muidumbi-queimam-igreja-cat%C3%B3lica-e-destroem-bens-p%C3%BAblicos>

*The escalation of attacks on villages and district headquarters by the armed bandits has intensified in Cabo Delgado due to the apathy of the armed defense and security forces. In the past four days, “malefactors,” according to the new police lexicon, have attacked seven villages in the district of Muidumbi, including government assets. A particular case was in the village of Muambula, where the Nangololomas Mission is located, which was totally destroyed by them. The people of that village are still hiding in the woods because of these terrorists who have been causing terror and panic in Cabo Delgado since October 2017, with the exception of the missionaries’ houses, which have not been invaded or touched, and some peoples’ houses that have also escaped destruction, although the most of Muambula was destroyed, including the Catholic church that was burned, and the banks and other goods that were inside the church. They ransacked people’s goods and food, insulted the name of Christ by shouting that Islam is the only religion and it is necessary that everyone follow it.*

*It is unclear how many people were killed and injured in this latest attack in Muidumbi. “We are in the woods, afraid to go out, they want to force us to be Muslims, but we Makondes are Christians, we eat and like pork. Where is our government now? We are in bad shape, we believe we were sold on account of wealth in the province,” said the source who finds herself a refugee in the bush.*



## Affiliates of Al-Qaeda and ISIS Start Clashing in the Sahel

**OE Watch Commentary:** The two main jihadist groups in the Sahel are the Islamic State in Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM). Since their respective formations in 2015 and 2017, they have generally avoided clashing, even though the former is aligned with the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the latter is affiliated with ISIS's rival, al-Qaeda. However, according to the excerpted article, this started changing in mid-April, when the two groups began clashing in an area along the Mali-Burkina Faso border called Gourma.

The article asserts that an ISGS attack on JNIM on 14 April led to casualties on both sides. ISGS subsequently attacked Fulani civilians in the same area who were suspected of being related to or supporters of the JNIM fighters.

The article also places this development in global context, noting that the Sahel had been the only region in the world where ISIS and al-Qaeda operated near each other but did not clash. According to the article, this latest development is resulting in increased deaths for both groups and civilians. These clashes further demonstrate how the al-Qaeda-ISIS rift has progressively become more severe all over the world. If there were any prospects for ISIS and al-Qaeda to collaborate, then the Sahel was the region where it could occur. Nevertheless, the article makes clear that clashes between the groups will become the norm while they both also fight national and French security forces at the same time.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“The Sahel was until this the only area in the world where the branches of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State organization coexisted without problem, but in recent months this situation has changed.”***



Main market of Fada N'Gourma; city in South-East Burkina Faso (West Africa).  
Source: Martin Wegmann Baliola via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fada\\_N\\_Gourma.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fada_N_Gourma.JPG) CC BY SA 3.0

**Source:** “Mali-Burkina: Plusieurs Morts dans des Affrontements entre Djihadistes dans le Gourma (Mali-Burkina: Several Dead in Clashes between Jihadists in Gourma),” *Nord Sud Journal*, 15 April 2020. <https://www.nordsudjournal.com/mali-burkina-plusieurs-morts-dans-des-affrontements-entre-djihadistes-dans-le-gourma/>

*During the night of Monday April 13 to Tuesday April 14, fighters from the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) organization, led by the Nigerien jihadist leader, Moussa Moumouni, attacked a position of the fighters of Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) of Jafar Dicko, affiliated with al-Qaeda in the forest of the locality of Tin Tabakat, near the Mali-Burkina Faso border.*

*Jafar Dicko's men repelled the attack, but according to our sources, there were many deaths on both sides. The same sources say that angry ISGS fighters killed several civilians in attacks on Fulani villages in the Tin Tabakat area that they suspected are connected to JNIM fighters of Jafar Dicko.*

*The Sahel was until this the only area in the world where the branches of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State organization coexisted without problems, but in recent months this situation has changed. Fighting between jihadist groups is now regular, particularly in Mali, and results in many deaths.*



## Colombia Warfare Update

**OE Watch Commentary:** With the coronavirus pandemic and global oil glut as unusual factors and the continuing deterioration of living conditions in neighboring Venezuela as a now usual factor, the irregular war in Colombia has taken a few odd turns. As evidenced by the first accompanying reference, the finance structure of the National Liberation Army (ELN) is being stressed by the secondary effects of the pandemic, this along with operations being mounted by the Colombian Army against that guerrilla organization. According to the reportage, the army dismantled three clandestine oil refineries belonging to the ELN in Catatumbo, a region spanning some of northeastern Colombia and northwestern Venezuela, and which has long been a center of armed conflict. Producing precursor chemicals for cocaine paste processing, such refineries are not unheard of, but an increased scale of such operations seems related to difficulties in obtaining refined products (including even gasoline) from Venezuelan sources. Meanwhile, as noted in the second reference, members of the government security forces are occasionally taken hostage by local indigenous groups as a form of protest. Tribal groups, mostly in the southwestern part of Colombia, will take a soldier or policemen captive, to later let them go after some embarrassing treatment. The practice has been tolerated for some time and now a retired officers' association is trying to bring the issue back to light. The third and fourth references are representative of reportage about recent government operations, also in Cauca Department, against FARC dissidents and units of the ELN. The government reports are claiming some success. The joint government operations, as is often the case, occurred in zones where outlaw groups engage in intramural combat over the control of smuggling routes. In worse news for the Colombian Army, however, several officers were cashiered because of what is reported in the fifth reference to have been the irregular use of intelligence assets (surveillance) by an army unit against some news media. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



*Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) insurgents.*  
Source: Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Revolutionary\\_Armed\\_Forces\\_of\\_Colombia\\_\(FARC\)\\_insurgents.GIF](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Revolutionary_Armed_Forces_of_Colombia_(FARC)_insurgents.GIF), Public Domain

The practice has been tolerated for some time and now a retired officers' association is trying to bring the issue back to light. The third and fourth references are representative of reportage about recent government operations, also in Cauca Department, against FARC dissidents and units of the ELN. The government reports are claiming some success. The joint government operations, as is often the case, occurred in zones where outlaw groups engage in intramural combat over the control of smuggling routes. In worse news for the Colombian Army, however, several officers were cashiered because of what is reported in the fifth reference to have been the irregular use of intelligence assets (surveillance) by an army unit against some news media. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“... [On] 1 May, in Caloto [county], Cauca Department... the Public Force was taken hostage by members of the indigenous reservation in that sector, obstructing thereby the constitutional work of guaranteeing security in the national territory.”***

**Source:** Ariel Cabrera, “El Ejército desmantela tres refineras de petróleo clandestinas del Eln en el Catatumbo (The Army dismantles three clandestine ELN oil refineries),” *Radio Santafé*, 22 April 2020. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2020/04/22/ejercito-desmantela-3-refinerias-de-petroleo-clandestinas-del-eln-en-la-region-del-catatumbo/>

*“The military operations, within the framework of the Heroes of Liberty Campaign plan, was begun in El Porvenir, Tibú county, a sector in which men of the Land Operations Battalion #9 located three illegal precursor refineries, equipped with three locally made distillers (marcianos), three pools for the storage of stolen crude, 12 metal tankards, and 370 meters of two-inch hose...*

*The Second Division of the National Army indicated it would continue its operations to dismantle the illicit economies of groups on the margin of the law that converge in Catatumbo.”*

**Source:** Editors, “El gobierno debe parar el secuestro de militares y policías por grupos de indígenas (The government must stop the kidnapping of soldiers and policemen by indigenous groups),” *La Linterna Azul*, 5 May 2020. <http://www.lalinternaazul.info/2020/05/05/comunicado-a-la-opinion-publica-del-cuerpo-de-generales-y-almirantes-en-retiro-de-las-ff-mm/>

*“The Retired Generals and Admirals Corps views with great concern the continuing occurrence of kidnappings of soldiers and policemen by groups that refuse to respect authority, as occurred Friday, 1 May, in Caloto [county], Cauca Department, where the Public Force was taken hostage by members of the indigenous reservation in that sector, obstructing thereby the constitutional work of guaranteeing security in the national territory.”*



## Continued: Colombia Warfare Update

**Source:** Editors, “Siguen operativos militares en Corinto (Military operations continue in Corinto),” *Diario Occidente*, 21 April 2020. <https://occidente.co/regionales/cauca/siguen-operativos-en-corinto/>

*“Yesterday the Army furthered operations in the mountainous zone of Corinto [county] after the police station in that locality had been harassed by an illegal armed group...”*

*Additionally, the Cauca Specific Army Command reported yesterday that there were firefights on presentation of FARC dissidents in Santa Elena township, an uphill part of the county, where a military base is located...”*

**Source:** Ariel Cabrera, “El Ejército abatió a ocho integrantes de las Farc en el Cauca (The Army took down eight members of the FARC in Cauca),” *Radio Santafé*, 15 April 2020. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2020/04/15/ejercito-abatio-a-8-integrantes-de-las-disidencias-de-las-farc-en-el-cauca/>

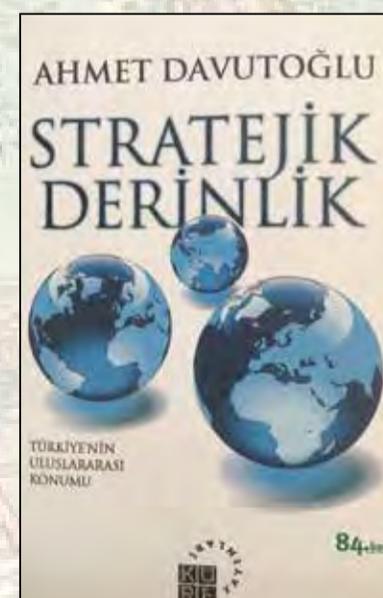
*“Highlighted in the military report is that the eight anti-socials were taken down in an overwhelming military operation framed within the joint military maneuvers furthered by the National Army Third Division, responding to calls received to counter firefights between the self-styled ‘Carlos Patiño Mobil Column’ [FARC] and the ‘José María Becerra Front’ of the ELN, that are disputing drug smuggling routes of the Micay river valley...The military action...developed in Argelia county...”*

**Source:** Richard Aguirre Fernández, “Irregularidades sacan a 11 militares y a un general (Irregularities take out 11 officers and a general),” *El Colombiano*, 2 May 2020. <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/irregularidades-sacan-a-11-militares-y-a-un-general-LI12924258>

*“The Minister of Defense, Carlos Holmes Trujillo, made known that 11 military officers were retired from their duties and that a general requested ‘la baja’, that is to say, voluntary retirement from active service. In a press conference, the minister indicated that the decisions were taken due to the ‘irregular employment of military intelligence capacities’, exactly those that had been informed of, principally by the Revista Semana...General (ret) Jaime Ruiz Barrera, president of the Association of Retired Officers of the Military Forces (ACORE), in dialog with El Colombiano, indicated that...he was in agreement with the decision taken...”*

## Book Review: A Look Back and Forward at Turkey’s “Strategic Depth” Foreign Policy Doctrine Karen Kaya February 2020

“Strategic Depth (Stratejik Derinlik)” is a Turkish book published in 2001. This was a time when international relations theorists were describing new frameworks of world order and security modalities following the end of the Cold War and bi-polar world. Works such as Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” and Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” were icons of this intellectual period. It was in this context of a changing international system that Turkish International Relations Professor Ahmet Davutoğlu (who later served as Foreign Minister between 2009-2014 and Prime Minister between 2014-2016) attempted to define Turkey’s position in his book “Strategic Depth.” From around 2002 to 2012, the foreign policy that Davutoğlu outlined in his book was considered the doctrine and roadmap for Turkish foreign policy.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/309386>



## Miscellaneous Venezuelan Misery

**OE Watch Commentary:** Can things get worse for Venezuelans? For those living in Venezuela, the answer always seems to be yes. It is yet too difficult to confidently assert what the direct effect of the coronavirus pandemic is like in Venezuela, at least from unclassified sources. The secondary effects, however, are patently not good. The first accompanying reference is of comments made by the owner of the premier foodstuffs producer in the country. He is warning about the danger government price controls pose to the food supply. The second reference is a sarcastically toned report on comments from the Bolivarian Labor Minister, who asserts that the re-accelerating rise in prices is impossible to explain. The third and fourth references are exemplary of twitter reporting about looting in various parts of the country, a phenomenon that had heretofore been avoided. The fifth reference brings to the fore an unfortunate economic consideration previously not reported. Remittances from expatriate family members, which for many families inside Venezuela had provided survival income, have dried out since restaurants and other business in the United States, Spain and other émigré destinations started closing down due to the pandemic. The last reference fits into the context of all of the above. Evidently, the Bolivarian regime is taking more political prisoners as part of its response to worsening public morale. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

***“The decision of the regime to toughen price controls [is] an attempt to stop the galloping inflation that has unleashed a growing social ill-will in the last few days, manifesting itself in some protests and lootings of businesses.”***

***“Human rights defenders and family members accuse that they [the regime] are taking advantage of the quarantine to increase persecution, repression, illegal movement and psychological tortures...”***

**Source:** Editors, “La mayor empresa de alimentos en Venezuela alertó por un riesgo de desabastecimiento (The biggest food company in Venezuela warns of the risk of shortages),” *Infobae and AP*, 26 April 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2020/04/26/la-mayor-empresa-de-alimentos-en-venezuela-alerto-por-un-riesgo-de-desabastecimiento/>

*“The decision of the regime to toughen price controls [is] an attempt to stop the galloping inflation that has unleashed a growing social ill-will in the last few days, manifesting itself in some protests and lootings of businesses. Nevertheless, it [the decision] caused a tough reaction from the president of the conglomerate, Lorenzo Mendoza, who considered the measures applied to Alimentos Polar, one of the companies of the group, as arbitrary...”*

*In the middle of the medical emergency due to the new coronavirus, which has left 313 infected and 10 dead to this date [26 April] (according to official numbers), the prices of foodstuffs and other goods has suffered a strong acceleration due in part to the jump in the exchange rate on the black market and to problems of distribution of foodstuffs generated by the shortage of gasoline, that has made transport costs higher.”*

**Source:** Jesús Herrera, “¡Economía Básica! Ministro de Trabajo: No hay explicación para el aumento desmedido de los precios (Economics 101! Labor Minister: There is no explanation for the disproportionate increase in prices),” *Noticiero Digital*, 24 April 2020. <https://www.noticierodigital.com/2020/04/pinate-no-hay-explicacion-para-el-aumento-desmedido-de-los-precios/>

*“The Chavista Labor Minister, Eduardo Piñate, indicated this Friday that a battle against speculation is being carried out, and he used the moment to opine that at this time there is no explanation for the disproportionate increase in the prices of products.”*

**Source:** Editors, “Hordas saquearon el hotel Portofino de Nueva Esparta (Hordes loot the Portofino hotel in Nueva Esparta),” *Dolartoday and Twitter*, 26 April 2020 <https://dolartoday.com/fotos-y-videos-hordas-saquearon-el-hotel-portofino-de-nueva-esparta/>

*“The Hotel Portofino in Playa El Agua in Margarita was vandalized this Sunday afternoon. The National Police detained several of the looters and recovered stolen objects, among them mattresses, furniture and kitchen items.”*

**Source:** Editors, “Reportan saqueos en Barquisimeto (Looting reported in Barquisimeto),” *Dolartoday and Twitter*, 27 April 2020. <https://dolartoday.com/videos-reportan-saqueos-en-barquisimeto-27abr/>

*“Twitter users reported lootings in the city of Barquisimeto. In videos broadcast on Twitter, civilians are seen looting food from stores after breaking storefronts of the businesses.”*

**Source:** Jennifer Orozco, “Remesas Dejan de Existir Durante Pandemia (Remittances Cease to Exist during Pandemic),” *La Prensa Diario de Lara*, 25 April 2020. <https://www.laprensalarara.com.ve/nota/15399/2020/04/remesas-dejan-de-existir-durante-la-pandemia>

*“The business closings around the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic are putting at risk the remittances of family economies that depend on them...The Director of Ecoanalítica, Asdrúbal Oliveros, estimates that a fall of at least 30% of the remittances, depending on the gravity of the world crisis that is affecting employment, while Luis Vicente [NFI] says that there is already a 35% recorded decrease in deliveries of money from outside Venezuela...”*

**Source:** Estefani Brito, “El régimen suma nuevos presos políticos, mientras la cuarentena empeora sus condiciones de reclusión (The regime adds new political prisoners while the quarantine worsens the conditions of imprisonment),” *El Nacional*, 26 April 2020. <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/el-regimen-suma-nuevos-presos-politicos-mientras-la-cuarentena-empeora-sus-condiciones-de-reclusion/>

*“...According to Foro Penal [Human Rights NGO focused on Venezuela], since April 23, 70 new detentions for political reasons have been recorded. Human rights defenders and family members accuse that they [the regime] are taking advantage of the quarantine to increase persecution, repression, illegal movement and psychological tortures...”*



## Daniel Ortega Reappears

**OE Watch Commentary:** In last month's *OE Watch*, we reported on the unexplained disappearance of Nicaraguan dictator Daniel Ortega. He has since reappeared in public, as noted in the first accompanying reference of 16 April. Curiously, according to the reportage, Ortega has still not mentioned why he went missing for more than a month in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. In any case, he reasserted the policy of his administration to do very little to confront the virus. The second accompanying reference is more recent -- a 1500-word complaint essay about the indifference of the Ortega regime to the pandemic. The outlet is generally anti-regime, so we might have to discount some of the invective, but there is little doubt that the official government data in Nicaragua is all but useless and that the government's *laissez faire* approach is more radical than that of most other countries. It may be hard to ever tell with certainty, given the dearth of testing and records, but toward the end of this summer, Nicaragua may have become the extreme comparative epidemiological case as far as policy approaches to the pandemic goes. With the medical outcome, we will also await what effect, if any, the regime's pandemic policy has regarding its hold on political power in the country. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Daniel Ortega.

Source: Fundscion Ong DE Nicaragua via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comandante\\_Daniel\\_Ortega\\_Celbreando\\_su\\_nuevo\\_ttiunfi\\_Presidencial.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comandante_Daniel_Ortega_Celbreando_su_nuevo_ttiunfi_Presidencial.jpg), CC BY 3.0

***“At no time during his speech did Ortega explain why he was absent for 34 days...”***

***“We are going to see ... the natural evolution of the sickness...”***

**Source:** Wilfredo Miranda, “Daniel Ortega reaparece tras 34 días y vuelve a minimizar el impacto de la pandemia en Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega reappears after 34 days and goes back to minimizing the impact of the pandemic in Nicaragua),” *El País*, 16 April 2020. <https://elpais.com/sociedad/2020-04-16/daniel-ortega-reaparece-tras-34-dias-y-vuelve-a-minimizar-el-impacto-de-la-pandemia-en-nicaragua.html>

*“The Sandinista ruler did not explain the reasons for his prolonged absence and, in turn, minimized the impact of the pandemic in his nation and in his speech focused on criticizing ‘nuclear bombs’...At no time during his speech did Ortega explain why he was absent for 34 days. This disappearance in the middle of the COVID-19 health threat was the longest in his presidential terms...He discarded decreeing a quarantine or social distancing, arguing economic reasons...”*

**Source:** Arlen Cerda, “Los brotes de covid-19 desbordan al régimen de Daniel Ortega (Outbreaks of COVID-19 overwhelming the Ortega regime),” *Confidencial*, 11 May, 2020. <https://confidencial.com.ni/brotos-de-covid-19-en-nicaragua-desbordan-al-regimen-de-daniel-ortega/>

*“Doctors warn: hospitals are full and there are infected medical personnel; they are calling on the population to continue preventive measures to reduce the catastrophe...The administration presented its last official report the fifth of May, when after 48 hours of official silence it added only one positive case to the list of confirmed cases, about which it offered no data regarding their contracting nexus, age, or gender. Then, there were no more reports in a silence of more than five consecutive days that continues to today...Doctor [Carlos] Quant [infectious disease specialist] declared that ‘without participation of the State, what we are going to see is the natural evolution of the sickness’, and in two weeks we will see the saturation of the hospitals, that in addition are going to see their capacity even more limited by the health workers who are sick...”*



## COVID-19 in Ecuador and Peru

**OE Watch Commentary:** Last month, we noted that the country of Ecuador was being reported as especially suffering the pandemic as compared to the rest of the region (see: “Ecuador Worst Hit by COVID-19?” *OE Watch*, May 2020). The Peruvian sports network *Depor* was paying close attention to the Ecuadoran outbreak, especially as it struck Guayaquil. Since then, *Depor* shifted its coronavirus coverage to other countries, particularly to Peru itself. The contagion in Peru may have not quite hit its peak, while in Ecuador it appeared to be ameliorating, according to regional reportage. As indicated in the second accompanying excerpt from an article published in the legacy Ecuadoran newspaper *El Comercio* on 10 May, the virus in Ecuador seemed to have peaked. The *El Comercio* article provided exhaustive data about the pandemic in Ecuador in charts and graphs. The collection effort and transparency of data provided by the government of Ecuador as compared to the government of Nicaragua is as day to night (see: “Daniel Ortega Reappears” in this issue of *OE Watch*). Beyond the data, the third accompanying reference, from the Guayaquil-based online periodical *Expreso*, provides a long array of anecdotal stories and stunning photographs of Ecuadoran life, especially economic, as affected by the pandemic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Aerial view of Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Source: JorgeAlejanDroo via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aerial\\_Guayaquil.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aerial_Guayaquil.jpg), CC by SA 4.0

***“This significant increment in the numbers obliged the President of the Republic, Martín Vizcarra to take drastic measures such as extending the quarantine for two more weeks until the 24th of May...”***

***“...the report registers a reduction in the numbers as to the total of probable deaths [in Ecuador]...”***

**Source:** Editors, “Coronavirus Perú EN VIVO: cifras oficiales de contagio por COVID-19, minuto a minuto y últimas medidas de Martín Vizcarra (Coronavirus in Perú live: official contagion numbers for COVID-19, minute by minute and measures taken by Martín Vizcarra),” *Depor*, 14 May 2020. <https://depor.com/off-side/coronavirus-peru-en-vivo-hoy-jueves-14-de-mayo-online-en-directo-ultima-hora-breaking-numero-de-contagiados-casos-confirmados-positivos-muertes-medidas-del-gobierno-y-mas-noticias-en-lima-callao-ica-loreto-piura-y-mas-ciudades-conferencia-martin-vizcarra-noticia/>

*“The coronavirus in Peru is growing at an exaggerated pace. With the first phase of economic reactivation approved by the government already underway, a progressive return to normal is hoped for...”*

*According to reports of the Health Ministry, in all of Peruvian territory there are 76,306 positive cases, of which 6,979 are now hospitalized and 2,169 have died...This significant increment in the numbers obliged the President of the Republic, Martín Vizcarra to take drastic measures such as extending the quarantine for two more weeks until the 24th of May...”*

**Source:** Editors, “Covid-19 en Ecuador: 29 559 personas contagiadas y 3 642 fallecidos en el contexto de la pandemia (COVID-19 in Ecuador: 29,559 persons contracted and 3,642 dead in the context of the pandemic),” *El Comercio*, 10 May 2020. <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/balance-contagios-fallecidos-coronavirus-covid19.html>

*“This Sunday, 10 May 2020, as the country celebrates Mother’s Day, Ecuador awakes with 29, 559 persons contracted and 3,642 dead in the context of the COVID-19: 2,127 due to the affectation of the coronavirus and another 1,515 suspected of having the sickness. This is the official total of the impact of the virus on the national scale as of 10:00 this Sunday after the processing of 84, 287 tests.. Also, the report registers a reduction in the numbers as to the total of probable deaths.”*

**Source:** Editors, “Coronavirus en Ecuador y el mundo: mapa, noticias, casos y más (Coronavirus in Ecuador and the world: map, news, cases and more),” *Expreso*, 14 May 2020. <https://www.expreso.ec/actualidad/coronavirus-mundo-ecuador-informacion-minuto-minuto-6162.html>

*“...In a small part of Daule [a neighborhood in Guayaquil] that is embedded between the cantons of Guayaquil and Durán is Aurora, where yesterday on the one hand joy reined, the biggest shopping center (El Dorado) having opened; and on the other hand, uncertainty regarding controls on movement and the worry that a new wave of coronavirus victims could cover the zone...”*



## China's COVID-19 Support to Peru Linked to Infrastructure Plans

**OE Watch Commentary:** The outbreak of coronavirus in Peru caused concern, given that the Peruvian economy depends heavily on exports to China, the country's largest trading partner. Many Peruvian fishing companies stopped sending fish shipments to China due to port closures and shipping barges became stranded in China without the option of leaving.

In response to concerns, Liang Yu, China's Ambassador to Peru, made a statement to news source *America Economía* urging patience saying, "Trade between China and Peru will not be affected in the long run. Instead, demand for typical products such as fish, copper and fruit will continue to grow throughout the year." Liang also indicated that Chinese and Peruvian officials are planning on holding talks sometime in October or November of 2020 when China will discuss plans related to future investment and infrastructure development in Peru.

As part of planned dialogue, Liang indicated that, "It is important for the Peruvian government to present us with their infrastructure investment plan regarding the construction of an intercontinental railway that would provide transportation and logistical movement of goods to the most important maritime ports and airports." The estimated cost of the project is \$60 million, but there is talk that the costs would be shared by China, Peru and Bolivia. The end goal of building an intercontinental railway is to help reduce costs of moving commodities from Brazil to Peruvian ports.

As Peruvian news source *Gestión* points out, "Chinese company BGI offered the Peruvian Ministry of Health over 1,000 kits that can confirm the illness within 3 hours... to help prevent and control new cases that may appear in the country." China is providing Peru support as the country deals with coronavirus, but that support may be related to economic interests. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

***“Trade (because of the coronavirus) between China and Peru will not be affected in the long run. Instead, demand for typical products such as fish, copper and fruit will continue to grow throughout the year.”***

***-Liang Yu, Chinese Ambassador to Peru***

**Source:** "China asegura que el comercio con Perú se mantendrá pese al coronavirus (China Assures that Trade with Peru Will Continue Despite Coronavirus)," *America Economía*, 20 February 2020. <https://www.americaeconomia.com/economia-mercados/comercio/china-asegura-que-el-comercio-con-peru-se-mantendra-pese-al-coronavirus>

*Liang Yu, China's Ambassador to Peru, is urging patience as, "Trade between China and Peru will not be affected in the long run. Instead, demand for typical products such as fish, copper and fruit will continue to grow throughout the year."*

**Source:** "Coronavirus: China ofrece donación de reactivos a Perú para realizar pruebas rápidas de diagnósticos (Coronavirus: China Offers Testing Kits to Rapidly Diagnose Coronavirus in Peru)," *Gestión*, 06 March 2020. <https://gestion.pe/peru/coronavirus-en-peru-china-ofrece-donacion-de-reactivos-para-realizar-pruebas-rapidas-de-diagnosticos-covid-19-nndc-noticia/>

*Following the confirmation of Peru's first case of Covid-19, Chinese company BGI offered the Peruvian Ministry of Health over 1,000 kits that can confirm the illness within 3 hours. The end goal of the donation is to help prevent and control new cases that may appear in the country.*



## Fake News in Bolivia

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to *El Diario*, a conservative Bolivian newspaper founded by the Corrasco family in 1904, various social media networks and news outlets have been using disinformation to relentlessly criticize the Jeanine Añez administration for such actions as transporting individuals via flights provided by the Bolivian Air Force. *El Diario* quotes an anonymous source who claims Añez’s political opponents are taking advantage of the tense situation regarding COVID-19 in an attempt to sway public opinion to wear down the government image. The author implies the Jeanine Añez administration has no opportunity to defend itself while facing the COVID-19 crisis.

Jeanine Añez has been serving as Bolivia’s interim president since the Evo Morales government’s resignation in November 2019. Described by journalists as having a right wing, anti-Morales political position, her interim term will end with the 2020 elections, which have been postponed indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Jeanine Añez.

Source: Noticias Al Dia via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jeanine\\_A%C3%B1ez\\_en\\_discurso\\_del\\_22\\_de\\_enero\\_de\\_2020.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jeanine_A%C3%B1ez_en_discurso_del_22_de_enero_de_2020.png), CC BY 3.0

Fearing for their safety, Evo Morales and key members of his government sought political asylum in Mexico after the Bolivian military and police called for his resignation amid protests regarding the validity of the November 2019 presidential elections. **End OE Watch Commentary (Lundell)**

**Source:** “Presenciamos un desborde de desinformación en medios y redes” (We’re Seeing an Overflow of Disinformation in the Media and on the Internet),” *El Diario*, 11 May 2020 [https://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2020/2020\\_05/nt200511/politica.php?n=44&-presenciamos-un-desborde-de-desinformacion-en-medios-y-redes](https://www.eldiario.net/noticias/2020/2020_05/nt200511/politica.php?n=44&-presenciamos-un-desborde-de-desinformacion-en-medios-y-redes)

*While the world faces the Covid-19 pandemic, the priority in Bolivia is the political agenda, through the political use of certain media outlets, which is overflowing with disinformation on social networks, said journalist Iván Rada, in contact with El Diario.*

*The source affirmed that the country has entered a new electoral process and politicians use each other for campaign purposes, especially against the current government, while the Jeanine Añez administration is facing Covid-19.*

*“After the scandal caused by a former Entel executive, the media ended the stage of truce that had been granted to the government, after the fall of the Evo Morales regime in November 2019,” he explained.*

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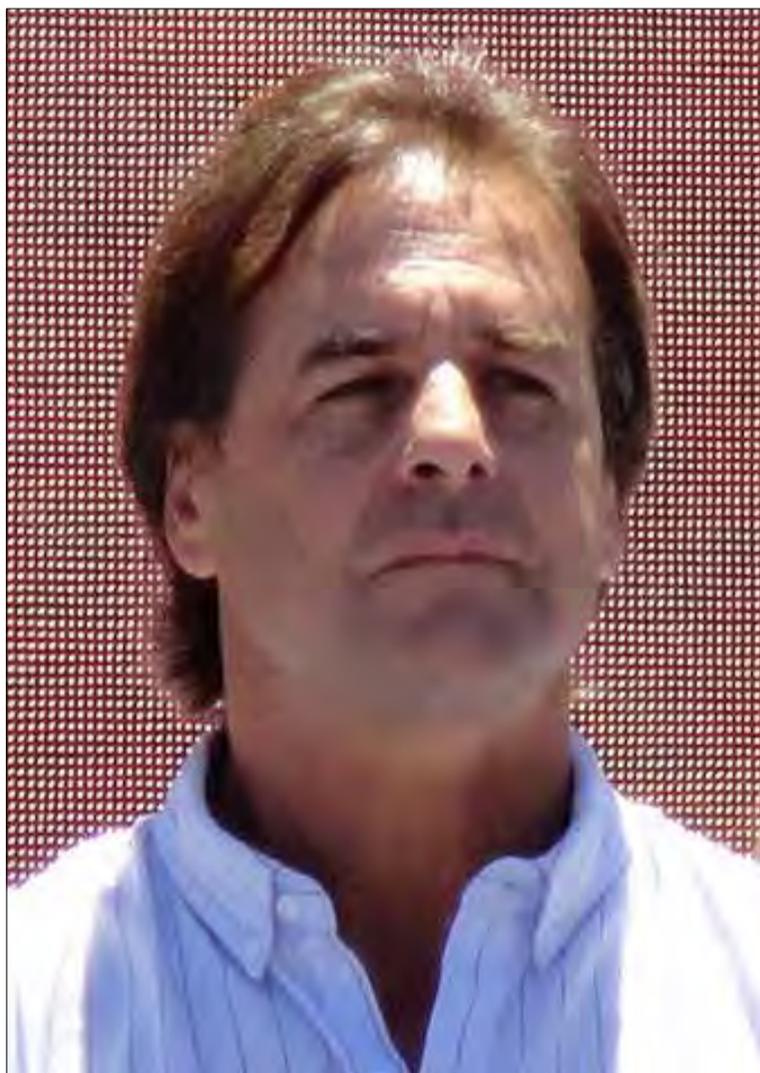
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## Uruguay Considers Changes to Immigration Laws to Attract Foreign Investment



Uruguayan President Luis Lacalle Pou.

Source: NaBUru38 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lacalle\\_Pou\\_2019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lacalle_Pou_2019.jpg), CC by SA 4.0

**OE Watch Commentary:** Uruguayan President Luis Lacalle Pou appears to believe that one way to achieve a stronger and more robust economy is to make it easier for people to immigrate to Uruguay by investing in the country. As reported in Argentinian news source *Infobae*, Lacalle Pou stated that, “Our economic team is determined to open Uruguayan borders so that hundreds of thousands of individuals can come and live in our country no matter what their nationality.” Lacalle Pou further indicated that proposed immigration changes are intended to attract foreign investment and to help the country grow and develop. And although Lacalle Pou is calling for migrants from around the globe, he is already looking to neighboring Argentina as a start because he believes that wealthy and educated Argentinians will be allured by generous tax breaks being offered in Uruguay.

In order to attract migrants, Lacalle Pou stressed the importance of changing Uruguay’s current fiscal and legal rules for residency and subsequent citizenship. In an interview with Argentinian news source *Infobae*, Uruguayan Tourism Minister Germán Cardoso elaborated on requisites required for migrants to do so. When questioned about investments needed to obtain fiscal residence, Cardoso indicated that Portugal is inspiring as they have increased their population by lowering fiscal requirements to \$500,000. Currently, the fiscal requirement in Uruguay is \$1,800,000 and requires investors to stay in the country for six months. Proposed changes include lowering the investment amount to \$500,000 and allowing investors to come and go during the six-month period before being granted residency.

By lowering the fiscal requirement, Uruguay is looking for investors, but Cardoso was adamant in stating that, “We do not want illicit capital. Instead, we are looking to attract families and investors with transparent financial resources who want to live and prosper in our country.” In addition to lowering fiscal requirements for migrants, Lacalle Pou also wants to modify requirements regarding the 180 days migrants

must stay in Uruguay before they can apply for legal residency. The proposed plan does not change the number of days migrants must stay in the country, but it allows them the flexibility to enter and leave Uruguay as long as they have enrolled their children in school, purchased a home, or taken other actions that demonstrate they want to stay in Uruguay.

Lacalle Pou’s plan to attract foreigners has faced criticism at home and abroad as indicated in Uruguayan news source *Montevideo Portal*. The most visceral criticism came from former Uruguayan President José Mujica, who argued that “instead of bringing 100,000 Argentines...Lacalle Pou should worry about Uruguayans investing in their own country.” Argentine President Alberto Fernández also warned that Lacalle Pou’s plan to ease financial regulations could turn Uruguay into a “tax haven.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

***“Proposed immigration changes do not focus on converting Uruguay into a [fiscal] paradise, or anything else out of the ordinary. Instead, we are just looking to lower immigration requirements as Uruguay needs more inhabitants, a larger work force, foreign investment and an expanded consumer base.”***



## Continued: Uruguay Considers Changes to Immigration Laws to Attract Foreign Investment

**Source:** “Lacalle Pou Pou dijo que buscará “abrir las fronteras” de Uruguay para que lleguen “miles y miles” de inmigrantes (Lacalle Pou Will Look for Ways to Open Uruguayan Borders for Thousands and Thousands of Immigrants),” *Infobae*, 24 February 2020.

<https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2020/02/24/Lacalle-Pou-pou-dijo-que-buscara-abrir-las-fronteras-de-uruguay-para-que-lleguen-miles-y-miles-de-inmigrantes/>

*“Our economic team is determined to open borders so that hundreds of thousands of individuals can come and live in Uruguay no matter what their nationality.” Lacalle Pou also added that, “Proposed immigration changes are not aimed at converting Uruguay into a (fiscal) paradise, or anything strange. Instead, we (the government) are simply looking to lower immigration requirements as we need a country with more inhabitants where people can come to invest, work, and expand our consumption base.”*

**Source:** “Todo lo que hay que saber para poder radicarse en Uruguay: así es la flexibilización que ya definió el próximo Gobierno (Everything there is to Know about Living in Uruguay and the Flexibilization Outlined by the Government),” *Infobae*, 13 January 2020.

<https://www.infobae.com/sociedad/2020/01/13/todo-lo-que-hay-que-saber-para-poder-radicarse-en-uruguay-asi-es-la-flexibilizacion-que-ya-definio-el-proximo-gobierno/>

*Fiscal requirements for foreign national to obtain legal residency currently requires a \$1,800,000 investment and a six-month consecutive stay in the country. For Tourism Minister German Cardoso, such requirements “make it difficult” to attract residents from other countries and suggestions have been made to lower fiscal residency investments to \$500,000. Despite decreasing investment criteria, Cardoso made it clear that “We (Uruguay) are not looking to attract illicit funds. Instead, we want families and investors with transparent financial resources who desire to live and prosper in our country.”*

**Source:** “Mujica criticó propuesta de Lacalle, que definió como “traer 100.000 cagadores argentinos (Mujica Criticizes Lacalle’s Proposal to Bring 100,000 Argentinian Farsantes),” *Montevideo Portal*, 15 January 2020. <https://www.montevideo.com.uy/Noticias/Mujica-critico-propuesta-de-Lacalle-que-definio-como-traer-100-000-cagadores-argentinos--uc741200>

*Former Uruguayan President José Mujica is adamantly opposed to Lacalle Pou’s proposed open border initiative plan and stated that, “Instead of bringing a hundred thousand Argentine fraudsters, let’s worry that our investors invest here (...) We have about US \$ 24 billion scattered around the world. Why don’t we make it a priority to try and recoup that money for Uruguay?”*

*Argentine President Alberto Fernández has also been openly critical of Lacalle Pou’s intentions and indicated that Uruguay had a hard time proving that it was not a tax haven in the past, and that re-opening that door does not seem like a good idea. Fernández also stated that, “The Frente Amplio, with ‘Pepe’ (Mujica), (Danilo) Astori and Tabaré (Vázquez) did a phenomenal job in removing the notion that Uruguay was a tax haven and that it did not obtain money spuriously.*



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## Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) Distributes Essentials amid COVID-19 Pandemic

**OE Watch Commentary:** Members of Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) have been seen delivering boxes of essential items across communities. According to accompanying Mexican news source *La Verdad Noticias*, photos of CJNG boxes have been circulating across social media, with decals on the boxes that read “From your friends CJNG, COVID-19 emergency support.” The article specifically references deliveries to various ranches in San Luis Potosí, but also deliveries since 12 April 2020 in Salinas de Hidalgo, Villa de Arriga, Villa de Reyes, Santa María del Río, Tierra Nueva, Rioverde, Villa de Zaragoza, and Soledad de Graciano Sánchez.

According to another Mexico news outlet, *Vanguardia*, CJNG trucks were seen in Cuautitlán, a southern city in Jalisco, delivering goods to residents. The report indicates that some boxes had decals reading “Given in the name of ‘El Señor de los Gallos,’ better known as ‘El Mencho.’” Both reports note that there has been an uptick in cartels delivering goods to communities since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in the Mexican cartels responding to the situation in a number of ways. Some cartels appear to be trying to seize an opportunity to fill a governance void by providing handouts and aid to local residents, as seen in this instance. Others are also engaging in quarantine enforcement (the Sinaloa Cartel) and the levying of a special pandemic tax to supposedly help pay for community aid (the Los Viagras cartel). **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**

***“CJNG is using the pandemic as an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with the population across different municipalities.”***

**Source:** “CJNG reparte despensa por coronavirus ahora en San Luis Potosí (CJNG distributes pantry items for coronavirus, now in San Luis Potosí),” *La Verdad Noticias*, 14 April 2020. <https://laverdadnoticias.com/crimen/CJNG-reparte-despensa-por-coronavirus-ahora-en-San-Luis-Potosi-20200414-0033.html>

*Hitmen of the CJNG were seen delivering boxes with pantry to the town of San Luis Potosi.*

*... On this occasion, various photos of pantry boxes signed by the CJNG began to circulate on social networks, which are packed with the assassins’ trucks. These boxes had a decal that could be read: “From your friends CJNG, COVID-19 emergency support.”*

**Source:** “Cártel de Jalisco regala despensas por coronavirus, de parte de ‘El Mencho’ (Jalisco cartel distributes pantry items for coronavirus, from ‘El Mencho’),” *Vanguardia*, 14 April 2020. <https://vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/cartel-de-jalisco-regala-despensas-por-coronavirus-de-parte-de-el-mencho>

*“Boxes of delivered goods had decals reading ‘given in the name of ‘El Señor de los Gallos,’ better known as ‘El Mencho.’”*

### Fangs of the Lone Wolf

Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars  
1994-2009

Dodge Billingsley  
with Lester Grau

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>



## Mexico: Explosives and Drones found in Cholua, Intended for Terrorism

**OE Watch Commentary:** In early May, the Prosecutors Office and the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) carried out searches for explosives and other munitions in the municipality of San Andrés Cholula, in the Mexican state of Puebla. According to Mexican news outlet *El Sol de Puebla*, Office of the Attorney General (FGR), and the Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime (SEIDO), authorities found C4, homemade bombs, and drones which were allegedly intended for terrorist attacks.

According to Mexican news outlet *Milenio*, on 22 April, SEIDO opened an investigation after receiving an anonymous tip. The tip alleged that certain bombing materiel was linked to the March car bombing in Celaya in the state of Guanajuato. On 25 April, the Federal Public Ministry authorized the search of three homes in Puebla. In addition to explosives and drones, authorities found gunpowder, a variety of firearms and magazines of different calibers, seven cell phones and 53 SIM cards, and three radio communication devices, among other objects.



Source: Office of the Attorney General (FGR), Twitter, @FGRMexico, <https://twitter.com/FGRMexico/status/1257016365287911426>

As the accompanying images from the Office of the Attorney General show, two quadcopter drones appear to be from the DJI Inspire series while another one appears to be from the DJI Phantom series. Two controllers are situated behind the drones, which have been retrofitted with circuit boards and wiring for weaponization purposes. The rear section of a DJI Inspire series drone is also retrofitted with a circuit board and wiring for weaponization purposes. The ‘homemade bombs’ have been identified as mortar bomb fireworks (‘chrysanthemums’). They were likely to be an IED component of the weaponized drones.

The seizure of the drones and explosives represents the third incident in which weaponized drones (or the components of weaponized drones) linked to organized crime groups have been encountered in Mexico—the first being in October 2017 in Valtierra, Guanajuato and then another later in June 2018 in Tecate, Baja just below the US-Mexico border. The SEIDO terrorism allegations are of significance because, rather than being politically inspired, they are motivated for criminal impunity purposes related to narco-terrorism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker/Keshavarz)**

***“The Office of the Attorney General began an investigation for alleged crimes by organized crime groups with intent to commit terrorist attacks, after finding explosive properties like C4 that may be related to attacks like the one that occurred in March in Guanajuato when a car bomb exploded in Celaya.”***

**Source:** Paulina Gómez, “Explosivo, bombas caseras, armas y drones se hallaron en cateos de Cholula (Explosives, homemade bombs, weapons and drones found during a search in Cholula),” *El Sol de Puebla*, 3 May 2020. <https://www.elsoldepuebla.com.mx/policiaca/explosivo-bombas-caseras-armas-y-drones-se-hallaron-en-cateos-de-cholula-5181930.html>

*C4, homemade bombs, firearms, cell phones and drones found, to be allegedly used for terrorist attacks, according to the Office of the Attorney General and Office of the Special Prosecution for Organized Crime (SEIDO).*

**Source:** Rubén Mosso, “FGR halla explosivos; indaga por terrorismo (FGR found explosives; indicates terrorism),” *Milenio*, 5 May 2020. <https://www.milenio.com/policia/inicia-fgr-pesquisa-delito-finalidad-cometer-terrorismo>

*The Office of the Attorney General began an investigation for alleged crimes by organized crime groups that want to commit terror, after finding explosive substances like C4 that may be related to attacks like the one that occurred in March in Guanajuato when a car bomb exploded in Celaya.*