

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH



Volume 10
Issue #7
July 2020

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

EURASIA

- 3 Russia's Mi-28NM 'Night Superhunter' Attack Helicopter
- 6 Russian Armed Forces Purchasing New Airframes
- 7 Russian Aviation Increases Training
- 9 Russia's A-50U Long-Range Radar Detection Aircraft
- 12 Going Blue by 2030: Upgrading and Refitting the Pacific Fleet
- 14 Training the Airborne for Mountain Combat
- 15 The Northern Fleet's Combat Training with an Arctic Focus
- 18 Looking Beyond China: Asian Actors in the Russian Arctic (Part Two)
- 20 Russian Religious Patriotism
- 22 Expanding Russia's Military Presence in Syria
- 23 Russian Arms Sales to Iran?
- 25 Russian Ministry of Defense: Battening Down the Information Hatches
- 26 Six Years On: The MH-17 Tragedy and Girkin's Damning Interview
- 27 Ukrainian Capabilities Challenge Russian Superiority in the Black Sea
- 28 Chinese Security Assistance to Tajikistan
- 29 Azerbaijan's Large-Scale Exercise Amid Coronavirus
- 31 Spanish Authorities Foil Weaponized Drone Attack by ISIS Sympathizer
- 32 Antifa in Spain

INDO-PACIFIC

- 33 China Sees Itself Widening the Gap with the United States in 6G Technology
- 34 China: Will COVID-19 Slow Military Modernization?
- 36 Integrated-Strike Battalions in China's Vision of Future Warfare
- 37 Breakthrough in Growing Crops on China's South China Sea Outposts
- 39 China Tests Emergency Support Capabilities Along its Southern Border
- 41 74th Group Army Conducts Mobilization Exercise with Roll-on Roll-off Ships
- 43 Chinese Flying Boat Enters Next Stage of Development
- 45 The Philippines: Abu Sayyaf Factions and Coronavirus Cause Alarm
- 46 Indonesia: Debating the Military's Role in Counter-Terrorism
- 47 An "Internship" in the Indian Army?
- 48 Increased Attacks in Afghanistan Post US-Taliban Peace Deal

MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

- 50 Russia and Iran's Competitive Relationship in Syria
- 52 Scenarios for the Future of Syria
- 54 Talks to Unify Kurds in Syria
- 55 Russian Power Projection in the Middle East and North Africa
- 57 Tension between Russia and Turkey over Libya
- 59 Turkey's Naval Power and the Role of Domestic Firms
- 61 Why Did the Turkish Naval Chief Resign?
- 63 Egyptian TV Show Aims to Control the Narrative in the Sinai
- 65 Yemen's South-South Divisions Continue to Plague the Saudi-Emirati Coalition
- 67 IRGC Navy Showcases Unmanned Underwater Vehicle
- 68 IRGC Navy Announces Construction of Two New Ships and Unveils New Speedboats
- 69 The Three Main Missions of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- 70 An Afghan Perspective: A New Phase in Afghanistan-Iran Relations

AFRICA

- 72 China-Africa Relations in the Time of COVID-19
- 73 South Africa's Military in Decline
- 74 Kenya's Exit Plan from Somalia
- 75 Kenya Criticized for Law Enforcement Response to COVID-19
- 76 Funding and Logistics for West African Terrorists
- 77 Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso Coordinate on Counter-Terrorism
- 78 Burkina Faso Faces Jihadists and Coronavirus
- 79 Germany Continues Military Support to Mali
- 80 France Publishes Updated Mali Security Assessment
- 81 Mozambican Government Perspectives on Insurgent Tactics
- 82 Zimbabwe: Amid Economic Crisis, President Tries to Strengthen Grip on Power

LATIN AMERICA

- 83 More Iran in Venezuela
- 84 Iranian Gasoline Support to Venezuela Linked During Pandemic
- 85 Social Protests in Venezuela, in the Streets and Online
- 86 Gulf Cartel Conducts Psychological Operations During COVID-19 Pandemic
- 87 Coronavirus-Affected Trade Causes Challenges for the Sinaloa Cartel
- 88 Mexican Cartels Expanding Operations in Colombia
- 89 Colombia's Pandemic Recovery
- 90 Former Colombian President Uribe in Social Media Crosshairs
- 92 Revolutionary Chile Dogs
- 93 Bolivia's 2020 Elections

The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, is part of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command G-2, whose mission is to Understand, Describe, Deliver, and Assess the conditions of the Operational Environment. For over 30 years, FMSO has conducted open source research on foreign perspectives of defense and security issues, emphasizing those topics that are understudied or unconsidered.

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.

The views expressed in each article are those of the author and do not represent the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the US Government. Release of this information does not imply any commitment or intent on the part of the US Government to provide any additional information on any topic presented herein.

The appearance of hyperlinks does not constitute endorsement by the US Army of the referenced site or the information, products, or services contained therein. Users should exercise caution in accessing hyperlinks.

The Operational Environment Watch is archived and available at: <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/>.

ON THE COVER:

Soldiers of the Assam Regiment.

Source: Defense Dept. photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jerry Morrison via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Army#/media/File:IndianArmyDelhi.JPG, Public Domain

OEWATCH

Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

Volume 10 | Issue 7

July | 2020

Regional Analysts and Expert Contributors

Eurasia

Chuck Bartles
Ray Finch
Les Grau
Adam Rodger
Matthew Stein
Sergey Sukhankin

Indo-Pacific

Cindy Hurst
Jerrilee Plude
Matthew Stein
Peter Wood
Jacob Zenn

Middle East, North Africa

Robert Bunker
Ihsan Gündüz
Karen Kaya
Alma Keshavarz
Michael Rubin
Lucas Winter

Africa

Dodge Billingsley
Robert Feldman
Jacob Zenn

Latin America

Geoff Demarest
Brenda Fiegel
Stevie Lundell

Editor-in-Chief

Editor

Design Editor

Tom Wilhelm

Karen Kaya

Thomas Tolare



Russia's Mi-28NM 'Night Superhunter' Attack Helicopter

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation currently fields two sole-purpose attack helicopters, the Ka-52 "Alligator" and the Mi-28N "Nochnoy Okhotnik (Night Hunter)," which are slated for modernization to the Ka-52M/Mi-28NM standards respectively. As the excerpted article from the 7 May edition of *Izvestia* explains, although both are primary sole-purpose attack helicopters in the Russian inventory, they fill slightly different niches. Generally, the Ka-52s are more maneuverable and better suited for air-to-air combat than the more heavily armored Mi-28s. *Izvestia* reports that despite different manufacturers, the radios, on-board defense systems, and weapons of the Ka-52M and the Mi-28NM will be standardized as much as possible to simplify maintenance and lower costs.

The accompanying excerpted article from the 12 May edition of *Izvestia* explains how the Mi-28NM "Nochnoy Superokhotnik (Night Superhunter)" is entering serial production and will be capable of employing Hermes-A [Гермес-А] air-to-surface missiles and Khrizantema-VM [Хризантема-ВМ] anti-tank guided missiles. The accompanying excerpted article from the 10 February edition of *Izvestia* discusses how the Mi-28NM strike helicopter will become a formidable air-to-air combatant, due to the capability to fire R-74M air-to-air missiles. As stated by *Izvestia*, The R-74M can target enemy aircraft, UAVs, and cruise missiles, and even fifth-generation aircraft. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Mi-28.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/MAKS-2007/i-sWd9Phd/A>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

“The R-74M has a much higher range, sensitivity, and resistance to interferences. It packs more explosives, leaving no chances to any aerial target. That is why the Mi-28NM will easily shoot down an American AH-64 Apache, which will not even see it coming.”

Source: Anton Lavrov and Roman Kretsul reporting development and production cycle of newest Russian attack helicopters: “Крадущийся «Аллигатор»: испытания Ка-52М завершатся через два года (The Stealthy ‘Alligator’: Testing of the Ka-52M and Mi-28NM Will End in Two Years),” *Izvestia* Online, 7 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1008123/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul/kradushchiisia-alligator-ispytaniia-ka-52m-zavershatsia-cherez-dva-goda>

State testing of the newest Ka-52M strike helicopter will be completed at the end of 2022. At the present time the efforts of the military and the engineers are concentrated on accelerating the launch of its competitor, the Mi-28NM “Night Hunter” into series production...According to sources at the publication, for the time being the decision has been made to concentrate primary efforts on the Mi-28NM project. The development program for this craft will be finished sooner...The engineers’ plans also call for the automatic interfacing of the craft with the “Strelets” command, control and intelligence complex. Ground troops, spetsnaz and airborne troops will be able to exchange battlefield situation information in the automatic mode...

Army aviation operates at relatively low altitudes and is to a large degree subjected to the danger of shelling from the ground. Therefore, recently an attempt has been made to adapt all helicopters for use during the night. It is simpler and faster to do this with the Mi-28NM, noted Distinguished Test Pilot Colonel Igor Malikov, the former deputy head of the State Flight Test Center. “It happens that under conditions of limited resources priority is initially given to craft that are at a greater degree of readiness and require less time and effort for upgrading,” the expert related to “Izvestiya.” “In another situation the Mi28NM and the Ka-52M would be developed in parallel. But in any event both craft will be completed and delivered to the troops.”

As “Izvestiya” reported previously, following the modernization, the communications gear, on-board defense systems and weapons of the Ka-52M and the Mi-28NM will be standardized to the maximum extent. This is necessary to simplify and lower the cost of joint operations and technical maintenance of the two different types of helicopters...Everything depends on the mission that is assigned. One can send the more protected Mi-28 to complete the mission, or the more maneuverable Ka-52.”

...Competition between the combat helicopters of the Mil and Kamov design bureaus has not abated since the initial design of the Ka-50 and the Mi-28 in the 1980s. Initially the Ministry of Defense wanted to use a competitive procurement to select one of the projects for series production. But the decision was finally made to purchase both types of helicopters for Russian aviation.



Continued: Russia's Mi-28NM 'Night Superhunter' Attack Helicopter

Source: “Сезон «охотника»: Ми-28НМ готовят к серийному производству (Season of the ‘Hunter’: The Mi-28NM is in Serial Production),” *Izvestia Online*, 12 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1009896/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul/sezon-okhotnika-mi-28nm-gotoviat-k-seriinomu-proizvodstvu>

The development of the Night Hunter has reached the finish line. By the end of the year, the Russian Mi-28NM strike helicopter will undergo state tests. The vehicle will have to confirm its flight and technical specifications and also conduct fire from the entire set of aviation weapons: from cannon systems and missiles to aerial bombs. This is the last phase before the end of the experimental design works and the delivery of new equipment in the inventory. The contract for the purchase of a large batch of upgraded vehicles was signed even before the official completion of all these phases. According to experts, this is a normal practice in the development of modern aircraft, so that they are not obsolete by the time they arrive in the units...

The helicopter will be equipped with several new types of missiles. Last year it was reported that the “Superhunter” will receive the Hermes-A [Гермес-А] air-to-surface missile. The range of such munitions will allow the Mi-28NM to attack targets at a distance of 15-20 km. Also, it will be possible to employ the Khrizantema-VM [Хризантема-вм] anti-tank guided missiles...In addition to the new weapons, the “Superhunter” has received many other design changes. The N025 mast-mounted radar station is the most notable of those. It allows the helicopter to detect targets beyond the visual range.

The military consider the dual command and control system to be the other important innovation. It makes it possible to steer the helicopter from any of the two seats. This will allow to use conventional vehicles for training the pilots. The basic Mi-28N did not have that capability, which made it necessary to develop a separate training version of the Mi-28UB ...The Mi-28NM will be fitted with VK-2500P engines, which are fully manufactured in Russia, as part of the import substitution program. Together with the improved all-composite rotor blades, this will increase the helicopter’s cruising speed by 10 to 13 percent. Mi-28N that are currently in service with the troops will be gradually upgraded in order to approach the combat capability and the weapons inventory levels of the Mi-28NM. It is planned that the first prototype of such a modified helicopter will take to the skies this year.



Mi-28N.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/VDay-Training-flights-at-Kubinka-4May2017/i-5nvkQWN/A>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0



Continued: Russia's Mi-28NM 'Night Superhunter' Attack Helicopter



Mi-28N.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/VDay-Training-flights-at-Kubinka-4May2017/i-3N5qgxR>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Source: Anton Lavrov Roman Kretsul, “Пятое поколение выбивают: вертолеты Ми-28НМ превратят в истребители (The Fifth Generation will be Knocked Out: Mi-28NM Helicopters will be Turned into Fighters),” *Izvestia Online*, 10 February 2020. <https://iz.ru/970000/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul/piatoe-pokolenie-vybivaiut-vertolety-mi-28nm-prevratiat-v-istrebiteli>

As Izvestiya was told by sources in the Defense Ministry, a fundamental decision was made regarding equipping the Mi-28NM with R-74M air-to-air aircraft missiles. They will drastically increase the helicopter's capabilities...

The installation of the most modern ammunition on the rotary-wing vehicle will enable it to effectively combat aircraft, helicopters, cruise missiles, and even unmanned aerial vehicles. Also known as the RVV-MD, the R-74M belongs to the class of short-range missiles. It is capable of hitting targets at a distance of up to 40 km. The munition easily destroys targets during the day and at night under any weather conditions. The R-74M was initially developed with consideration of the possibility of striking the fifth-generation F-35 and F-22 fighters. Neither an attempt to escape on the afterburners, nor intensive maneuvering will help against this missile. The homing head is immune to enemy electronic jamming and heat flares.

Military expert Vladislav Shurygin believes that with such powerful ammunition, the Mi-28NM will actually become a helicopter killer. “Foreign attack helicopters are currently being equipped with conventional man-portable air-defense system (MANPADS). It is the Stinger in the West, while we have the Igla or Verba,” the specialist noted. “But MANPADS pale in comparison with a full-fledged aviation missile. The R-74M has a much higher range, sensitivity, and resistance to interferences. It packs more explosives, leaving no chances to any aerial target. That is why the Mi-28NM will easily shoot down an American AH-64 Apache, which will not even see it coming.

A helicopter is a complex target for a modern fighter. Operating at extremely low altitudes and in the terrain folds, it is poorly noticeable for the aircraft radar. Buildings and industrial facilities provide many false reflections. The land surface camouflages its thermal wake and makes it difficult for the aircraft munitions to lock on the rotary-wing vehicle using an infrared homing head.

After the emergence of such missiles on helicopters, the hypothetical enemy pilots will feel less secure, the distinguished test pilot, Hero of Russia, Colonel Igor Malikov believes. “The helicopter can be invisible to radars because of the terrain,” he told Izvestiya. “You pass over it, without noticing, and then a missile chases you from behind. And you have to eject. A friend of mine recalled how such munitions were tested on a fighter: once launched, the missile went down. The pilot was already upset, thinking that it was a misfire, when suddenly it struck the training target from below -- a MiG-21 -- and literally tore it in half.

A helicopter, armed with a pair of R-74M will be able to employ outboard target designation from ambushes. At the same time, the latest munition's capabilities support firing without establishing visual contact with the aircraft, as they say, “from around the corner.” The homing head is capable of capturing the target after launch. In such a scenario, even the latest stealth-fighters can be vulnerable against the rotary-wing vehicles.



Russian Armed Forces Purchasing New Airframes



Su-34.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Su-34-Grey/i-7q42HtH/0/9b2d432b/X2/IMG_3631-X2.jpg, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpted article from *RIA Novosti*, the Russian Armed Forces will purchase 423 helicopters before 2027. A related article from *Izvestia* discusses the purchase of 76 Su-34Ms, a twin-engine, twin-seat, all-weather fighter-bomber, that was developed for the Soviet Air Force, but was only first fielded in 2014. Although it appears Russia will be receiving at least 500 new aircraft before 2027, it was unclear what proportion of this number would truly be ‘new’ aircraft, and what proportion of Mi-28N/Su-34s would be overhauled to the new Mi-28NM/Su-34M standard. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The Russian Defense Ministry has agreed a contract to buy 76 new Sukhoi Su-34 strike aircraft by 2027.”

“The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation plans to acquire 423 modern helicopters, including 96 Mi-28NM attack helicopters, before 2027.”

-Deputy Minister of Defense Aleksey Krivoruchko

Source: “Минобороны до 2027 года планирует получить 423 современных вертолета (The Ministry of Defense Plans to Acquire 423 Modern Helicopters before 2027),” *RIA Novosti* Online, 3 February 2020. <https://ria.ru/20200203/1564179802.html>

The Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation plans to acquire 423 modern helicopters, including 96 Mi-28NM attack helicopters, before 2027, reported Deputy Minister of Defense Aleksey Krivoruchko. “The ‘Helicopters of Russia’ holding company transferred 112 helicopters to the troops. Of these 58 were delivered ahead of schedule. Before 2027 the Ministry of Defense plans to acquire a total of 423 modern helicopters, including 96 Mi-28NM attack helicopters, as provided for in the GPV-2027 (editors’ note: State Armaments Program Extending to 2027)” he said in an article published in the journal “Radio Electronic Technologies.”

Krivoruchko previously reported that the military establishment had ordered 98 Mi-28NM helicopters, and two helicopters of the setup batch had already been delivered to the Ministry of Defense. Andrey Boginskiy, General Director of “Vertolety Rossii” stated that 18 craft would be delivered before 2021 and thereafter 16 a year will be delivered.

The Mi-28NM is a highly effective, all-weather new-generation attack helicopter. The combat craft is able to perform a broad spectrum of tasks, including the destruction of armored equipment, attacking low-flying, low-speed air targets, aerial reconnaissance, and target designation for other helicopters and aircraft.

Source: “Армия получит 76 модернизированных Су-34 (Army to Receive 76 Modernized Su-34s),” *Izvestia* Online, 28 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1017029/2020-05-28/armiia-poluchit-76-modernizirovannykh-su-34>

*The Russian Defence Ministry has agreed a contract to buy 76 new Sukhoi Su-34 strike aircraft by 2027, *Izvestia* daily reported on 28 May. Citing unnamed sources in the Defence Ministry and defence industry, *Izvestia* said that while the contract has not yet been signed, industry enterprises are already buying components to build the aircraft.*

The aircraft, which will be of an upgraded standard to the baseline Su-34, will be delivered at a rate of between eight and 14 a year, the report said. The first components will be delivered to the factory to begin production by the second half of this year.

The Defence Ministry has allowed manufacturer Sukhoi to start preparing for series production of the aircraft before a contract was formally signed due to the long development period for the machine, the report said.

All the Su-34s delivered under the new contract will be modified in line with the Sych research and development programme, and designated Su-34M or Su-34NVO the report said. This includes a new avionics suite, compatibility with new precision-guided weapons and external podded reconnaissance systems...

The pods will allow the Su-34 to locate radars and radio-emitters for hundreds of kilometres and fix their positions. The UKR-RL pod will allow the bomber to “see” in all weather conditions, day or night, the report said...



Russian Aviation Increases Training

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses how aviation training has increased for Russian pilots. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new Russian pilots got 30-50 hours of flight time over the course of their entire training program. Currently, new pilots are routinely getting around 200 hours, and a lucky few around 300 hours. Russia now uses Ansat-U helicopters and Yak-130s jets as training platforms. The accompanying excerpted interview of the Commander of Long-Range Aviation, Lieutenant General Sergey Kobylash, from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses how Russian long-range aviation training is improving, and about how Russian military aviation is increasing its international presence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Yak-130 combat training aircraft.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/MAKS-2013/i-sqPbsjX/0/cd9cd1aa/X2/MAKS2013part1-36-X2.jpg>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

“All in all, the training of the pilots amounts to over 200 flight hours, or even to 300 -- if you are lucky.”

“Long-range aviation keeps expanding the geography of its presence with every passing year. The aircraft crews are carrying out air patrolling flights in remote geographic areas, which include landing at airfields of foreign states. Over the past few years, flights have been performed with the landing of long-range aviation aircraft at airfields in Indonesia, Venezuela, and South Africa.”

Source: Vladimir Karnozov “Учебная авиация взяла новую высоту (Training Aviation Conquers New Heights),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* Online, 15 May 2020. http://nvo.ng.ru/armament/2020-05-15/1_1092_aviation.html

In a fleet with total strength of several hundred units, such significant increase in the serviceability -- from 58 to 90 percent -- cannot be attributed to the improvement of the situation at the aircraft repair enterprises alone. It must be also the wider involvement of aircraft building plants, with increasing volume and expanding range of work in post-sale support of aircraft in service. As well as the mass decommissioning of worn-out aircraft of past generations: Mi-2U, L-39S, L-410, An-26, and so on.

The past decade has been marked by the arrival of about 50 of the latest Ansat-U training helicopters and over 100 Yak-130 combat training aircraft; additional orders are expected...

Today, the three-tiered training system is still in place in flight schools, and the training takes five years. Few of the cadets, with The Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF) experience, come with some flying time on the Yak-52 aircraft or Mi-2U helicopter. The flight schools employ the two-seater L-39C jet for the initial and basic training stages of future fighter pilots, and the twin-engine turboprop L-410UVP is used to train bomber (BA) and military-transport aviation (VTA) crews.

The first stage includes about 60 flight hours, the second one -- additional 80 hours (those who are assigned to the BA and VTA fly much less). Then, at the advanced (in-depth) training stage, they fly another 70 hours on the two- and single-seater versions of combat aircraft (the BA flies the Tu-134BL, VTA -- the An-26, and others). All in all, the training of the pilots amounts to over 200 flight hours, or even to 300 -- if you are lucky.

This corresponds to the figures of the late Soviet period and considerably exceeds the 1990's -- 2000's indicators. The lowest point, when the flying time of newly minted fighter pilots at the time of graduation was about 50 hours total (with a minimum norm of 30), was passed. By 2007, when this number increased to 165, the situation improved. Incidentally, in 2009, then Russian Air Force Commander in Chief Aleksandr Zelin announced the cost of pilots training. He said that the training of a front-line aircraft pilot costs \$3.4 million, and about \$8 million -- for a sniper-pilot.



Continued: Russian Aviation Increases Training



Ansat-U training helicopter.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/MAKS-2013/i-K9zGrnj/0/55b52f1d/X2/MAKS2013part3-50-X2.jpg>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0



Lieutenant General Sergey Kobylash, Commander of Russian Long-Range Aviation Commander.

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Кобылаш,_Сергей_Иванович#/media/Файл:Sergey_Kobylash,_2017.jpg, CC BY 4.0K9zGrnj/0/55b52f1d/X2/MAKS2013part3-50-X2.jpg, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Source: Alexander Pinchuk, “Стратегов воздушные горизонты (Aerial Horizons of Strategy),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 15 May 2020. <http://redstar.ru/58945-2/>

Sergey Ivanovich, please tell us about the results of the winter training period. What events did the crews take part in? What missions were rehearsed? What kind of results have been achieved? How goes the plan of flight teams’ flying hours?

Formations and military units accomplished all scheduled combat training activities in the winter training period, and achieved good results in terms of the main indicators. Over 30 exercises and training sessions of various levels were conducted under my leadership and the leadership of formations’ and military units’ commanders. During the reporting period, over 350 flight shifts were performed with 7,000 hours of total flying time, and more than 700 practice bombings were conducted at various ranges...

Long-range aviation is steadily expanding the geography of its presence. Tell us which regions were covered during the accomplishment of air patrol missions? Were the assigned missions successfully accomplished?

Long-range aviation keeps expanding the geography of its presence with every passing year. The aircraft crews are carrying out air patrolling flights in remote geographic areas, which include landing at airfields of foreign states. Over the past few years, flights have been performed with the landing of long-range aviation aircraft at airfields in Indonesia, Venezuela, and South Africa. Also last year, a joint air patrol flight was carried out in the airspace above the waters of the Eastern China Sea for the first time by Russian and Chinese crews aboard Tu-95MS and Xian H-6K, respectively.

In the 2020 winter period, the crews of strategic missile carriers and long-range bombers carried out over 15 sorties on air patrols missions over the waters of Black, Barents, and Japanese seas, as well as the Arctic, Atlantic, and Pacific oceans. Over 70 percent of these sorties were performed with mid-air refueling. Such flights are a complex form of flight training, which requires the crew to be highly skilled. I will note that all long-range aviation pilots undergo appropriate training and are capable of performing assigned combat missions in any geographic area.



Russia's A-50U Long-Range Radar Detection Aircraft

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from the 18 May edition of *Izvestia* discusses the capabilities of Russia's A-50U long-range radar detection (DRLO) aircraft. The first A-50U entered service in 2011. Since that time six 'flying radars' have undergone modernization. (There are 22 of the older A-50M reportedly still in service.)

After upgrading the A-50M to the A-50U standard, the aircraft is reportedly better able to detect, track, and identify air, large ground and naval targets, and transmit their information to command centers. The A-50U is also able to independently guide fighters to air targets, and operational-tactical aircraft to ground and naval targets. The system has an advertised 650km detection range for large air targets, such as bombers, a 300km range for the detection of ground targets, and a 215km range for the detection of low flying cruise missiles.

Since April 2017, one or two A-50Us have been stationed at the Khmeymim Airbase. An A-50U

reportedly tracked the 14 April 2018 cruise missile strike conducted by France, Great Britain, and the United States, on Syria. Russian media stated that the A-50U was capable of tracking the US's AGM-158B Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile-Extended Range (JASSM-ER) cruise missiles. The accompanying excerpted article from the 3 May edition of *Izvestia* explains how an A-50U was employed by the Baltic Fleet to coordinate operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



© Vitaly V. Kuzmin

A-50 Long-Range Radar Detection Aircraft.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/100th-Anniversary-of-RuAF/i-tF89vtq#>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

“The A-50 can operate in the air for an extensive period, without entering the zone of responsibility of the enemy’s air defenses”

“As a rule, the A-50 interacts with a regiment of such [MiG-31] interceptors, which allows large regions to be quickly ‘closed’ to the enemy. It is important that its radars can fix the locations of enemy cruise missiles earlier and more effectively than ground radars. The cruise missiles are easily visible from above against the background of the land and during flight they cannot hide behind terrain features.”



Continued: Russia's A-50U Long-Range Radar Detection Aircraft



A-50 Long-Range Radar Detection Aircraft.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/100th-Anniversary-of-RuAF/i-pfBsLzj#>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Source: Anton Lavrov and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Засветились на радаре: ВКС получат новую технику для обнаружения ракет (They Show Up on the Radar: Aerospace Forces Will Acquire New Equipment for Detecting Missiles),” *Izvestia* Online, 18 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1012605/anton-lavrov-bogdan-stepovoi/zasvetilis-na-radare-vks-poluchat-novuiu-tekhniku-dlia-obnaruzheniia-raket>

Next year Russian Aerospace Forces will receive two unique “flying radars.” This is the nickname the troops have given to the A-50U long-range radar detection (DRLO) aircraft. Craft of this type have already performed excellently in Syria, but changes will be introduced in their equipment for the domestic army. The radar will be upgraded, as will the command and control and communications systems. In the opinion of experts, as a result this equipment will become especially effective for tracking cruise missiles and for directing fighters.

Two modernized A-50U “flying radars” will join Russia’s Aerospace Forces before the end of 2021, sources in the defense industrial complex told “Izvestiya.” The capabilities of these aircraft will substantially increase in comparison with their predecessors...The modernization of the long-range radar detection and guidance (DRLO) aircraft will be conducted at the Taganrog Aviation Science and Engineering Complex imeni G.M. Beriyev. The cost of the work on each of them will be more than 600 million rubles. As indicated by their specifications (which “Izvestiya” has in its possession), the main attention will be devoted to the radar section.

The A-50 can operate in the air for an extensive period, without entering the zone of responsibility of the enemy’s air defenses, “Izvestiya” was told by Reserve Lieutenant-General Aytech Bizhev, former Air Force Deputy Commander in Chief for the Unified Air Defense System for CIS Countries.

“During modernization the resistance of the craft to jamming generated by electronic warfare devices must be strengthened. And the number of enemy aerial objects tracked will be increased,” the expert believes. “DRLO aircraft are especially effective while interacting with MiG-31 fighters. As a rule, the A-50 interacts with a regiment of such interceptors, which allows large regions to be quickly ‘closed’ to the enemy. It is important that its radars can fix the locations of enemy cruise missiles earlier and more effectively than ground radars. The cruise missiles are easily visible from above against the background of the land and during flight they cannot hide behind terrain features.”

“After detecting the enemy, the A-50 will allocate the targets in real time to both aircraft, as well as ground air defense assets. The MiG-31s, which often interact with these airborne radars, were especially developed to repel both attacks of cruise missile and the United States tactical bombers that carry them,” stressed Aytech Bizhev.

The DRLO aircraft is a flying command post and powerful radar providing target detection and designation, explained Hero of Russia, Lieutenant-General Valeriy Gorbenko, former Commander of the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army. “From on board the A-50U the repelling of any air attack can be commanded,” the specialist stated to “Izvestiya.” “The craft ensures a detection range at a greater distance than that provided by ground-based radar stations, allowing a timely reaction to the threat. Operators located in the cabin follow the air situation and transmit information to ground command posts and to fighter interceptors in real time...”



Continued: Russia's A-50U Long-Range Radar Detection Aircraft

Source: Dmitriy Boltenkov and Roman Kretsul, Балтийская крепость: что показали маневры в Калининградской области (Baltic Fortress: What Maneuvers in the Kaliningrad Region Showed),” *Izvestia Online*, 3 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1006630/dmitrii-boltenkov-roman-kretcul/baltiiskaia-krepost-cto-pokazali-manevry-v-kaliningradskoi-oblasti>

The Baltic Exclave - is the country's most vulnerable region since it has no land ties either with Russia or with allied Belarus. The experience of contemporary military conflicts shows that much is decided in the initial period - the first two to three days. It is precisely they that also determine the further course of combat operations.

Therefore, the primary mission for 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 manage to lay minefields to counter an enemy amphibious operation and to organize a land defense. All of these actions were rehearsed during the course of the exercises that were conducted in 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 in Kaliningrad Oblast. Those unique aircraft - are rare guests in the sky over the Baltic.

Under the command and control of the A-50U, the Su-30SM and Su-24M strike aircraft conducted a series of flights, 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, those major exercise became the first in the history of the recently created Kaliningrad 132nd Composite Aviation Division.

The large-scale aerial maneuvers attracted the attention of the NATO countries' military personnel. 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 the unduly aggressive Belgian F-16s.

On the whole, Kaliningrad Oblast is adequately saturated with air defense systems, beginning from S-400 long-range complexes and ending with ship systems. While taking into account 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 PVO systems have been included in the region's defense loop...

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>





Going Blue by 2030: Upgrading and Refitting the Pacific Fleet

OE Watch Commentary: According to *Izvestia*, the neglected Russian Pacific Fleet is getting more ships and top-of-the-line systems. It is moving from a coastal defense and strategic submarine fleet to a true blue-water fleet by 2030. A veteran of the Pacific Fleet, the ASW Marshal Shaposhnikov will rejoin the Pacific Fleet as a rebuilt gun and missile frigate employing the latest Russian strike missile systems. It will still be ASW capable. Some readers may remember the Marshal Shaposhnikov from May 2010 when its naval infantry freed the tanker *Moskovskiy Universitet*, which had been seized by Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden. Not a good day to be flying the Jolly Roger. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Before the end of this decade, the Pacific Fleet will again be a fully-fledged blue water fleet and will be able to operate on the expanses of a good half of the world’s oceans.”

Source: Military Historian Dmitriy Boltentkov, “Pacific renewal: Why the Pacific Fleet is receiving new ships,” *Izvestia*, 23 May 2020. iz.ru/1014468/dmitrii-boltenkov/obnovlenie-po-tikhomu-dlia-chego-tof-vooruzhaiut-novymi-korabliami

Pacific renewal: Why the Pacific Fleet is receiving new ships

*Russia’s Pacific Fleet marked its 289th anniversary on 21 May. That day, Fleet Commander, Admiral Sergey Avakyants, announced that 15 new warships and support vessels will enter service with the fleet in the Far East by the end of the year. Among them are the Project 20385 corvette *Gremyashchiy*, submarine *Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy*, Project 12700 minesweeper *Yakov Balyayev*, counter-sabotage cutter *Raptor*, seagoing tug *Andrey Stepanov*, and two Project 23040 rescue cutters. With its new ships, the Pacific Fleet’s mission will also begin to change. It used to possess a powerful task force for long-range operations, but it will now receive a large number of relatively small ships with powerful missiles*

Naval forces in the Far East were neglected in Tsarist times because this part of the country, was remote from the center and relatively undeveloped. It was considered enough to send some ships to show the flag. Then, in the 1890s, the Russian imperial government began to rely on its base at Port Arthur. This led to the Russo-Japanese Battle of Tsushima, after which the Russian Empire’s naval forces in Vladivostok were minimal and the defense of Kamchatka was ignored altogether. After the Civil War the USSR had no naval forces whatsoever in this region. In the 1930s, everything changed.

Convoys with military hardware and dismantled ships were sent from the western part of the country eastward. Ships and submarines were assembled from parts in Vladivostok and work started on a submarine base on Kamchatka’s Krasheninnikov Peninsula. This base would later become known as the “submerged Russian serpents’ nest” in the Far East. At the same time, they began building shipyards so that some of the ships for the Navy could be made locally. The largest such enterprise was the Amur Shipyard in the city of Komsomol’sk-na-Amure. However, the region’s overall economic backwardness meant that all the major ships and half the submarines for the Pacific Fleet were built in the Soviet Union’s western parts, at yards in Leningrad, Nikolayev, and Severodvinsk.

The Pacific Fleet was at the peak of its powers in the early 1990s and operated in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It had several hundred warships, cutters, and submarines. The subsequent collapse of the country and the economic crisis of the 1990s led to scrapping much of the fleet ... In the 1990s and early 2000s, when Russia’s other fleets got something to upgrade their effectiveness, the Pacific Fleet ... received one missile cutter....

*The Pacific Fleet currently has three major commands. The Submarine Forces Command and the Joint Group of Forces and Assets in northeast Russia are both stationed on the Kamchatka Peninsula. The submarine forces command includes the atomic submarines, three of which -- the *Aleksandr Nevskiy*, *Vladimir Monomakh*, and *Ryazan* -- carry strategic nuclear missiles. The submarine forces command also has several Project 949A and 971 attack submarines. The Joint Group of Forces and Assets is responsible for the defense of Kamchatka and Chukotka and includes surface ships, aviation, and air defenses, and coastal forces.*

The Primorskaya Flotilla, based in Vladivostok, consists of surface ships and diesel submarines. Its forces regularly sail in the Pacific and Indian Oceans and sometimes even reach the Mediterranean.

During the reforms, Russia’s fleets received new ships and military hardware. The Black Sea and Baltic Fleets and the Caspian Flotilla have undergone major upgrades and a number of new submarines and surface ships have joined the Northern Fleet. The Pacific Fleet has remained in the shadows, although it has received two missile submarines and two corvettes.

Because Russia’s shipyards are busy renewing the fleets in the west, the Navy’s command the Navy’s command decided to modernize the existing assets of the Pacific Fleet. Soviet-built ships will undergo major refits, replacing their weaponry and updating their electronics.

(Continued)



Continued: Going Blue by 2030: Upgrading and Refitting the Pacific Fleet

Source: Military Historian Dmitriy Boltenkov, "Pacific renewal: Why the Pacific Fleet is receiving new ships," *Izvestia*, 23 May 2020. iz.ru/1014468/dmitrii-boltenkov/obnovlenie-po-tikhomu-dlia-chego-tof-vooruzhaiut-novymi-korablami

There are three such programs. The first is to modernize the Project 1234 small missile ships, based on replacing the Malakhit missile system with the newer Uran. The missile ship Smerch and then three of its peers will be upgraded.

The second program is the upgrade of the Project 1155 large antisubmarine warfare (ASW) ships to fire the Kalibr and Uran missile systems on board and, in the future, also the Tsirkon. The Marshal Shaposhnikov will join the fleet by the end of this year, and has been modernized to such an extent that its classification has been changed from large ASW to frigate. A further three ships will also receive a similar upgrade.

The third program is the most challenging. Project 949A atomic submarines will swap their Granit missiles for Kalibrs and Tsirkons. The first upgrade should be the Irkutsk, with the Chelyabinsk next....

Construction of new ships and submarines for the Pacific Fleet has been stepped up in recent years. The diesel submarine fleet will get six new 6363-type boats, the first of class of which, the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, will arrive by the end of the year. After that, it will also get Project 677 nonatomic submarines.

The surface ... fleet will receive the Project 20385 corvette Gremyashchiy by the end of the year, followed by the Provornyy. Unlike the Project 20380 corvettes, these ships carry the Kalibr missile system. The two corvettes already built at the Amur Ship Repair Yard, the Sovershenny and Gromkiy, will be augmented by the Aldar Tsydenzhapov and Rezkiiy.

The Amur yard is regaining the status of main shipbuilder for the Pacific Fleet. In addition to four corvettes, it is also building six Project 22800 small missile ships and in the future it will build a series of 10 of these surface warships. Project 12700 minesweepers are also being built for the fleet. The first of class, the Yakov Balyeyev, should commence its service in Kamchatka by the end of the year as part of the 114th Brigade of waterway protection ships. It will be followed by the Petr Ilichev, and others.

The Yantar yard in Kaliningrad is building two Project 11711 amphibious landing ships, the Vladimir Andreyev and Vasilii Trushin, which will join the fleet in 2023-24 and be the first of their type. The pandemic delayed laying the keel the multirole amphibious landing ship Vladivostok at the Zaliv yard in Kerch' in May 2020, but it will happen soon. Within a few years, the Sevastopol' will be launched.

The main ships for distant seas will be the Project 22350 frigates and corvettes of the new Project 20386 family, which are currently under construction at the Severnaya Verf shipyard in Saint Petersburg. How many of these will go to Pacific Fleet has not been announced.

Before the end of this decade the Pacific Fleet will again be a fully-fledged blue water fleet and will be able to operate on the expanses of a good half of the world's oceans. Armed with the various latest missile systems, such as the Bulava, Kalibr, and Tsirkon and with its reach extended to the next level, the Pacific Fleet will be many times more powerful than it was in Soviet times.

Source: Alexsi Ramm and Bogdan Stepovoy, "Navy to get Frigate armed with Tsirkon," *Izvestia*, 22 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1013981/aleksei-ramm-bogdan-stepovoi/novoe-giperzvuchanie-vmf-poluchit-fregat-osnashchennyi-tcirkonami>

Navy to get Frigate armed with Tsirkon

The refitted Project 1155 frigate Marshal Shaposhnikov will commence sea trials by the end of the year. It was previously an ASW [antisubmarine warfare] ship, now with radically increased capabilities and set to be the first ship in the Pacific Fleet carrying Tsirkon hypersonic missiles. The Shaposhnikov will also be armed with subsonic Kalibr and supersonic Yakhonts missiles. It will be the first of class for a whole series of updated Project 1155 large ASW ships....

The frigate joined the Navy's order of battle in 1986 and is currently at the Dalzavod ship repair center, where its modernization is being completed. Most ships of this design did not receive strike missiles, because they had a narrow specialized role -- to hunt submarines.

But the Shaposhnikov is getting a major update and being made multipurpose. More than 20 percent of its structure was dismantled and rebuilt from scratch during the work. These changes were made so that modern equipment and missile systems could be installed.

Izvestiya reported earlier that the frigate will receive launchers for Kalibr cruise missiles. These are multipurpose -- they can also be used to fire the hypersonic Tsirkon. The Kalibr has an effective range of about 1,400 kilometers -- its low flight altitude and highly precise navigation make it invisible even to the most hi-tech detection systems. It can also strike at terrestrial targets.

The Tsirkon can accelerate to hypersonic speed (Mach 6-8) and hit targets up to 500 kilometers away. It is an invincible weapon -- air defense antimissile systems simply cannot keep up with it. The frigate will also get an A-190-01 100-mm gun with stealth technologies. And it retains its ASW capabilities....

Mikhail Barabanov, a senior researcher at the Center for Analysis of Strategy and Technologies, stated "Nowadays any capital ship capable of operating on distant high seas is essential to the Navy because few of them are being built. After its upgrade the Shaposhnikov will be not an ASW but a multirole ship. It will be able to perform the entire gamut of missions that could be assigned to it..."



Training the Airborne for Mountain Combat

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpt from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses Russian Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov's visit to the Novorossiysk Guards Airborne Assault Alpine Division, where he inspected the formation's preparations for the summer training season and viewed the training base and facilities. The 7th Guards Mountain Air Assault Division is garrisoned near the Black Sea coastal city of Novorossiysk in Krasnodar Krai. This is close to the Kerch Straits and Eastern Crimea. Besides being a parachute division, the 7th is also a designated mountain unit and is specially trained for that type of combat. Mountain climbing and unit movement requires special skill sets. Mountain range firing is quite different than normal level ground firing and requires special training and practice in order to be effective. Moving combat vehicles, especially towed artillery, in the mountains is also quite different and challenging. Crossing mountain rivers and streams present its own challenges. The 7th has access to an excellent mountain combat training facility and is using it. Training for mountain combat is nothing new to the Russian military. When the Soviet Army entered Afghanistan, it had one mountain training facility. It expanded to seven and, during the course of the war, all infantrymen and drivers attended a mountain training center for up to six-months instruction before deploying to Afghanistan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The Four Elements course includes sectors with trenches and craters, a “village of fire,” a place to practice crossing a mountain river, and a climbing wall. Training facilities like these enable assault troops to successfully practice the actions required in combat training programs for alpine subunits.”

Source: Unattributed, “Developing the Alpine Component,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15 May 2020. <http://www.redstar.ru>

“Developing the Alpine Component”

During a visit to the Novorossiysk Guards Airborne Assault Alpine Division, Deputy Defense Minister Lieutenant General Yunus-Bek Yevkurov inspected the state of the formation's preparations for the summer training season and also viewed the training base and facilities at its Rayevskiy training ground.

The division's commander, Colonel Andrey Sukhovetskiy, showed the Deputy Minister around the training ground's tactical shooting range, its alpine firing range which provides intensive instruction on firing on steep terrain from above and below, the alpine driving course for fighting vehicles and an alpine engineering camp. All these instruction and training facilities are being successfully used by Novorossiysk airborne subunits, to gain solid skills in conducting combat in mountainous terrain.

The airborne reconnaissance troops demonstrated the unique facilities of the new “Four Elements” assault course for Lt Gen Yevkurov. This comprehensive course of alpine obstacles can recreate realistic assault combat in mountainous terrain: in the air -- on a hanging bridge across a gorge and mountain river, in the water -- when reconnoitering and fording a water obstacle, on the ground -- when tackling a highly challenging 100-meter obstacle course, and even under ground -- in the cramped confines of a concrete culvert, and also in the fiery elements -- breathing the heat and soot of the “burning buildings.” Added to all the hurdles ... is altitude -- at the climbing wall and its sheer surface, which requires special alpine skills and random rocks. Or the sector for moving vehicles across rocky ground and scree.

...

Guards Col Andrey Sukhovetskiy stated that “all the resources at this training ground make it possible to train high quality specialists who can wage war in mountainous conditions....The Four Elements course includes sectors with trenches and craters, a “village of fire,” a place to practice crossing a mountain river, and a climbing wall. Training facilities like these enable assault troops to successfully practice the actions required in combat training programs for alpine subunits.”

Lt Gen Yevkurov was impressed by the level of equipment at the facilities he was inspecting and by the outcomes of the training carried out at them....”Preparing personnel for warfare in mountain conditions is one of most challenging and particular processes in the combat training program. A unique base has been created here, where one can train in shooting, driving fighting vehicles, overcoming various natural hurdles, and tactical actions in the mountains. They have everything here to prepare high-class specialists in this field,” the Deputy Defense Minister said.

During his working visit to the Novorossiysk airborne assault troops, the Deputy Defense Minister met with the command and personnel of a separate reconnaissance battalion and artillery regiment at the division, where the Atlant training and instruction complexes recently opened. These have 25-meter four-lane pools with showers, changing rooms, and gyms, and provide more opportunities for the troops to work on their total fitness. Their design means they can be used not only for sports but also for troops to practice tackling water obstacles in full kit and with weapons.



The Northern Fleet's Combat Training with an Arctic Focus

OE Watch Commentary: Vice Admiral Oleg Vyacheslavovich Golubev, the commander of the Kola Multiforce Flotilla and Deputy Commander of the Northern Fleet, discussed the 2020 training calendar with a *Krasnaya Zvezda* [Red Star] correspondent. According to the excerpted interview, this looks like another lively training year in the Russian Arctic. Expect increased aviation missions, fleet activity and amphibious landings—as well as another riverine assault up the mighty Yenisei River. It turns out that the Russian Arctic was not a bad place to shelter-in-place during the COVID-19 pandemic given its natural and demographic conditions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“This year, ... we will deploy the Victory Banner over the Arctic.... We will raise the Great Victory Banner in various remote corners of the Russian Arctic along the entire voyage route, as well as during the conduct of tactical exercises on the coast of the Taymyr Peninsula, the Novosibirsk Islands, Yakutia, and Chukotka.”

Source: Yuliya Kozak, “Combat training with an Arctic accent,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 May 2020. <http://redstar.ru/zapolyarnyj-aktsent-boevoj-podgotovki>

Combat Training with an Arctic Accent

The Northern Fleet ... is a unique multiservice strategic formation, comprising submarine and surface ships, the VVS [Air Force] and PVO [Air Defense] Army, ground and coastal troops, logistic and search-and-rescue support forces. The training of each of these components has its own peculiarities, but there is also one common feature -- the Arctic focus. Vice Admiral Oleg Golubev, the Northern Fleet deputy commander, told our Krasnaya Zvezda reporter on how the Arctic focus is being implemented in combat training of naval formations, air force and air defense units, ground and coastal troops' formations.

[Krasnaya Zvezda] Oleg Vyacheslavovich, tell us, what is different about combat training for the military units and ships of the Northern Fleet.

[Golubev] *We focus on preparing for resolute actions in the harsh conditions of the Arctic. The Arctic focus ... is equally relevant for naval formations, the VVS and PVO units, ground and coastal troop's formations.*

In the winter training period -- the maintenance of personnel combat proficiency and the training of formations, ships, military units, aviation squadrons, and subunits of ground and coastal troops guarantees their capability to perform their missions within multiservice groupings.

The servicemen of ground and coastal troops rehearsed multiservice coordination in tactical exercises with the fleet's units of the VVS and PVO army and Kola Multiforce Flotilla, in the course of which a naval infantry brigade guarded command posts and airfields, while subunits of separate motorized rifle brigades acted as enemy sabotage groups. They also took part in a joint tactical special exercise on the protection and defense of special weapons storage facilities countering hypothetical enemy sabotage and reconnaissance groups in the Northern Fleet zone of responsibility. We also participated in providing high-altitude parachute jumps for our airborne assault troops' comrades-in-arms on Alexandra Land Island of the Franz Josef Land Archipelago.

In January, the crews of the missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov and the large antisubmarine warfare ship Vice Admiral Kulakov took part in a joint exercise of the Northern and Black Sea fleets in the Black Sea, as part of a mixed-force grouping. In May, the missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov and the ships of the Kola Mixed Forces Flotilla's three formations rehearsed similar operations in the Barents Sea. Despite the harsh weather conditions, persisting in the waters of the Barents Sea virtually throughout the spring period, we managed to accomplish a number of performance-evaluation tactical exercises at sea competently.

The Northern Fleet servicemen's combat training is planned in such a way so as to ensure that missions on providing security in the Arctic are resolved by the Navy with the maximum competence.

(Continued)



Continued: The Northern Fleet's Combat Training with an Arctic Focus

Source: Yuliya Kozak, "Combat training with an Arctic accent," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 May 2020. <http://redstar.ru/zapolyarnyj-aktsent-boevoj-podgotovki>

[Krasnaya Zvezda] Oleg Vyacheslavovich, as you have already noted, one of the main focuses of the Northern Fleet's activity is to ensure Russia's security in the Arctic zone. How is the fleet personnel's combat training organized to support this focus?

[Golubev] In the winter training period, the weather conditions, which are particularly harsh in the polar region -- low temperatures, strong winds, abundant precipitation, contribute to the preparation of the personnel for operations in the Far North and in the Arctic. This relates both to the preparations of the crews of surface ships and support vessels for operations in areas with complex navigational-hydrographic conditions and ice situation, and to that of our land-based component. The Arctic combat training of ground and coastal troops' formations ... mainly takes place on our polar ranges on the Kola Peninsula, as well as on islands of the Arctic Ocean, and on the coastline of the Russian mainland along the Northern Sea Route.

In the winter training period we mainly train our personnel at our established training facilities. Around 100 company tactical exercises of ground and coastal troops, over 20 battalion drills, and more than 200 squad and 110 platoon live firings were conducted at ranges.

The crews of surface ships and submarines mainly engaged in basic and individual training at sea. The military sailors began to rehearse operations in the composition of formations at the end of April, and will continue throughout the summer training period, during the Arctic voyage and the muster-voyage of surface ships.

Looking ahead ... at the beginning of fall, we will rehearse a series of tactical exercises in the Arctic along the Northern Sea Route, on islands and the coastline of the mainland, in accordance with combat training plans.

Purposeful and high quality work was conducted on the personnel training of the coastal missile and artillery troops, including the combat crews of Bastion mobile coastal defense missile systems, deployed on islands of the Arctic archipelagos of Franz Josef Land and the Novosibirsk Islands.

With respect to the training of the VVS and PVO Army personnel, ... for the first time in many years we have resumed the maximum range flight patrols of our long-range antisubmarine warfare aircraft over the Arctic and Atlantic oceans.

In the winter training period, the flight personnel of all aircraft regiments... have improved their flight skills: in total, more than 200 flight training missions were conducted, and their total flying time significantly exceeded 2,500 hours. Over 60 field exercises of air defense units and tactical flight exercises were conducted. In the winter training period, the fleet personnel fulfilled combat training plans in full and with high quality indicators.

[Krasnaya Zvezda] The majority of our readers associate the Northern Fleet with people of a heroic profession -- the submariners. What were the final results of their winter training period?

[Golubev] ... In general, the intensity of their combat training remains at a high level. As Northern Fleet Commander, Vice Admiral Aleksandr Alekseyevich Moiseyev, noted earlier in his interview with *Krasnaya Zvezda*, our boats undertaken more missions at sea. For example, last year the total time spent underway exceeded the planned figures by 41 percent. Three nuclear-powered vessels from various maritime areas of our zone of responsibility carried out intercontinental ballistic missiles launches, successfully destroying hypothetical targets on ranges at distances of several thousand kilometers. The crews of Kalibr cruise missile-carrying submarines also proved themselves in the course of a whole series of exercises.

Since December and until now, scheduled combat training sessions are underway, in addition to performing combat stand-by duty and executing assigned missions. They are held not only at bases and training centers, but also in the Barents and White seas, and under the ice of the Arctic Ocean. Several crews "sailed under the ice," rehearsing combat training tasks, related to the employment of modern naval weapons.

We are expecting that in the near future, the composition of our submarine forces will be augmented by the arrival of the new strategic missile submarine cruiser *Knyaz Vladimir*, which has recently entered the White Sea to check the elimination of the latest shortcomings, which were identified in the course of state sea trials.

[Krasnaya Zvezda] Oleg Vyacheslavovich, you mentioned the immediate prospects, tell us in more detail: what combat training tasks are to be accomplished by the Northern Fleet in the summer training period?

[Golubev] For the Northern Fleet personnel, this period is traditionally saturated with various large-scale combat training activities, which will be conducted at sea, on land, and in the air....

First, there is the muster-voyage, which will take place under the leadership of the Northern Fleet commander. Second, the continuation of a number of performance-evaluation tactical exercises with groupings of the fleet's mixed forces and troops.

In the summer, we plan to carry out the next -- the ninth -- Arctic voyage of ships and support vessels of the Northern Fleet, in the course of which we intend to conduct multiservice combat training....

(Continued)



Continued: The Northern Fleet's Combat Training with an Arctic Focus

Source: Yuliya Kozak, "Combat training with an Arctic accent," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 22 May 2020. <http://redstar.ru/zapolyarnyj-aktsent-boevoj-podgotovki>

[Krasnaya Zvezda] *It is not the first time that you will personally lead an Arctic grouping of the Northern Fleet; tell us, what are the Northern Fleet personnel expecting this year?*

[Golubev] *During each Arctic voyage, we try to rehearse some new elements: the landing of an amphibious assault force at locations, where, figuratively speaking, no human has set foot on; striving to travel the routes, which previously have not been crossed by ships of this class and displacement. A great deal can be done for the first time in the Arctic, as its active exploration has only begun not that long ago.*

This year, when our country celebrates the 75th anniversary of the end of the Great Patriotic War, and humanity celebrates the end of World War Two, we will deploy the Victory Banner over the Arctic. We will take a replica of the Banner with us into this voyage. And all the amphibious assault landings on the open Arctic coastline of the continent and islands in the seas of the Arctic Ocean will be carried out under the Banner, which was deployed 75 years ago over the defeated Reichstag. We will raise the Great Victory Banner in various remote corners of the Russian Arctic along the entire voyage route, as well as during the conduct of tactical exercises on the coast of the Taymyr Peninsula, the Novosibirsk Islands, Yakutia, and Chukotka.

Large landing ships and large antisubmarine ships of the Kola Multiforce Flotilla, support vessels of the auxiliary fleet and of the fleet's Search and Emergency Rescue Directorate, as well as naval infantry personnel and the Arctic Brigade, will take part in the next Arctic voyage.

I would like to stress that all our exercises in the Arctic zone are exclusively defensive in nature.

We will continue the research activity, which we launched jointly with the Russian Geographic Society, to study the history of explorations of the Russian Arctic and the seas of the Arctic Ocean.

[Krasnaya Zvezda] *Will the pandemic interfere with these plans? Has the new coronavirus infection pandemic affected the Northern Fleet's combat training and the quality of personnel training?*

[Golubev] *The complex sanitary-epidemiological situation, which originated in the middle of March in the regions of Russia where the Northern Fleet forces and troops are stationed, has not had a significant impact on the conduct of the planned combat training measures.*

First, most of the accomplished activities were carried out during the first three months of the new training year.

Second, the Defense Ministry leadership and the command of the Northern Fleet promptly adopted measures to prevent the spread of infection among the personnel.

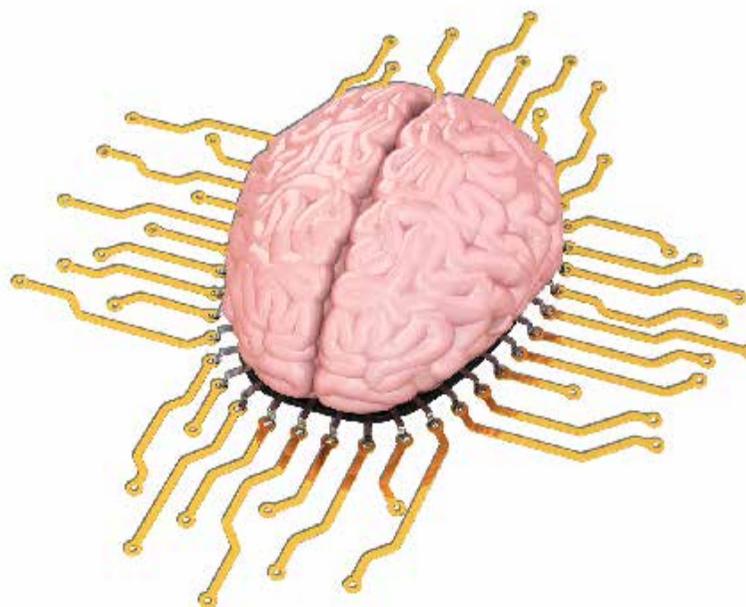
Third, in those places of the Far North and the Arctic, where our servicemen improve their professional skills and abilities, the natural and demographic conditions definitely do not contribute to the spread of the pandemic.

In general, even the seasonal flu has remained at an average level among the servicemen. Therefore, all the assigned combat training tasks were accomplished, despite harsh weather conditions and the coronavirus.

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.





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

by Sergey Sukhankin

Republished and edited for OE Watch in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol: 17, Issue: 68, dated 14 May 2020. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/looking-beyond-china-asian-actors-in-the-russian-arctic-part-two/>

OE Watch Commentary: This is the second of a two-part series on Asian actors in the Russian Arctic. While Part One dealt with India, Part Two focuses on Japan. (To read Part One in *OE Watch*, see “Looking Beyond China: Asian Actors in the Russian Arctic (Part One),” *OE Watch*, June 2020 or see full article at: <https://jamestown.org/program/looking-beyond-china-asian-actors-in-the-russian-arctic-part-one/>).

While China remains the most active player among non-Arctic nations, other Asian actors, such as India and Japan (the world’s third largest economy) are playing an increasingly visible role in this geo-economically and geopolitically vital region. In an article published by *Inosmi.ru* at the start of this year, the director of the Hokkaido Research Institute for the Twenty-First Century, Eisaku Nakamura, argues that Japan needs to increase its presence in the Arctic region by strengthening cooperation with Russia. Specifically, he notes that this could be achieved by building stronger subnational ties between Japanese Hokkaido and Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula. If successful, this initiative could mark “the first year of [Japan’s] great Arctic path.”

Indeed, the past decade was marked by Japan’s active promotion of an Arctic agenda. In 2013, the country was granted permanent observer status in the Arctic Council (AC); whereas, in 2015, Tokyo released a government policy document articulating Japan’s objective of achieving a leading role in the sustainable development of the Arctic region. The “Arctic Policy of Japan” explicitly points to Tokyo’s determination to use its scientific and technological potential to transform the country into a non-Arctic power. This, however, will remain unachievable without close cooperation with the Arctic states themselves, and Russia in particular.

Japan’s interest in the Arctic is effectively inseparable from Russia, premised on the following four main pillars:

The first issue of importance for Japan is realizing fast, inexpensive and safe transportation of goods and products between East Asia and Europe via through the Northeast Passage (NEP)—a maritime route that crosses the Bering Strait and importantly hugs Russia’s Arctic coast, a segment under Moscow’s control known as the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Japanese estimates suggest that the NEP could eventually secure up to 40 percent of the country’s cargo shipments to the European Union. In late 2019, the Japanese business sector first floated the idea to connect the Japanese city of Tomakomai and Kunashir Island with Kamchatka-based Russian port(s), thereby directly linking Japan to the NEP.

The second factor guiding Tokyo and its need to cooperate with Moscow is energy security and diversification of energy supply routes—an issue that acquired particular resonance domestically after the 2012 Fukushima nuclear disaster. An issue of special interest is liquefied natural gas (LNG). According to former Russian minister for economic development Maksim Oreshkin, Japan has, therefore, invested approximately \$5 billion in Russia’s Arctic LNG-2 project (located on the Gydan Peninsula, in northern Siberia). On July 22, 2019, the Russian side confirmed that approximately a 10 percent share of the project was acquired by a Japanese consortium of Mitsui & Co. and the Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC). Russian officials, however, stated that the above-indicated sum does not fully reflect the real picture: Japanese investments in the Russian energy sector are much larger (around \$15 billion) due to the fact that “[Japanese] investments are coming via third countries... [T]hat is why they are not reflected as ‘investments’ in official documents.”

Another important milestone in Japan’s involvement in LNG projects in the Russian High North is the prospective creation of a joint venture (with headquarters in Singapore) between Novatek (with a 49 percent share) and Japanese Saibu Gas (51 percent) that envisages shared use of an LNG terminal in Kitakyushu, Japan that would store and subsequently redistribute LNG coming from Russia’s Arctic. Russian sources have argued that the terminal will ensure more flexibility in working with potential LNG buyers. A second major aspect of Japan’s energy security push is its demand for oil and oil products. To address this issue, the Japanese side (represented by Inpex, Mitsubishi, Itochu, Mitsui & Co. and Marubeni) conducted negotiations with the CEO of Rosneft, Igor Sechin, who invited the Japanese corporations to take part in the Vostok Oil extraction project (expected to begin operations in 2024). The Russian side argued that participation in the project could help Japan diversify its energy supplies from the unstable Middle East, which is currently the source of 90 percent of all Japanese oil imports.

The third factor behind Tokyo’s outreach to Moscow in the Arctic is the two sides’ long-time cooperation on regional science and research projects in areas such as climatology, meteorology, ecology and seismology. The two main Arctic research facilities used by Japanese scientists are both on Russian territory: the experimental forest station “Spasskaya Pad” (Central Yakutia region) and Cape Baranov (Severnaya Zemlya) station.

(Continued)



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

The fourth motivating factor for Japan is national security concern over China's regional aspirations, which threaten to materialize as growing militarization of the Arctic.

So while Japan is unlikely to succeed in its Arctic projects without close cooperation with Russia, certain realities might diminish the effectiveness of their regional cooperation. First of all, Japanese businesses retain certain doubts about the viability of this relationship. Japanese sources have pointed to the “bitter experience” of dealing with Rosneft in the past, when, last year, the Russian side opted for Swiss (Glencore) and Qatari (Qatar Investment Authority) investors over any Japanese partners. In addition, the seemingly long-term plummeting of oil and gas prices will profoundly decrease the commercial attractiveness of Arctic-based projects.

Second of all, the NEP is itself experiencing difficulties. Russian sources have underscored multiple complaints coming from the Japanese side related to high transit tariffs, inflexible regulations, and the still-unsatisfactory state of Russian Arctic infrastructure—discouraging Japanese investors. And while regulatory/administrative obstacles can be addressed relatively easily, physical infrastructure improvements will require massive economic investments, which Russia does not have, and which foreign players are unlikely to provide given Western sanctions and current global economic trends.

Finally, Japanese energy regulations currently prevent Russia from supplying more than 10 percent of the East Asian country's gas. This means that Japanese investments in Russia's Arctic projects will be limited.

Japan will almost certainly continue developing its ties with Russia in the Arctic. But expecting any major breakthroughs in this relationship is hardly likely at this stage. **End OE Watch Commentary (Sukhankin)**



Press statements following talks with Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe, 29 June 2019.

Source: President of Russia, Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60860>, CCA 4.0



Russian Religious Patriotism

OE Watch Commentary: Last December, President Putin remarked that “patriotism is the only possible ideology in the modern democratic society,” as noted in the first excerpt. The contours of Russian patriotism are still developing, but as the second excerpt suggests, religious faith, along with military power, will likely comprise key components. The article notes “the Cathedral in honor of the Resurrection of Christ... has the status of the main temple of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.” The cathedral’s consecration date was moved to 22 June 2020, postponed from the original consecration date of 9 May due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The military’s huge, new cathedral is not the only evidence of uniting religion and military power in Russia’s patriotic formula. As the third and fourth excerpts indicate (from a series of two long articles in the military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*), the religious factor within patriotism has also become more apparent in recent writings about military strategy. After first describing and defining the nature of war throughout history, the author asserts that “we have entered the fourth world war today. Geo-religious.”

The author begins by criticizing “modern Russian military science,” claiming that “current doctrinaires have simplified modern warfare, lowering its understanding to the level of guns, tanks, ships and planes and covering this shame with a bloom of something ‘cybernetic.’” According to the author, this shallow understanding of war ignores the “hybrid war [which] is raging around and inside Russia... to undermine the spiritual, intellectual, biological and economic potential of Russia with a view to its subsequent dismemberment...” He goes on to identify Russia’s primary enemy in this “geo-religious” conflict, claiming that once Russia fully restores its national state power, “the threat of a major war between Russia and the forces of world Evil led by the United States will become inevitable.”

Had these latter two articles regarding a religious component in Russian strategy not been published in a well-respected military periodical, it would be easy to dismiss such radical views as belonging to the fringe of Russian military thought. Their publication, along with the consecration of the new military cathedral, suggest that militant religious belief may become an integral component of the new Russian patriotism, or as the author put it: “Russia must restore its significance to the world religious and spiritual center of truth and justice on Earth. Moscow - The Third Rome!” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“We have entered the fourth world war today. Geo-religious....”

Source: “Russian President Vladimir Putin considers patriotism the only possible ideology in modern society,” *TASS*, 19 December 2019. <https://tass.com/politics/1101043>

“In my opinion, patriotism is the only possible ideology in the modern democratic society. Patriotism in the broadest and best sense,” the Russian leader said on Thursday during his annual news conference. “It must be depoliticized and aimed to strengthen the inner framework of the Russian state,” he stressed....

Source: “Главный храм Вооруженных сил РФ откроют в Подмосковье 22 июня (The main temple of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will open in the Moscow suburbs on 22 June),” *TASS*, 2 June 2020. <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/8625865>

The main temple of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation will open on June 22 in the Patriot park near Moscow, Russian Defense Minister General of the Army Sergei Shoigu said on Tuesday. ...Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill will consecrate the Cathedral in honor of the Resurrection of Christ in Patriot Park in Kubinka, Moscow Region, which has the status of the main temple of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation....



Continued: Russian Religious Patriotism

Source: AVladimir Kvachkov, “Третий Рим, Сатана и мегатонны (Third Rome, Satan and Megatons),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 18 May 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/56987>

The general theory of war and military construction in the era of World War IV... We have entered the fourth world war today. Geo-religious. ...Modern Russian military science not only shied away from solving this systemically important problem of military affairs, but in understanding the essence of the war sank even lower than the former Soviet military partocrats. Current doctrinaires have simplified modern warfare, lowering its understanding to the level of guns, tanks, ships and planes and covering this shame with a bloom of something “cybernetic.” ...They did not understand anything and did not learn anything. A hybrid war is raging around and inside Russia (we will use this term for now) to undermine the spiritual, intellectual, biological and economic potential of Russia with a view to its subsequent dismemberment, and the state and the army again, as in 1941, they are preparing for an armed attack on us. And the enemy is already here.... The first and main global theater of war is in the spiritual and religious sphere.

Now, before our eyes, the first geo-religious battle in human history is unfolding, which has become the beginning of the first geo-religious psychobiological war on Earth. ...Without God, by our human powers alone, we will not conquer this world evil.

...Russia must restore its significance to the world religious and spiritual center of truth and justice on Earth. Moscow - The Third Rome!

Source: Vladimir Kvachkov, “Боевая служба как привилегия (Combat service as a privilege),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 26 May 2020. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/57104>

It is obvious that after the restoration of national state power independent of the World behind the scenes in Russia, the threat of a major war between Russia and the forces of world Evil led by the United States will become inevitable.



Military Professionals Appointed as Assistant Commanders for Religious Workers in Two Strategic Missile Forces Units.

Source: Russian Federation Defence Ministry, <http://mil.ru/et/news/more.htm?id=10797951@egNews>, CCA 4.0



Expanding Russia's Military Presence in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian military will soon celebrate its 5th anniversary of combat operations in Syria. While the Kremlin leadership had previously announced that the military had completed its mission and would reduce the number of forces in Syria, it now appears that “Russia intends to expand its bases in Syria” as the title from the popular daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda* contends. The author (military journalist, Victor Baranets) points out that Russia has already extended and expanded its basing rights at Tartus, “according to which up to 11 Russian ships can be based,” and plans to extend its presence at the airbase at Khmeimim “indefinitely.” While Baranets does not provide specifics, he insists that “in Syria, the number of Russian combat aircraft and ships, and along with land personnel, will increase.”

According to Baranets, the impetus behind this increase revolves around Moscow's intention “to build up a ‘fist’ for the final defeat of the terrorist ‘viper in Idlib,’ and at the same time let Turkey know that the Russians are not supportive of its solution.” The author describes other countries in the region where the Russian military has recently staked an interest (e.g. Iran, Egypt, Algeria, Libya), declaring that “it's just right to talk about the “global” breakthrough of Moscow in the Middle East.” The author concludes by positing that energy considerations help to explain the Kremlin's increased military involvement in this region, declaring that “Russia is clearly transforming its plans to establish control of the ‘gas station of the world,’ asserting that “her desire to thoroughly entrench herself in the Syrian bridgehead in advance is a visionary step...”

A few of the reader comments support the author's analysis, stating that increasing the Russian military footprint in Syria is a “very correct and timely decision! Russia projects power in other countries! Pindos [Americans] are afraid of us!” Others are less optimistic, claiming that “there is no doubt that as soon as all the bases are rebuilt, Russia will leave without any compensation, and the irremovable leader [Putin] will say that we do not need them: we have satellites.” Others wonder about the cost, questioning “Is that where the money saved on retirees went?” while still others point to other recent military operations: “And how did the Venezuelan adventure end?” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“It's just right to talk about the “global” breakthrough of Moscow in the Middle East.... Russia is clearly breaking its plans to establish control of the “gas station of the world.”

Source: Victor Baranets, “Россия намерена расширить свои базы в Сирии (Russia intends to expand its bases in Syria),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 29 May 2020. <https://www.volgograd.kp.ru/daily/27136.5/4227073/>

The news, fluttered out of the Kremlin on Friday night, is a military-political sensation. President Putin instructed the ministries of defense and foreign affairs to negotiate with Syria on the transfer of additional real estate to the Russian military and an impressive “piece” of the Mediterranean....

...The first conclusion, which suggests itself here, is that Syria gives the green light to expanding the military presence of Russia in its “Arab apartment”. Both on land and at sea. It is worth recalling that the draft protocol No. 1 to the agreement on the deployment of a Russian aviation group in Syria on August 26, 2015 has already been approved by the government. This group of Russian VKS was created on September 30, 2015 to support the Syrian government forces in the war on terrorists. By agreement between Moscow and Damascus, it is deployed on the territory of the Syrian air base Khmeimim indefinitely. Khmeimim is Russia's largest military base in Syria. From here, planes took off, striking targets of militants fighting the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

And in 2017, Russia and Syria signed another agreement, according to which up to 11 Russian ships can be based in Tartus, including those equipped with nuclear power plants (in other words, it was about our nuclear submarines). It was also planned to expand the ship repair capabilities of the base in Tartus.

The agreement is designed for 49 years and is automatically extended for another 25. The second conclusion is also obvious: in Syria, the number of Russian combat aircraft and ships, and along with land personnel, will increase. On the one hand, this indicates that Moscow intends to build up a “fist” for the final defeat of the terrorist “viper in Idlib,” and at the same time let Turkey know that, according to its scenario, the solution to this problem will not work.

...Russia is clearly on the side of Syria, Russia in recent years has established partnerships with Iran, Russia has significantly strengthened its economic and military-technical relations with Egypt and Algeria. Here it is worth adding Libya. It's just right to talk about the “global” breakthrough of Moscow in the Middle East.... Russia is clearly breaking its plans to establish control of the “gas station of the world.” And the struggle for energy, as you know, will very much determine in this century the “formula” of international relations. And Moscow clearly does not want to be “last in line” here. Her desire to thoroughly entrench herself in the Syrian bridgehead in advance is a visionary step ...

Reader comments:

June 1, 10:24 the guest

There is no doubt that as soon as all the bases are rebuilt, Russia will leave without any compensation, and the irremovable leader will say that we do not need it: we have satellites.

June 1, 04:37 Yuri

Is that where the money saved on retirees went?

May 31, 18:45 Grandfather Coat

very correct and timely decision! Russia projects power in other countries! Pindos are afraid of us!

May 30, 04:47 the guest

And how did the Venezuelan adventure end?



Russian soldiers during Vladimir Putin's visit to Khmeimim Air Base in Syria, 11 Dec 2017.

Source: President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56351>, CCA 4.0 Intl



Russian Arms Sales to Iran?

OE Watch Commentary: As part of the 2015 deal to induce the Iranian leadership from pursuing nuclear weapons, a five-year ban was imposed on arms transfers to or from Iran. The time-limit on this embargo expires in October, and there is now considerable speculation on whether Iran will attempt to purchase advanced weapon systems from Russia, and whether Russia will sell them. The accompanying excerpt from an article in the moderate *Svobodnaya Press* discusses the prospects for military-technical cooperation between Russia and Iran after the arms embargo expires.

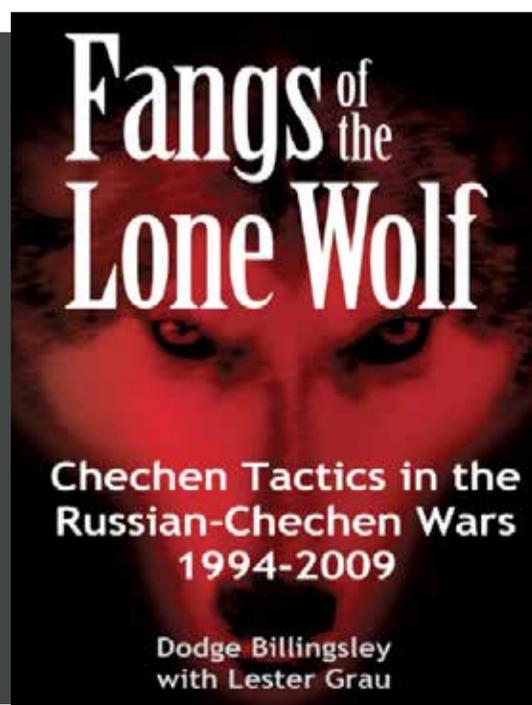
After reviewing the background to this arms restriction, the article cites the Iranian ambassador to Russia who claims that “there are already some plans... after lifting the arms embargo, Iran will be able to exercise its legitimate right to meet defense needs.” The article cites a source in the Russian foreign ministry who asserts that “Moscow will allow negotiations on the export of Russian arms to Iran to begin after the international legal obstacle in the form of an embargo is overcome.”



5P85TM TEL for S-400 missile system at 2015 Victory Day Parade practice.
Source: Vitaly Kuzmin via Vitalykuzmin.net, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/April-22th-Alabino/i-3PjZTP2>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

The article also quotes two Russian military experts, one of whom is quite certain that “military-technical cooperation will develop,” and that “S-400 [advanced air defense] shipments are likely.” The other expert is less sanguine, pointing out that not only is China “the main competitor in Iran’s arms market,” but that given the depressed state of the Iranian economy, Iran “will not have much money... to buy the most modern types of weapons and military equipment.” The article concludes on a cautious note, pointing out that even after the arms embargo expires, the US will “impose sanctions against those countries that have military-technical ties with Iran,” and that therefore, “Russia will need to choose which is more profitable: to cooperate with other countries or... with Iran.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“In any case, contacts between Tehran and Moscow have always been maintained.... As soon as the embargo is lifted, negotiations will resume. And in the near future, I think, we will hear about the signed contracts...”



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>



Continued: Russian Arms Sales to Iran?

Source: Svetlana Gomzikova, “В октябре иранцы приедут в Москву за С-400 (In October, Iranians will come to Moscow for the S-400),” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 15 May 2020. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/265345/>

...Recall that in October 2020, the time limit for the supply of arms to Iran, which was introduced by the UN Security Council as part of the so-called nuclear deal - the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (JCPA) to resolve the multi-year issue of the Iranian atom, signed in July 2015, expires.... In addition, it included an agreement that the arms embargo would be lifted from Iran within five years.

That is, after October, Tehran will no longer need a special permission from the UN Security Council to supply arms. And, as stated a few days ago, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali, his country in this respect there are already some plans. According to the diplomat, proposals for the supply of military equipment and defensive weapons came to Iran from a number of countries, however, “the existing restrictions did not allow the completion of transactions in this area.” Now, after lifting the arms embargo, Iran will be able to exercise its legitimate right to meet defense needs.

What is important for us: Russia is also ready here to provide the necessary assistance to the Iranian republic. In any case, the director of the second department of Asia, the Russian Foreign Ministry, Zamir Kabulov, recently said that Moscow will allow negotiations on the export of Russian arms to Iran to begin after the international legal obstacle in the form of an embargo is overcome. “Iran is a sovereign country, no less than Russia, and it is her right to contact us,” the representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry said....

...To comment on how Russian-Iranian military-technical cooperation will develop under such conditions after the lifting of the embargo, we asked an expert from Arsenal of the Fatherland magazine Alexei Leonkov: “Of course, it will develop. Moreover, the military-technical cooperation between Russia and Iran has a very long history....”

“SP”: - *What exactly can we offer the Persians?*

“First of all, we can talk about air defense and armored vehicles. In any case, contacts between Tehran and Moscow have always been maintained.... As soon as the embargo is lifted, negotiations will resume. And in the near future, I think, we will hear about the signed contracts....”

“SP”: - *There was talk that our S-400s were very suitable for the Iranians....*

“S-400 shipments are likely.... Of course, in order to protect itself from missiles, Iran needs to build a modern air defense system... Therefore, most likely, I think this will be the first priority that Tehran will set for itself after the lifting of the embargo. And just along the line of the air defense complex, our military-technical cooperation will develop further.”

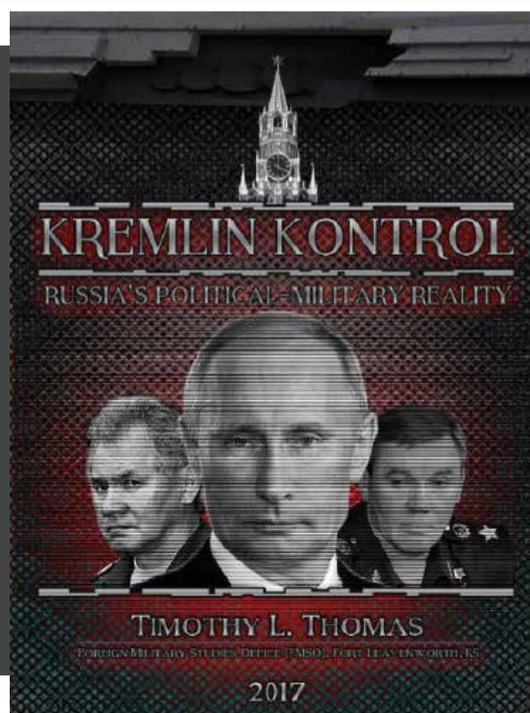
Vladimir Sazhin, a senior researcher at the Center for the Study of the Near and Middle East at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, is slightly less optimistic about the prospects for such cooperation:

“...China, of course, will do everything possible to ensure that the Iranians buy equipment only from them...”

“SP”: - *That is, China is the main competitor in the Iranian direction?*

“Yes, the main competitor in Iran’s arms market is, of course, China.... That is, sanctions will be imposed against companies, against certain individuals who are working on military-technical cooperation with Iran.... Iran, in general, will not have much money in order to buy the most modern types of weapons and military equipment. Therefore, I think, nevertheless, cooperation of Russia with Iran will not reach such a wide scale. The same holds true with China’s cooperation with Iran.

...So, Russia will need to choose which is more profitable: to cooperate with other countries or, after all, with Iran? And there the market is not so promising right now because of Tehran’s serious financial difficulties.”



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>



Russian Ministry of Defense: Battening Down the Information Hatches

OE Watch Commentary: August will mark the 20th anniversary of the sinking of the Kursk, an Oscar-class, nuclear submarine in the Barents Sea with a total loss of its crew. After embarrassing media revelations surrounding this disaster, one of the Kremlin's lessons-learned was the importance of controlling the country's major information flow, particularly with regard to military matters. However, given the advances in communication over the past two decades, sustaining this control has proven exceptionally challenging. The brief excerpt from the moderate site *Gazeta.ru* describes recent legislation signed by President Putin to ensure that the Ministry of Defense (MoD) continues to maintain (and further extend) effective control over the military's primary narrative.

As the article points out, "in March last year [2019], Putin signed a federal law, according to which servicemen were forbidden to post in the media and the Internet information revealing their departmental affiliation and official activities." The new legislation extends these restrictions to anybody who has previously served in the military and "their family members or their parents." To ensure its control over information, the law not only applies to actual combat operations and training exercises, but any data which might "include the location of a person, his work, the activities of military units, bodies, associations and organizations."



Burial site of sailors from the nuclear submarine "Kursk." St. Petersburg.

Source: GAlexandrova via Wikimedia Commons, <https://bit.ly/2A9u8F8>, CC by SA 4.0 Intl

The article alleges that those who break this law will be charged with "gross misconduct," and while it doesn't spell out the penalties for ex-military or family members, those in uniform "may be demoted, dismissed from military service or arrested for 30 days." Such punishment, according to the article, is similar for those charged "with hazing, destruction of military property, or unauthorized abandonment of a military unit."

The article alleges that those who break this law will be charged with "gross misconduct," and while it doesn't spell out the penalties for ex-military or family members, those in uniform "may be demoted, dismissed from military service or arrested for 30 days." Such punishment, according to the article, is similar for those charged "with hazing, destruction of military property, or unauthorized abandonment of a military unit."

By prohibiting service members from possessing digital devices or posting material on the Internet, the MoD limits sensitive data from falling into the wrong hands. While restricting ex-military and family members may also serve this objective, it may also allow the military to cover up negative information and maintain firm control over the narrative. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"The military has also forbidden to divulge information those who had been dismissed from military service, their family members or their parents..."

Source: Lydia Misnik, "Новый устав: военным запретили говорить о службе (New order: military forbidden to talk about service)," *Gazeta.ru*, 7 May 2020. <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/05/07/13074877.shtml>

...The Russian military was banned from disseminating information on the Internet or the media that could determine their affiliation with the Russian Armed Forces. In addition, the placement of information about other servicemen and members of their families will be considered a gross misconduct. The corresponding decree of Russian President Vladimir Putin on amendments to the Disciplinary Charter of the RF Armed Forces of 2007 was published on the official Internet portal of legal information.

The military has also forbidden to divulge information those who had been dismissed from military service, their family members or their parents. In particular, it is impossible to disseminate information that allows you to determine the location of these people in a certain period. Another prohibition is on the disclosure of information on the deployment or redeployment of military command and control bodies.

...In March last year, Putin signed a federal law, according to which servicemen were forbidden to post in the media and the Internet information revealing their departmental affiliation and official activities. In particular, it is impossible to distribute photo, video materials and geolocation data about yourself and other military personnel.

...These categories of citizens were forbidden to distribute or provide information "about other military personnel and citizens called up for military training, citizens discharged from military service, members of their families or their parents". Such data include the location of a person, his work, the activities of military units, bodies, associations and organizations.

The military was forbidden to use social networks and gadgets with which you can store and distribute audio recordings, photos, videos and geolocation data via the Internet. At the same time, push-button telephones can be used....

Later, the Ministry of Defense prepared a draft presidential decree, which proposed expanding the list of gross disciplinary misconduct by military personnel, including the use of gadgets and communication with the media. The decree provided for a significant toughening of punishment for servicemen for breaking the rules.

According to the law "On the status of military personnel," for gross disciplinary misconduct, the military may be demoted, or dismissed from military service or arrested for 30 days. That is, the storage of smartphones or communication with the media was proposed to be equated with hazing, the destruction of military property and the unauthorized abandonment of a military unit.



Six Years On: The MH-17 Tragedy and Girkin's Damning Interview



Igor Girkin (Strelkov) at a press conference in Yekaterinburg, 2015.

Source: Dom Kobb via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Igor_Ivanovich_Strelkov_Yekaterinburg5_\(cropped\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Igor_Ivanovich_Strelkov_Yekaterinburg5_(cropped).JPG), CCA-SA 4.0 Intl

OE Watch Commentary: The armed struggle in the Donbas region between pro-Russian separatist and Ukrainian forces continue to drag on. The destruction of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH-17 over SE Ukraine on 17 July 2014 was a turning point in how much of the world looked at this conflict. Thanks to monumental obfuscation on the part of the Kremlin-driven information juggernaut, those responsible for this tragedy have been able to evade justice. A trial surrounding this crime began in The Hague in March, but as the brief excerpt from the pro-business daily *Kommersant* points out, to date, the Kremlin leadership “continues to deny involvement in the tragedy.”

A new round of Kremlin denials occurred when the former commander of pro-Russian forces in Donbas, Igor Girkin (aka Igor Strelkov) recently spoke to journalists from both Britain and Ukraine about his brief role as commander of the separatist forces in the region. As the article points out, during both interviews, while Girkin stated that he “feels moral responsibility for these deaths,” he was adamant that his militia “did not bring down this plane.” When further queried as to whether he was suggesting that regular Russian military forces were responsible, Girkin replied, “people can interpret this as they please” and “declined to comment further.” (See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7XeAfEgc-I> for full interview; Girkin’s comments regarding MH-17 begin at 2:42:00).

While Girkin’s interview was widely watched on social media (over 5 million views), not surprisingly, given the doubt it raises over Russian innocence, his interview was almost totally ignored by the major Kremlin-supported media. It remains highly unlikely that those responsible for this tragedy will even be brought to justice, but Girkin’s suggestion that regular Russian military forces were involved, implicates the highest level of command. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Russia continues to deny involvement in the tragedy...”

Source: Alena Miklashevskaya, “Стрелков взял на себя моральную ответственность за гибель пассажиров рейса MH17 (Strelkov took moral responsibility for the death of passengers on flight MH17),” *Kommersant*, 20 May 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4349791>

The British newspaper The Times took a brief comment from Igor Girkin (Strelkov), a former defense minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR). He was questioned in connection with the upcoming June 8 hearing of the Hague District Court on the crash of flight MH17 on July 17, 2014.

Commenting on the story of the downed airplane, Mr. Girkin remarked: “Since I commanded the militias and participated directly in that conflict, I feel moral responsibility for these deaths.” At the same time, he repeated again that the militia “did not bring down this plane.” To the question of the publication about whether his statement would be perceived as a confession of guilt by the Russian military, Mr. Girkin replied: “People can interpret this as they please.” He declined to comment further.

On May 18, a four-hour interview with Igor Girkin was published on his YouTube channel by Ukrainian journalist Dmitry Gordon. In an interview, Mr. Girkin noted that he would not be surprised if he appeared before the Hague Tribunal.

July 17, 2014 a passenger plane Boeing 777 Malaysia Airlines, flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, was shot down by a missile over the Donbass in the war zone. Killed all 298 people on board, including 80 children. The Russian citizen Igor Girkin (Strelkov) and his three former subordinates became suspects in this case. Russia continues to deny involvement in the tragedy.



Ukrainian Capabilities Challenge Russian Superiority in the Black Sea

OE Watch Commentary: Tensions around the Black Sea are on the rise after the successful test of two Neptune missiles by the Ukrainian military. According to Ukrainian officials, the missiles successfully destroyed two targets, at distances of 85 and 110 kilometers from the launch site, with the missiles reaching their destinations “almost simultaneously.” While *Izvestia* emphasizes that these weapons systems are far from the most advanced, Russia’s response to the tests underscores Russian concerns about growing Ukrainian capabilities in the region.

Konstantine Sivkov, a member of the Russian Academy of Missile and Artillery Science, described the new missile system as a credible threat to Russian superiority in the Black Sea, noting that it can strike warships of the Russian Navy. He emphasized the need for measures to counter these threats, such as developing a control system, strengthening the intelligence system in the theater of operations of the Black Sea, and “monitoring the movements of Ukrainian ships to the places where these missiles are likely to launch and prevent them from moving there.”

The article notes that Sivkov essentially described the Neptune missile as an update to the older Soviet X-35 missile, and also drew comparisons between the Neptune and the American Harpoon missile, which first entered service in 1977. Sivkov also asserted that the range on the Ukrainian missile is much less than those employed by the Russian military.

The article also points out that the rhetoric out of Ukraine has heightened with the development of the Neptune missile, writing that Alexander Turchinov, former secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, threatened to use the system to “destroy” the new bridge from Russia to Crimea. Therefore, while the missile system is viewed as not quite as advanced as those available to Russia, it still represents a threat not only to Russian superiority in the Black Sea region, but more specifically, to Russia’s hold on the annexed territory of Crimea and its continued influence in SE Ukraine. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rodger)**



Neptune Cruise Missile.

Source: Адміністрація Президента України via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Neptune_cruise_missile_05.jpg CCA SA-4.0 Intl

“Of course, a certain threat exists, because an anti-ship missile is a serious danger. They can strike even on warships of the Russian Navy...”

Source: “Военный эксперт оценил испытания украинской ракеты ‘Нептун’ (Military Expert Assesses Tests of Ukrainian Neptune Missiles),” *Izvestia*, 31 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1017951/2020-05-31/voennyi-ekspert-otcenil-ispytaniia-ukrainskoi-rakety-neptun>

Domestic missiles have a much greater range than Ukrainian missiles, announced Konstantin Sivkov, corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Missile and Artillery Sciences, on Sunday on May 31, on the NSN.

“Of course, a certain threat exists, because an anti-ship missile is a serious danger. They can strike even on warships of the Russian Navy. We’ll have to take measures to counter such threats - provide a control system, strengthen the intelligence system at the Black Sea theater of military operations, monitor the movements of Ukrainian ships to the places where these missiles are likely to be launched and prevent them from moving there,” he noted.

According to Sivkov, Neptune is a version of the old Soviet X-35 missile, and by its basic characteristics it also resembles the American “Harpoon.”

A military analyst spoke in detail about the capabilities of Ukrainian weapons, comparing their characteristics with Russian and American [weapons].

“Russia now has modifications of missiles having a range of about 2–2.5 times greater than those in Ukraine,” he added.

The day before, the head of the design bureau “Luch,” Oleg Korostelev, announced the successful testing of the Neptune R-360 cruise missiles. It is noted that the charges almost simultaneously destroyed two targets at different distances. The firing was carried at the two objectives in the Black Sea with an interval of two seconds.



Chinese Security Assistance to Tajikistan

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese security cooperation with Tajikistan has increased over the past several years, including the establishment of a Chinese military facility in Tajikistan’s Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast. However, this has generally not interfered with any security cooperation the Tajik government carries out with Russia, Tajikistan’s most important security cooperation partner. The accompanying excerpted article reports on how the Chinese government recently supplied the Tajik armed forces with medical equipment during the coronavirus pandemic and this assistance provides a brief look at how Chinese-Tajik security cooperation continues to take shape.

The article from *Asia Plus*, a Russian-language news website in Tajikistan, reports that a “military transport plane of the PLA brought humanitarian aid to Dushanbe” on 14 May and that it is “for military medical personnel of the Tajik Ministry of Defense.” The article notes that the aid consisted of “13 pieces of medical equipment, including ventilators.” This assistance comes only a few days after the Chinese government delivered other medical equipment to Tajikistan, including “17 mechanical ventilators, more than 48 thousand medical masks, almost 397 thousand disposable medical masks, 47 thousand surgical masks and personal protective equipment” for civilians. Overall, the medical equipment might not have the same impact as the security assistance from Russia, but it marks another instance of what is becoming a more consistent effort by the Chinese government. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“A military transport plane of the PLA brought humanitarian aid to Dushanbe during the night.”

Source: Avaz Yuldashev, “Армия Китая оказала поддержку таджикским военным медикам (The Army of China is providing support to Tajik military medics),” *Asia Plus*, 14 May 2020. <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20200514/armiya-kitaya-okazala->

A military transport plane of the PLA brought humanitarian aid to Dushanbe during the night. It is meant for military medical personnel of the Tajik Ministry of Defense...(they) received 13 pieces of medical equipment, including ventilators...

The Chinese cities of Qingdao and Xiamen earlier provided assistance to Dushanbe. On 10 May, at the Kulma-Karasu border checkpoint, Tajiks received 17 mechanical ventilators, more than 48 thousand medical masks, almost 397 thousand disposable medical masks, 47 thousand surgical masks and personal protective equipment...The total amount of aid was \$479,000...



Historical map of Tajikistan showing the border with China. Source: CIA World Factbook via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China%E2%80%93Tajikistan_border#/media/File:TI-map.gif, Public domain



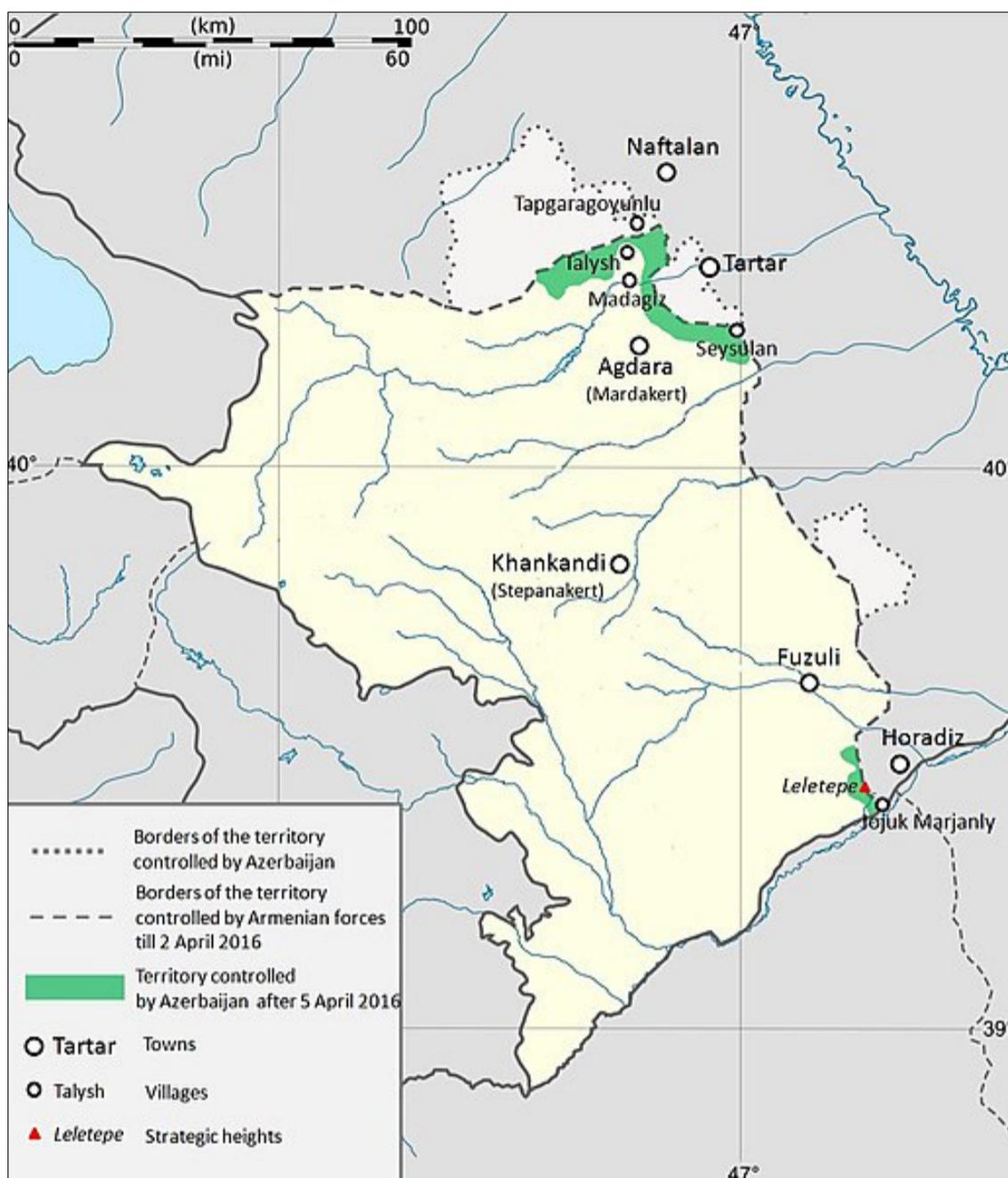
Azerbaijan's Large-Scale Exercise Amid Coronavirus

OE Watch Commentary: Earlier this year Azerbaijani officials reported that the country's armed forces had been following a set of measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and maintain readiness (see: "Conscription in the Caucasus during Coronavirus," *OE Watch*, June 2020). The accompanying excerpted articles report on a large-scale exercise recently carried out by the armed forces just as the country began a phase of loosening restrictions amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The article from *Eurasia Daily*, a Russian-language news website, reports that the Azerbaijani armed forces carried out "large-scale tactical exercises 18-22 May" and that the exercises involved "close to 10 thousand soldiers, around 120 tanks and armored vehicles, close to 200 artillery systems of various calibers, multiple rocket launch systems and 30 aircraft from the army as well as unmanned aerial systems." The article does not mention if the armed forces took any precautions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus during the exercise. However, it is worth noting that the government of Azerbaijan enforced a curfew in most urban areas during the first weekend of June after the number of coronavirus cases in the country rose following the phase of loosening restrictions, which began on 18 May. The article does mention how the "scenario of the exercise looked at utilizing units in specific areas, the application of massive strikes by rocket and artillery, airstrikes and the use of precision-guided weapons throughout the depth of the conditional enemy."

The exercise scenario shares similarities with the clashes in April 2016 when Azerbaijani forces carried out an operation with the use of rocket and artillery strikes followed by an assault with ground forces in a few areas along the line of contact in the occupied territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The article also notes that the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan conducted a videoconference in April and that they "agreed that in the current global health crisis it is important to adhere to a ceasefire and refrain from any provocations."

The article from *Trend*, an Azerbaijani news agency, reports on an exercise that took place in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (an exclave of Azerbaijan) around the same time, which also focused on carrying out "operations in different sectors of the territory." The article notes that the exercise involved "12 motorized rifle and mechanized companies, 18 artillery and mortar batteries" and that "units conducted tactical actions and live firing." Ultimately, the articles show that the government of Azerbaijan continues to prepare for a scenario similar to April 2016; and sees this as a high priority that cannot be delayed, even despite a pandemic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Territorial changes after 2016 Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes.

Source: Interfase via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Territorial_changes_after_2016_Armenian-Azerbaijani_clashes.jpg, CC BY 4.0

“The scenario of the exercise looked at utilizing units in specific areas, the application of massive strikes by rocket and artillery, airstrikes and the use of precision-guided weapons throughout the depth of the conditional enemy.”



Continued: Azerbaijan's Large-Scale Exercise Amid Coronavirus

Source: “Азербайджанская армия проведёт крупные учения на фоне глобальной пандемии (The Azerbaijani army will carry out a large-scale exercise amid the global pandemic),” *Eurasia Daily*, 14 May 2020. <https://eadaily.com/ru/news/2020/05/14/azerbaydzhanskaya-armiya-provedyot-krupnye-ucheniya-na-fone-globalnoy-pandemi>

The armed forces of Azerbaijan will carry out large-scale tactical exercises 18-22 May...The exercise will involve close to 10 thousand soldiers, around 120 tanks and armored vehicles, close to 200 artillery systems of various calibers, multiple rocket launch systems and 30 aircraft from the army as well as unmanned aerial systems...

The scenario of the exercise looked at utilizing units in specific areas, the application of massive strikes by rocket and artillery, airstrikes and the use of precision-guided weapons throughout the depth of the conditional enemy...

As reported by EA Daily, the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Elmar Mamedyarov and Armenia, Zograb Mnatsakanyan, held talks on 21 April via videoconference...The ministers of the two republics agreed that in the current global health crisis it is important to adhere to a ceasefire and refrain from any provocations...

Source: “В войсках Нахчыванского гарнизона завершились командно-штабные учения (Soldiers at the Nakhchivan garrison have wrapped up a command-staff exercise),” *Trend*, 24 May 2020. <https://www.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3244551>

Soldiers of the Nakhchivan garrison have wrapped up a command and staff exercise, reports Trend, citing the Defense Ministry of Azerbaijan. According to the plan of the exercise, operations in different sectors of the territory were carried out...

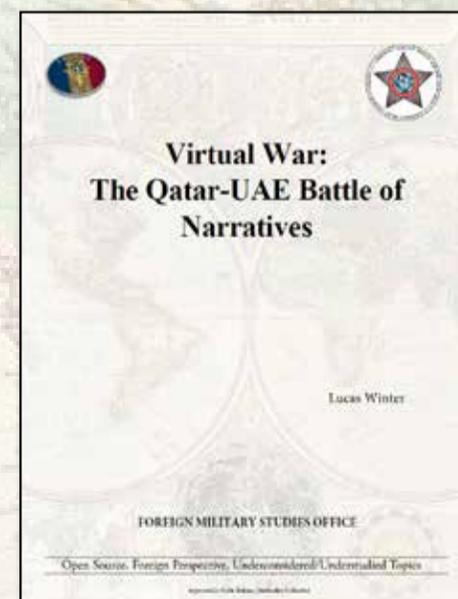
Amid a unified tactical situation, the tactical training was carried out with 12 motorized rifle and mechanized companies, 18 artillery and mortar batteries. Units conducted tactical actions and live firing...

VIRTUAL WAR: THE QATAR-UAE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

Lucas Winter

May 2020

For much of the past decade, Qatar and the UAE have been engaged in a battle of narratives. Their ongoing dispute dates to 2011 and is rooted in foreign policy and ideological disagreements. Following a hack of the Qatari News Agency in 2017, the nature of Qatari-Emirati competition shifted from being primarily the purview of government officials, spokespeople, journalists, analysts and authors, to one where coders, influencers, trolls and cybersecurity experts played a vital role. Since then, both countries have worked to increase their capabilities in the cyber and informational domains. Their relationship in these domains has evolved into one of strategic competition. This paper looks at how these dynamics may affect the regional operational environment, with a particular focus on the cyber and informational domains.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/329799>



Spanish Authorities Foil Weaponized Drone Attack by ISIS Sympathizer

OE Watch Commentary: On 8 May, Spanish authorities in Barcelona arrested a suspected Islamic State sympathizer who was planning a drone attack. According to the accompanying Spanish news article from *El Periódico*, authorities arrested a Moroccan citizen whom they believed became radicalized while living in Spain. The report said the detainee was in constant online contact with an alleged Islamic State fighter who was coaching him from Syria. He was allegedly told to purchase a drone in Barcelona, learn how to use it, and load it with explosives to carry out a terrorist attack during a Barcelona – Real Madrid soccer match.

The investigation was an international effort by Spain's Central Investigating Court and the Office of the Public Prosecutor of the National Court, the Moroccan Directorate General for Territory Security (DGST), and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The investigative report indicated that the detainee's radicalization and affinity for the Islamic State has been ongoing for at least 4 years. According to *El Periódico*, the detainee used the COVID-19 lockdown and defied quarantine orders to scout locations for potential targets for attacks. Another accompanying Spanish news source, *El Sexta*, reported that the detainee confessed to authorities that his objective was to attack a soccer match between Barcelona and Real Madrid; however, no drone was found during the raid in his apartment in Ciutat Villa.

The Islamic State has an extensive history of weaponized drone use in Iraq and Syria during the existence of the territorial Caliphate, with fielding beginning in August 2014 through about December 2017. While no recorded incidents of such drone use have taken place in Europe or the United States by Islamic State operatives or lone wolves inspired by the group, this incident demonstrates the continued threat of such attacks. The threat of similar Salafi-Jihadi linked weaponized drone attacks pre-date those of the Islamic State by some years. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker and Keshavarz)**

“A waiter who has spent 12 years in Spain – now 34 years old – is now in jail and accused of exalting terrorism and self-indoctrination. The coronavirus left him without his job as a waiter. During the lockdown, he swore allegiance to the Islamic State and was being given guidance out of Syria.”

Source: J.G. Albalat, “La Guardia Civil detiene en Barcelona a un supuesto yihadista que buscó objetivos bajo el estado de alarma (The Civil Guard arrested a suspected jihadist in Barcelona, who sought targets during a state of alarm),” *El Periódico*, 8 May 2020. <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20200508/yihadista-detenido-barcelona-guardia-civil-objetivos-estado-alarma-7954745>

The Civil Guard reported that there were references to the detainee's radicalization and affinity for the Islamic State for at least 4 years.

Source: Luis Rendueles and Vanesa Lozano, “El yihadista que iba a matar en Barcelona, un camarero que se radicalize cuando se quedó sin trabajo por el covid (A jihadist who was going to kill in Barcelona, a waiter who was radicalized when he lost his job because of covid),” *El Periódico*, 18 May 2020. <https://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20200518/yihadista-barcelona-detenido-matar-maquina-picar-carne-coronavirus-7964858>

A waiter who has spent 12 years in Spain – now 34 years old – is now in jail and accused of exalting terrorism and self-indoctrination. The coronavirus left him without his job as a waiter. During the lockdown, he swore allegiance to the Islamic State and was being given guidance out of Syria.

The detained jihadist recorded himself exploring the city and the subway during the pandemic lockdown.

Source: Alfonso Pérez Medina, “El yihadista detenido en Barcelona pretendía atentar con un dron durante un FC Barcelona – Real Madrid (The jihadist detained in Barcelona was planning an attempted drone attack during an FC Barcelona – Real Madrid match),” *La Sexta*, 13 May 2020. https://www.lasexta.com/noticias/nacional/yihadista-detenido-barcelona-pretendia-atentar-dron-barcelona-real-madrid_202005135ebc2b014ab42000011f0c7f.html

He told authorities his objective was a drone attack during a game. He didn't say when the attack would occur, and no drone was found.



Antifa in Spain

OE Watch Commentary: Antifa recently became a prominent news item in Spain. According to reportage, the center-right Vox party began to highlight the group and announced that it favored having it categorized by the Spanish government as a terrorist group. That the Spanish government would do so is extremely unlikely, which the leaders of Vox undoubtedly know. They also accused the leftist Podemos party of leading and giving political cover to Antifa. Podemos currently forms part of the Spanish government, the second Vice President being the Podemos Secretary General. According to the third accompanying reference, Podemos' leader Pablo Iglesias did not deny Vox's assertions and instead offered a Tweet admiring Antifa. The same reference is a long, semi-apology for Antifa that seems intended to present the organization as foreign and not particularly dangerous or competent. The fourth reference is of Antifa Madrid's Twitter presence, in which their web references are given. The Madrid Antifa web page, Madrid Antifascist Coordinator, has some orphaned pages, but also some current material including an elaborate contact page for aspirants. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“Vox’s parliamentary spokesperson, Iván Espinosa de los Monteros, believes that the Antifa movement is ‘led’ in Spain by Podemos.”

Source: E.I., “Vox cree que Podemos “lidera” y da “cobertura política” al movimiento Antifa en España (Vox [political party] believes that Podemos [political party] ‘leads’ and ‘gives political cover’ to the Antifa movement in Spain),” *El Imparcial*, 2 June 2020. <https://www.elimparcial.es/noticia/213668/nacional/vox-cree-que-podemos-lidera-y-da-cobertura-politica-al-movimiento-antifa-en-espana.html>

“Vox’s parliamentary spokesperson, Iván Espinosa de los Monteros, believes that the Antifa movement is ‘led’ in Spain by Podemos ...‘It is a global group that is in the whole world and that in Spain is led by Podemos’...”

Source: Editors, Vox ilegalizaría al movimiento antifascista como “organización terrorista (Vox would legalize the antifascist movement as a “terrorist organization),” *ABC Espana*, 1 June 2020. https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-ilegalizaria-movimiento-antifascista-como-organizacion-terrorista-202006011436_video.html

“Vox would be in favor of de-legalizing the antifascist movement in Spain under categorization as a ‘terrorist organization’...according to the spokesperson for Vox’s Committee for Political Action, Jorge Buxadé.”

Source: Víctor Lenore, “Antifa: la polémica punk que salpicó a España (Antifa: the polemic punk that is splattering Spain),” *Vozpopuli*, 6 May 2020 updated 4 June 2020. https://www.vozpopuli.com/altavoz/cultura/fascismo-trump-podemos-vox-punk_0_1361265104.html

“The Second Vice-President of Spain, Pablo Iglesias [leader of Podemos], was quick to enter into the polemic, writing a tweet with the word ‘Antifa’ and an image of the liberation of a Nazi concentration camp...”

The progressive world shifts within a species of schizophrenia: on one side, it dismisses the messages and proposals of the Radical right as weak and useless – a kind of intellectual junk, while on the other it proclaims the urgent need to prohibit or at a minimum isolate these messages, giving the sense that if the population listens to them, it will believe them, and will join them....

The antifascists don’t stand out for their political efficiency, either...”

Source: “Coordinadora Antifascista de Madrid (Madrid Antifascist Coordinator),” *Twitter*, accessed 4 June 2020. <https://twitter.com/antifamadrid?lang=en>; Coordinadora Antifascista de Madrid, “Quienes Somos (Who we are),” *Coordinadora Antifascista de Madrid*, accessed 5 June 2020. <http://madrid.antifa.es>

“http://madrid.antifa.es madrid.antifa@riseup.net

Madrid Joined May 2010...

Currently the Madrid Antifascist Coordinator is composed of the organizations that are detailed below...”

Organizations:

1.RASH Madrid

2.Izquierda Castellana

3.Bukaneros

4.Asociación de Cultura Popular Estrella Roja

5.Yesca

6.Ciempozuelos Antifascista

7.Kolectivo 103 Lucero...”



China Sees Itself Widening the Gap with the United States in 6G Technology

OE Watch Commentary: With the rollout of 5G technology now underway and the United States cracking down on Huawei, China has been increasingly vocal about its determination to push forward with its plans to be the global leader in 6G technology one day. The accompanying two articles, both from the *Global Times*, discuss the viewpoints of some Chinese telecom industry analysts.

Ma Jihua, a veteran telecom analyst, argues that repeated attacks by the United States on Huawei are clear signs that China cannot afford to lose its race in 6G. He further describes 6G as a technology that will become the next decade's battlefield as countries want to take the lead and have a strong voice in the telecom market of the future. According to Ma, China's research in 6G "is more advanced than 5G due to a large and very sophisticated talent base, solid technical experience, and strong application demand." He explains that it will be "practically impossible for the US to leapfrog China in 6G" because of "the generational progress of telecommunication technologies" being based on advancement of technologies, application of technologies, and scales of application.

Another Chinese telecom industry analyst, Xiang Ligang, laid out his vision for a 6G roadmap. First, visions of 6G will come about by 2023. By 2026, technology standards will be set. By 2028, relevant technology will begin to launch. Finally, by 2030, commercial use of the network will begin.

According to Fu Liang, a Beijing-based telecom industry expert, the communications network of the future, including 6G, "will break the Internet centralization structure and prevent one company or companies from one government from establishing dominance."

The three telecom operators (China Telecom, China Unicom and China Mobile) in China have tripled their investment in 5G over the past year. Meanwhile, according to the second article, the coronavirus epidemic has stimulated China's policy support for 5G, along with increasing demand for a faster Internet to facilitate telecommuting, online education, and live streaming.

While 5G and its predecessors tend to be associated with cellular technology, *Global Times* states that 6G will mostly be used in areas that include the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, and smart factories. While neither article mentions potential military applications, 6G could also be a game-changer for military operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Chu Daye and Ma Jingjing, "Huawei Confirms Early-Stage Investment in Futuristic Technology," *Global Times*, 31 May 2020. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1190092.shtml>

Huawei Confirms Early-Stage Investment in Futuristic Technology

Ma Jihua, a veteran industry analyst, told the Global Times on Sunday that the repeated attacks by the US on Huawei are clear signs that China could not afford to lose its race in 6G.

"The generational progress of telecommunication technologies is based on advancement of technologies, application of technologies and scales of application," Ma said. "Given the concept that 6G will morph out of 5G, it would be practically impossible for the US to leapfrog China in 6G."

The US' repeated crackdowns on Huawei also hold important lessons -- that China cannot afford to lose the 6G race, which is why companies are simultaneously researching 6G while rolling out 5G, experts said.

Xiang Ligang, a veteran industry analyst, gave a roadmap of 6G development in China. There will be visions of 6G by 2023, technological standards will be set by 2026, the launch of relevant technology will take place by 2028 and preliminary commercial use of the network will begin by 2030.

Huawei said that 6G will be mainly used in sectors including the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles and smart factories.

Source: Zhang Dan, "China Ramping Up Research into 6G," *Global Times*, 17 May 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1188617.shtml>

China Ramping Up Research into 6G," Global Times, 17 May 2020

Ma Jihua, a veteran industry analyst, told the Global Times on Sunday that 6G will become the next decade's battlefield as countries all want to take the lead and have a strong voice in the telecoms market of the future.

Fu Liang, a Beijing-based telecom industry expert, told the Global Times on Sunday that the communications network of the future, including 6G, will break the internet centralization structure and prevent one company or companies from one government from establishing dominance.

"...China's 6G research is more advanced than 5G due to a large and very sophisticated talent base, solid technical experience and strong application demand," Ma noted.

"The gap is widening, whether in the fiber-optic broadband technology or in mobile networks... If China uses a 'heavy machine gun' while the US holds a bow and arrow on the 6G battlefield 10 years from now, there won't be a competition between the two in the telecoms sector," he said.

Ma said that the three Chinese telecom operators have tripled their investment in 5G over the past year. The coronavirus epidemic has stimulated China's policy support for 5G, along with consumers' increasing demand for a faster internet during telecommuting, online education and livestreaming.



China: Will COVID-19 Slow Military Modernization?

OE Watch Commentary: In May, representatives of China's government and military convened at the 13th National People's Congress (China's national legislature), where they discussed ongoing military reforms and COVID-19. The first accompanying article from *Jiefangjun Bao*, reminds readers what had been stated in 2017 during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, that 2020 is the year in which China expects to achieve its goal of "building the national defense and the military," while also constructing a "solid foundation" that will ensure a "first-rate military in the world." This is the year that the army expects to have completely achieved "mechanization" with major progress made in "informationization," while significantly improving its "strategic capability."

The article describes the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic as having seriously challenged the military. For example, it states that the control and prevention of the epidemic has been a "major test" for the Joint Logistics Support Force, which had undergone reforms that were based on the growing requirements of joint operations, joint training, and joint support.

Meanwhile, Xi Jinping continues to push the military to the forefront of the battle against COVID-19, while also stressing the need to strengthen combat training, being highly responsive, and safeguarding national sovereignty, security, economic development, and strategic stability. China's English-language state-sponsored media sources, such as the second and third accompanying article extracts from *China Daily* and *Xinhua* respectively, reported widely on Xi's attendance at the 26 May event, where, during a meeting, he stressed the need to up the military's involvement in multi-functional roles. According to the articles, some of these roles include: gearing up combat preparation, conducting battle drills in a flexible manner, developing plans for the next five years in a way that will maximize the defense budget, "accelerating capacity building on biosecurity defense, supporting social development, and offering assistance to help alleviate poverty." All the while, Xi urged the PLA to achieve its goals while also maintaining "effective epidemic control on a regular basis." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**



Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

Source: Palácio do Planalto via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xi_Jinping#/media/File:Xi_Jinping_2019.jpg, CC BY 2.0

“In a time where epidemic prevention and control is on one hand and combat capacity building is on the other, achieving the goals on time is not optional. It is mandatory.”

Source: Chen Guoquan, "Military Representatives Engage in Spirited Discussions on Reforms to Strengthen the Military: Solving Development Difficulties, Accelerating Development Progress," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 26 May 2020. http://www.81.cn/2020zt/2020-05/26/content_9821916.htm

Military Representatives Engage in Spirited Discussions on Reforms to Strengthen the Military: Solving Development Difficulties, Accelerating Development Progress

“With regard to the Army, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forth that by 2020, mechanization was to be achieved, informationization was to have made significant progress, and strategic capability was to have greatly improved. Whether this goal can be accomplished on time depends on whether or not the strategic deployment and national defense can be advanced and completed on time.” Many military representatives said that efforts to prevent and control the coronavirus epidemic should not slacken and that building combat effectiveness cannot be relaxed for a moment. In a time where epidemic prevention and control is on one hand and combat capacity building is on another hand, achieving the goals on time is not optional. It is mandatory.

The prevention and control of the epidemic has been a major test that demonstrated the effectiveness of the Joint Logistics Support Force. In joining the main battlefield of combatting the epidemic in Wuhan, Hubei, the Joint Logistics Support Force resolutely acted as the guardian of the defenders of the people's safety and health, successfully withstanding the severe test.



Continued: China: Will COVID-19 Slow Military Modernization?

Source: Huang Panyue, “Xi Urges Military Combat Readiness,” *China Daily*, 27 May 2020. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-05/27/content_9822805.htm

Xi Urges Military Combat Readiness

Effectiveness of national defense system reforms tested by outbreak

... the novel coronavirus outbreak has had a profound effect on the world situation and China’s security and development. Therefore, he [Xi Jinping] said, the Chinese military must stick to bottom-line thinking, comprehensively strengthen combat training, respond effectively and in a timely way to sophisticated scenarios and firmly safeguard national sovereignty, security, development interests and its strategic stability.

... gear up combat preparation and conduct battle drills in a flexible manner.

Xi also ordered the military to produce sound plans for its development in the coming five years. It should make detailed and accurate calculations on how to spend the defense budget to make sure every expenditure is worth making.

Moreover, he requested that troops support economic and social development and offer assistance to poverty alleviation work.

Source: “Xi Emphasizes Strengthening National Defense, Armed Forces,” *Xinhua*, 27 May 2020. http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/2018/tpxw/202005/t20200527_800207496.html

Xi Emphasizes Strengthening National Defense, Armed Forces

Chinese President Xi Jinping Tuesday stressed ... accelerating capacity building on biosecurity defense, among others.

Xi demanded reform and innovation to address new situations and problems exposed in the epidemic and ordered accelerating the research and development on COVID-19 drugs and vaccines by tapping the advantages of military medical research.

He also stressed scientific innovation on national defense and training of high-caliber professional military personnel.

Noting that this year marks the end of the 13th five-year plan for military development, Xi said extraordinary measures must be taken to overcome the impact of the epidemic to ensure major tasks on the military building are achieved.

CLICK ON AN ISSUE TO DOWNLOAD!



OEWATCH

Check out back issues of FMSO’s Operational Environment WATCH dating back to 2011. They provide 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.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/p/oe-watch-issues>



Integrated-Strike Battalions in China's Vision of Future Warfare

OE Watch Commentary: The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been undergoing major reorganization since 2015. As part of that effort, Chinese forces have been striving to increase joint capability with the ultimate goal of building a fully integrated "intelligentized" force. Another important goal is to achieve more rapid-decision making capability by delegating responsibility down to the lower levels. China's vision of future warfare also includes integrated strike battalions which, according to the accompanying excerpt from the official newspaper of the PLA, "emphasize precision operations, intelligent collaboration, strategic decision-making, campaign level command, and highly integrated tactical actions and prominently featured small-scale precision operations."

The article offers some noteworthy points on these so-called new type precision fighting units, which the author refers to as battalion-level units of high-tech services and arms. According to the article, "integrated-strike battalions" are fully self-contained with their own distinct features, which include the following:

1. They are modular units organized into the system of joint operations forces, which allow for rapid re-grouping capability.
2. They can be used autonomously by putting together the basic elements of task planning, integrated command and control, battlefield protection and operational support, which creates a precision strike chain.
3. They can be used at any time because of their comprehensive integration of precision strike weapons, combined elements of operation, and optimization and restructuring of forces, which allows for quicker reaction time.
4. Through the network information system and information fusion support they can achieve "optimized grouping, intelligent collaboration, and distributed operations," between the fighting unit and between the services' combat force.

Currently, the authors' vision is only in the conceptual phase. However, what is described fits well into China's overall vision of achieving superiority and victory in a battle." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The so-called integrated-strike battalions are, precisely, tactical units [fendui] that can relatively perform precision operations tasks independently, with the backing of the joint operations system.”

Source: Zhao Zhonggi and Nan Dangshe, "Create New Type of Precision Fighting Units," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 12 May 2020. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-05/12/content_261231.htm

Create New Type of Precision Fighting Units

Intelligentized warfare emphasizes precision operations, intelligent collaboration, strategic decision-making, campaign-level command, and highly integrated tactical actions and prominently featured small-scale precision operations.

Currently, foreign armed forces are pushing for the combat concepts of joint all-domain operations, joint all-domain control, and multi-domain operations being into the operational doctrines. The basis of application is a new type of tradition transcending fighting units as well.

... By letting small units get involved in major collaborative efforts, small forces accomplish major tasks, and small actions achieve major goals, and diversified military operations of varying scales are carried out flexibly.

The so-called integrated-strike battalions are, precisely, tactical units [fendui] that can relatively perform precision operations tasks independently, with the backing of the joint operations system...

As the new type of precision fighting units, integrated battalions have their distinct features:

1. Plug-and-play: as the basic tactical modules for precision strikes in joint operations, they are organized into the system of joint operations forces in a modular form to bring about rapid regrouping and need-based organization of combat forces, so as to flexibly perform the task of precision strike operations.

2. They can be used autonomously. The basic elements of task planning, integrated command and control, battlefield protection, and operational support are put together to create a precision strike chain that is effectively geared toward intense attack and defense confrontations and that enables autonomous completion of precision firepower strikes.

3. They can be used at any time. Comprehensive integration of new model precision strike weapons, combination of operations elements, and optimization and restructuring of forces are achieved so reaction time is quicker, and battle disposition is more flexible.

4. Distribution for joint use: by way of the network information system and information fusion support, optimized grouping, intelligent collaboration, and distributed operations are achieved between fighting units and between the combat forces of the services, to bring the maximum combat effectiveness into play.



Breakthrough in Growing Crops on China's South China Sea Outposts

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese media recently announced a breakthrough in cultivating crops on China's island and reef outposts in the South China Sea. The new plot for vegetables is on Woody Island, the seat of the Sansha Prefecture that covers all of the South China Sea and the most densely populated of the islands and reefs.

Chinese history includes examples of cultivating crops at military outposts for logistical and political reasons as early as the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE – 9 CE). This “Tuntian System” [屯田制] employed farmers, soldiers, and merchants to help settle border areas while providing fresh food to military outposts. These agricultural communities sprung up around the watchtowers of border fortifications protecting China from invasions from the North and settling portions of Xinjiang in the west.

In more modern times, the PLA was regarded as a “productive force” and expected to engage in civilian works projects and agriculture. These tasks have been decreased to make room for the demands of training for modern warfare, but it is common to see small garden plots supporting military bases.

In the South China Sea, developing fresh sources of vegetables has a more directly significant role. The conditions at these outposts and their distance from the mainland has led to a higher incidence of various illnesses. Some are the result of the harsh environment but others are related to poor diet, which can be addressed through access fresh produce. As noted in the accompanying article, the islands of the Paracels (the archipelago in the northern half of the South China Sea), have long relied entirely on food shipped in from the mainland.

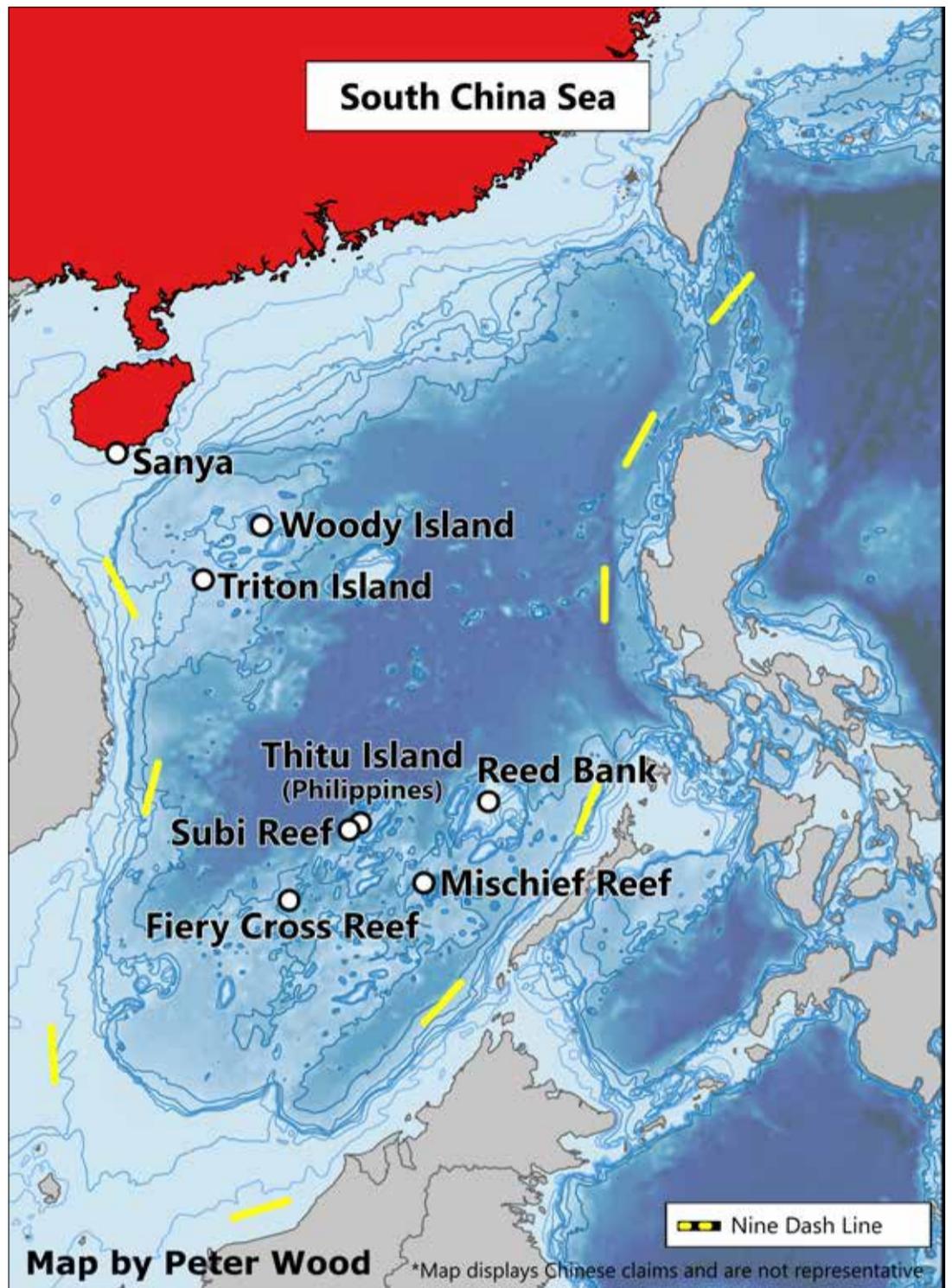
However, these outposts are tiny dots in a vast space: the Sansha prefecture established in July 2012 and which covers all of China's claims in the South China Sea, has only 1,800 residents (not including military personnel) in 2 million square kilometers. Supplying these islands and reefs—some hundreds of kilometers apart—is a real challenge.

According to a garrison member, due to the strong sunlight, the vegetables grow quickly and each half mu (a Chinese unit of measurement), or 333 square meters, yields 750kg of vegetables.

Test cultivation of vegetables on Woody Island began in 2007, and the various garrisons subsequently built small greenhouses on Duncan Island [琛航岛] and other islands. The breakthrough is in a mix of additives that allow the island sea sand to be used directly, rather than importing soil from the mainland.

While the addition of fresh vegetables and a small reduction in logistics support is certainly a benefit, there are also legal implications that may be a consideration for growing the crops. Article 121 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for example, includes the line that “Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.” Growing the crops may help cement China's legal claims.

In April, the Chinese State Council further formalized its administrative rule over the South China Sea, establishing the Xisha (Paracel) [西沙岛礁] and Nansha (Spratley) Districts under the Sansha Prefecture. Xisha is administered from Woody Island [永兴岛] and Nansha from Fiery Cross Reef [永暑礁]. Tourism has been opened to Woody Island in another bid to formalize China's presence on these islands. If possession is nine-tenths of the law, then increasing the capacity to feed the population occupying these islands and reefs will be an important step in China's plan to cement control over its claims in the South China Sea. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**





Continued: Breakthrough in Growing Crops on China's South China Sea Outposts

“The cultivation test was a success, hopefully resolving our shortages of fresh vegetables for military personnel and civilians on the island.”

Source: “Zhang Qingbao [张庆宝], Chen Zhufei [陈竹飞], “海军西沙某水警区向科技要保障力, 着力破解岛礁大面积种植绿化难题 (Navy Maritime Garrison Looks to Science and Technology to Improve Support, Crack the Largescale greenification problem),” *PLA Daily*, 6 June 2020. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2020-06/06/content_263145.htm

In late May, PLA personnel of the maritime garrison had their first successful harvest of cabbages, bok choy and other vegetables in a test field along the white beach of Sansha City on Woody Island [永兴岛].

The leaders of the maritime garrison told reporters: “the cultivation test was a success, hopefully resolving our shortages of fresh vegetables for military personnel and civilians on the island.”

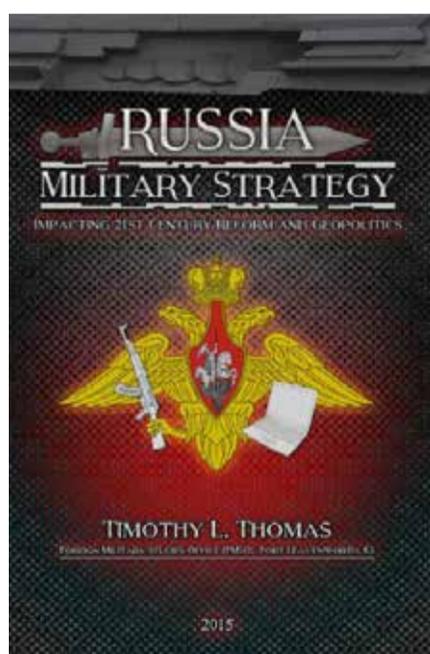
The islands and reefs of the Paracels’ high salinity, humidity and temperatures have meant that access to fresh vegetables has been a major problem for military personnel. Since the 1970s those stationed there have essentially relied on supplies shipped in.

“In the past, sea weed, glass noodles, tofu skin or pumpkin were the main dishes for meals in the Paracels. Since personnel lack access to fresh vegetables, without nutritional supplements they are vulnerable to various ulcers and related illnesses.

On Triton Island [中建岛], Master Sergeant Class 3 Qiu Hua [邱华], who has served as part of the island garrison for more than 20 years, explained, to improve the environmental conditions on the islands personnel have brought soil from the mainland. While they have grown Chinese spinach, peppers and other vegetables, the yields were not particularly great.

Sand on the reefs in the Paracels is unlike that in the desert; the granules are large and contain high levels of salt and is alkaline. After more than four months of efforts, the scientific research team as able to make a breakthrough in turning a beach into a usable field.

In early April, working under the guidance of the research team, the garrison personnel transformed the beach into a form suitable for cultivating vegetables. Mixing a plant fiber material with sea sand, combined with watering and addition of fertilizer, can achieve similar results to normal soil.



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.

DOWNLOAD AT:

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195605/download>



China Tests Emergency Support Capabilities Along its Southern Border

OE Watch Commentary: China's armed forces have been making improvements to their logistical resupply capabilities, establishing the Logistic Support Department in 2016, improving equipment, and integrating civilian assets (see "74th Group Army Conducts Mobilization Exercise with Roll-on Roll-off Ships" in this issue). An under-appreciated aspect of this development is the creation of integrated support networks for China's remote outposts, including along its mountainous southern borders with India, Nepal, and Bhutan.

This accompanying excerpted article details a new system being trialed to improve logistical supply for some of China's most remote border outposts. The Kunmujia Sentry post [昆木加哨所] near the China-Nepal border is at an altitude of 4,900m. Kunmujia is part of the Shigatse Military District [日喀则军区] that extends along most of China's borders with Nepal, and Bhutan, as well as a portion of India between the two.



Shigatse Prefecture.

Source: Boqiang Liao, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shigatse_Prefecture.jpg, CC BY-SA

Kunmujia's remoteness makes logistic resupply difficult, so in recent years the outpost has installed wind and solar energy generation equipment, and connected it to the broader network of border defense outposts with fiber optic cables. Troops stationed in the area have suffered from severe altitude sickness and related illness requiring the creation of special recuperation facilities for rotating troops. The new support model detailed in the article allows each outpost to have a clear idea of what equipment or supplies other units nearby have. This means that if they can request something from a neighboring unit, it will save time getting it from headquarters. At the same time, it allows for more efficient deliveries from central depots.

These developments are even more important given recent events: On 15 June, Chinese and Indian forces along the border in the Galwan Valley (further to the west in the Aksai Chin region) skirmished, resulting in casualties on both sides. The spokesperson for the Chinese Western Military District issued a statement demanding that India "restrain its front-line troops and immediately stop all provocations." The Kunmujia post itself is relatively close to Doklam [洞朗], which sits between India, China and Bhutan and was the site of a standoff between Indian and Chinese forces in 2017.

China's success in its 1962 border war with India is sometimes credited to its extensive logistics preparations, roadbuilding, and establishment of caches of supplies. India has also expanded its road-building program but more slowly.

Elsewhere in China, Joint Logistic Support Force units have been depicted in Chinese media making greater use of digital supply tracking systems or semi-automated warehouses that allow units to order palletized supplies for a unit through a digital system. While this article deals specifically with emergency supplies such as oxygen tanks, as highlighted by the article, the new logistical support model appears to have achieved major successes throughout the Tibet Military District. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“Since the beginning of this year, the time required to provide support to the front-line troops in the Tibet Military Region has been decreased, the total distance traveled by transports has been significantly reduced, and the utilization rate of support resources has been increased by 20%.”



Continued: China Tests Emergency Support Capabilities Along its Southern Border

Source: “探索建立区域统筹型保障网络体系 --西藏军区：雪域边关实现应急物资随缺随补 (Learning How to Build a Regional Integrated Support Network—Xizang Military District: System Snowy Border Crossing Resupplied as Needed),” *PLA Daily* [解放军报], 4 June 2020. military.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0604/c1011-31735239.html

In mid-May, when the oxygen-producing equipment of a border guard regiment under the Tibet Military District [西藏军区] failed, the leaders of the unit deployed medical resources from friendly and neighboring units in the near vicinity, sending the maintenance equipment to the company in only four hours. The Tibet Military District is testing an integrated regional support network system to achieve the rapid deployment of emergency supplies.

The leader of the Military District support department explained that Tibet has many border defense points, a long border, vast area, and many points, long lines, wide areas, remote points to the superiors to claim materials cycle is longer, transport inconvenience, in the event of heavy snow-covered mountains, emergency supplies are difficult to achieve with the shortage. To this end, the military district is testing an integrated regional support network system, connecting units both vertically and horizontally (that is, between lower and higher echelons and also laterally between units) rather than simply vertically. In this new model, when remote locations encounter shortages of emergency supplies, they can be supplemented by supplies from neighboring units.

The military district organs have carried out significant research and explored new support models, organized the implementation of joint reserves of materials for different forces in the same region, and the operational organs have coordinated delivery of supplies according to the specific needs of different locations. At the same time, they also organized at all levels to increase funding, forming a technical team to ensure adequate equipment support for the winter road-clearing teams to create a stable emergency support network.

On the “support map” of the snowy high plateau, the advantages of the new support model are increasingly apparent: the most remote Kunmuja outpost in the military region is more than 200 kilometers away from the regiment headquarters, but only a few tens of kilometers from another friendly unit. In the past the outpost was take 1 to 2 days to receive supplies directly from headquarters. Now, (using the new system) it only takes 2 to 3 hours to get supplies from the neighboring units.

...
Since the beginning of this year, the time required to provide support to the front-line troops in the Tibet Military Region has been decreased, the total distance travelled by transports has been significantly reduced, and the utilization rate of support resources has been increased by 20%.



The RED DIAMOND is the Army's leading e-journal highlighting current threats in the Operational Environment.

It is published by TRADOC G-2 OEE ACE Threats Integration and is posted at:

<https://atn.army.mil/tradoc-g2/operational-environment-publications/red-diamond-newsletter>



74th Group Army Conducts Mobilization Exercise with Roll-on Roll-off Ships

OE Watch Commentary: In early June, elements of a heavy combined arms brigade [重合成旅] completed an exercise involving loading a civilian Roll-on, Roll-off ship (Ro-Ro). The accompanying excerpt is a partial transcript from a television report on the exercise.

The ship involved in the exercise, the Changdalong [长达隆], is a 20,000-ton car carrier. It is 140.5 m long and 24.4m wide, has 8 decks and can typically accommodate 2,000 cars. Homeported in Shenzhen, the Changdalong and its sister ship are operated by Sinotrans&CSC [中国外运长航集团], China's largest logistics company. In 2017 SinoTrans offered the ships for use by the PLA, which agreed to subsidize them and pay for refitting to make them adequate for military use.

Recent Chinese laws have sought to formalize the responsibilities for civilian transport companies support for the PLA. Previous Chinese media reporting on exercises involving the Changdalong, for example, cited the *National Defense Transport Law* [中华人民共和国国防交通法] (2016) which, in Article 36 notes that "The state, with large and medium-size transportation enterprises as the main support, organizes and builds strategic delivery support forces...Enterprises that undertake strategic delivery support tasks are responsible for organizing personnel and equipment...Carrying out necessary training and exercises and improving their ability to carry out strategic delivery tasks."

Over the past few years, the PLA has adopted a combined arms brigade model across most of the force, with light, medium and heavy brigades with varying equipment types. Video of the exercise depicted Type 96 main battle tanks, Type 63 APCs and Type 86G infantry fighting vehicles being loaded. As noted in the excerpt below, even in a massive ship, the size and weight of the vehicles poses many challenges in terms of maintaining communication between the loading crew and vehicle drivers and keeping the ship balanced.

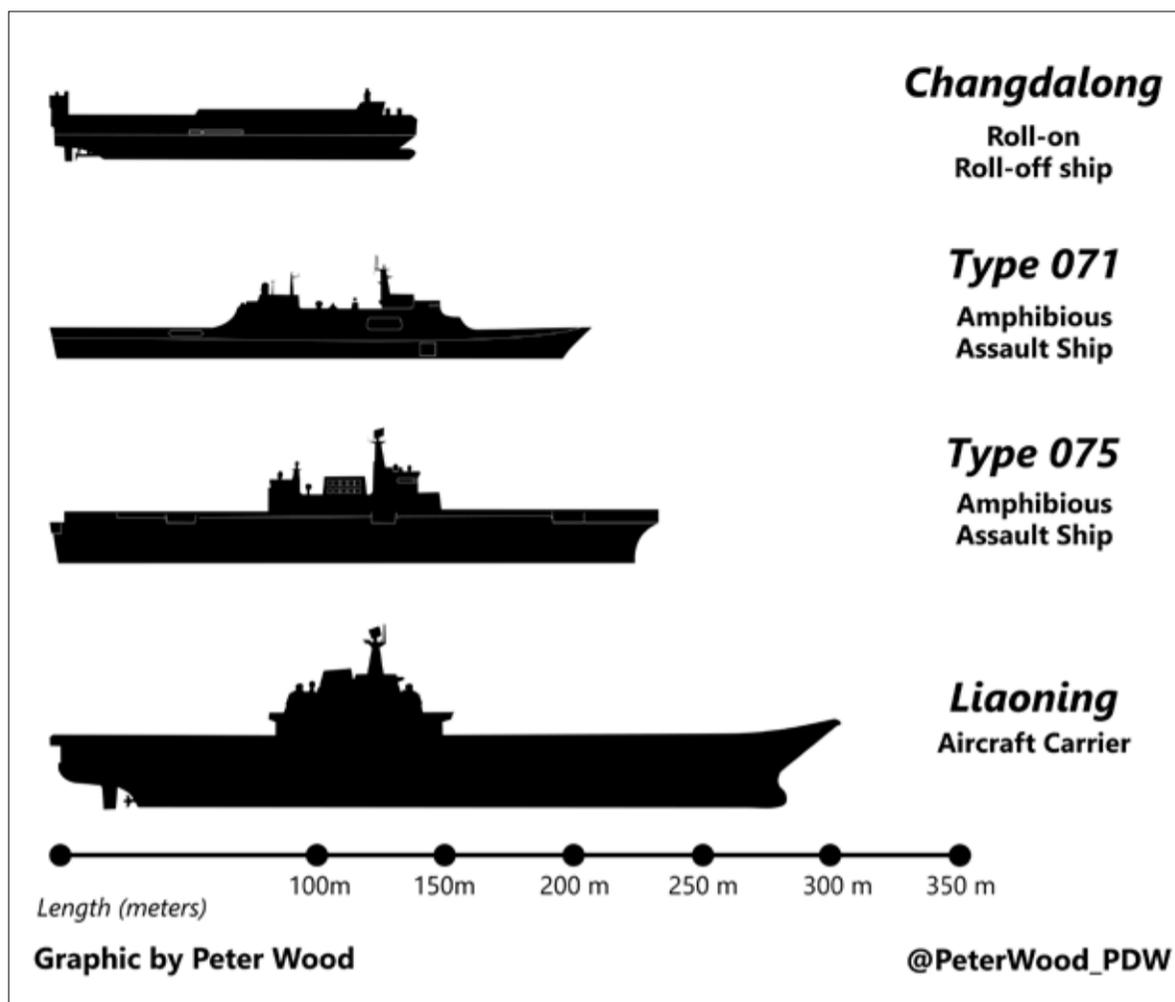
Additional reporting on the exercise noted that the civilian crew not only worked with the PLA unit on embarkation and disembarkation procedures but also tested damage control while at sea.

This unit has reportedly conducted ten such exercises in the past few years, reflecting the importance of this particular mission. The heavy combined arms brigade is subordinate to the 74th Group Army headquartered in Huizhou [惠州], Guangdong province. It falls under the Southern Theater Command, with responsibility for protecting Chinese interests in the South China Sea and projecting power in that theater during a conflict. It would also play a role in any contingency involving Taiwan.

Public analyses of a conflict between Taiwan and the mainland envision a massive shift of military equipment across the Strait, making amphibious and transportation exercises such as this one an important part of preparation for that contingency. While the Changdalong has significant carrying capacity, it should be noted that it is limited by its requirement for having adequate dock facilities to offload vehicles. Other ships such as the Type 071 or Type 075 amphibious assault ships (see graphic below) have well-decks that allow direct deployment of amphibious vehicles.

A more likely scenario is that the ships will be used to transport vehicles to Chinese bases overseas such as the one in Djibouti, which hosts a contingent of troops from the PLA Navy Marine Corps.

In recent years the PLA has expanded the scope of its logistics exercises, holding its largest ever for example in 2018. While the Changdalong itself is only one component of the sealift capacity the PLA is developing, these are technically complex exercises of capabilities that the PLA needs and their frequency and realism appears to be increasing. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**





Continued: 74th Group Army Conducts Mobilization Exercise with Roll-on Roll-off Ships

“Through this civilian ship loading and unloading test drill, commanders at all levels have mastered the organization procedures and methods for using civilian transport ships, created standard loading and unloading procedures for a heavy combined arms brigade to use civilian ships, and laying a solid foundation for our participation in a joint exercise”

-- Fu Huaguo [付华国], deputy chief of staff in an unidentified brigade of the 74th Group Army

Source: “军地联合 完成重装跨海投送 (Military Civil Cooperative Operation: Sea Lift of Heavy Equipment),” *Morning Report on Defense* [国防军事早报], 7 June 2020. http://www.js7tv.cn/video/202006_219448.html

Narrator: At the port, dozens of tanks and other military equipment are ready to be loaded in accordance with the loading plan. During loading, the tank needs to enter the ship’s hold by reversing, which requires the pilot to operate strictly in accordance with the command of the guiding team. If you are a little careless, there is a risk of an accident.

Tang Geyong [唐鸽勇], one of the guides for the tanks: “Due to the width of our tank and the narrowness of the aisles, the drivers have very limited lines of sight. When the tank enters the ship’s hold it gets really loud.”

Narrator: In order to improve the loading efficiency, the vehicles are pre-positioned according to the capacity of each deck. Various types of heavy equipment are loaded in sequence.

Jin Chengwei [金成伟] Captain of the Changdalong: “When loading we have to pay attention to the balance of the ship because these armored vehicles are relatively heavy. When bringing them aboard we have to distribute them on both sides as much as possible, since loading a single side could cause the ship to list, which is dangerous.”

Narrator: At sea, the wind and waves make the ship rock 20-30 degrees. In order to ensure the safety of the cabin equipment during the voyage, before the ship offshore, officers and soldiers to tie down and reinforce all equipment.

...

Narrator: The brigade also organized navigational adaptation training, contingency training, etc., to ensure that heavy equipment transport is more efficient and safer.

Fu Huaguo [付华国], deputy chief of staff in an unidentified brigade of the 74th Group Army noted: “Through this civilian ship loading and unloading test drill, commanders at all levels have mastered the organization procedures and methods for using civilian transport ships, created standard loading and unloading procedures for a heavy combined arms brigade to use civilian ships, and laying a solid foundation for our participation in a joint exercise”



Chinese Flying Boat Enters Next Stage of Development

OE Watch Commentary: China’s flying boat, the AG600, will begin open ocean testing later this year. The aircraft is an interesting case study for Chinese aviation development. Despite the relative simplicity of the design, and clear utility for government operators, its development has taken more than a decade. The accompanying passage from China’s *Economic Daily* discusses the AG600.

Designed by Chinese state aircraft company AVIC and manufactured by China Aviation Industry General Aircraft (CAIGA), a producer of business jets and utility aircraft, the aircraft began development in 2009.

AG600 Development Timeline		
2009	June	Project Approved
	September 5	Work officially begins
2012		Preliminary Design Completed
2014		Detailed design completed; trial production begun
2015		Large airframe components completed, parts assembly completed
2016	23 July	Prototype shown at the Zhuhai Airshow
2017	24 December	First test flight (ground takeoff/landing)
2018	24 January	Second Test Flight (ground takeoff/landing)
2018	26 January	Third Test Flight (ground takeoff/landing)
2018	24 July	First Test Flight (water takeoff)
2019		Additional testing and manufacture of additional prototypes
Late 2020 (planned)		First Open Sea Test
2023 (planned)		Mass production

With four WJ-6 turboprop engines, it has a crew of three and has a range of over 4,500km. It can carry up to 50 passengers, allowing it to act in a search and rescue capacity. At this stage in development it has now accumulated 172 flights and 308 flight hours. Beginning open-sea tests later this year means that major hurdles have been overcome and the airplane is entering one of the final stages of development.

The project’s lead designer is Huang Lingcai [黄领才]. A dedicated test facility was set up at Zhanghe Reservoir outside Jingmen [荆门], Hubei, for the July 2018 phase, which included water takeoff. The open-ocean phase scheduled for later this year will likely be better indication of the aircraft’s performance in real-world conditions.

The AG600’s relatively slow development is indicative of some of the broader challenges facing China’s aviation industry. China is striving to achieve what is called “original innovation”—self-developed breakthroughs in technologies that do not rely on imitation of work from abroad. At the same time it is attempting to “on-shore” or indigenize as much industrial capacity as possible. As sometimes reluctantly admitted by Chinese scientists and engineers, however, much of the countries’ new technologies or systems remain reliant on foreign-developed design concepts or key components. The C919,

for example, is touted as China’s first successful passenger aircraft but has been plagued by delays and uses imported engines. Other more successful designs such as the Y-20 transport aircraft or KJ-200 early warning aircraft have received significant input from foreign design firms, particularly Ukraine.

While English-language reporting from official Chinese news sources make no mention of its military applications, the plane is mentioned multiple times in Chinese sources as an exemplar of Military-Civil Fusion—that is it benefits from collaboration between military and civilian research institutes and has dual-use applications. The Chinese Coast Guard is also a likely customer. Chinese fishing boats now operate globally, but despite a major building program (and transfer of old PLA Navy ships), the Chinese Coast Guard has somewhat limited capabilities in China’s own waters. It operates Z-9 helicopters and Y-12 light transports for some duties, but these have limited range and cannot carry out the sorts of rescue missions the AG600 would be capable of. It also has the ability to scoop up water for firefighting missions.

While not stated in official reporting on the aircraft, it is possible that it will be adopted by the PLA Navy. PLA Naval Aviation has for many years operated several Q-6 flying boats out of Qingdao. The Q-6 is an improved variant of the Beriev-6 maritime patrol aircraft. In recent years China has fielded a much more modern dedicated ASW aircraft, the KQ-200 (GX-6), based on the Y-9 transport aircraft. Earlier this year these aircraft reportedly deployed to Fiery Cross Reef [永暑礁] in the South China Sea. Logistic resupply remains an important issue for China’s far-flung outposts, and the AG600 could likely serve in this capacity, ferrying personnel and supplies more efficiently and rapidly than ships. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“China’s independently-developed...AG600 aircraft will begin major sea flight testing in the second half of this year at Qingdao.”



Continued: Chinese Flying Boat Enters Next Stage of Development



AG-600 at Airshow China 2016.

Source: Alert5 via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AG-600_at_Airshow_China_2016_\(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AG-600_at_Airshow_China_2016_(cropped).jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0

Source: “‘鲲龙’AG600将在青岛开展海上飞行试验” (‘Kunlong’AG600 Will Conduct Sea Test Flight in Qingdao),” *Economic Daily* [经济日报], 24 May 2020. http://www.xinhuanet.com/local/2020-05/24/c_1126024531.htm

Recently, China Aviation Industry Corporation (AVIC) officially announced that China’s independently-developed large-scale fire extinguishing/water rescue amphibious “Kunlong” AG600 aircraft will begin major sea flight testing in the second half of this year at Qingdao. This phase of testing follows successful land and sea takeoff tests in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

According to reports, the AG600 aircraft will fully explore the sea test flight technology and test methods, verify the aircraft’s hydrodynamic performance and surface control characteristics, check the operation of the aircraft’s systems in the marine environment, and collect sea flight data for subsequent development. At the same time the aircraft will be evaluated for corrosion problems brought on by the high salinity and high humidity environment of the ocean.

So far, the AG600 has officially begun pre-flight preparations (for the ocean test flight) with a total of 308 hours of flight time over 172 flights. The various routes, airspace and take-off and landing areas for the test flight are being selected, and safety precaution measures in the event of an emergency are being put into place.



The Philippines: Abu Sayyaf Factions and Coronavirus Cause Alarm

OE Watch Commentary: The Philippines army has primarily combated Abu Sayyaf in the southern Mindanao island of Sulu. Until recently, the main factions there were not united, but there are signs this may be changing. According to the excerpted article from a local news source, two Abu Sayyaf factions have united. This also fulfills the goal of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to create one so-called “East Asia Province” comprising Filipino fighters.

In particular, the article points to a battle in April in which two Abu Sayyaf leaders, Radullan Sahiron and Hatib Sawadjaan, killed 11 soldiers and injured 14 others. This corroborated that there was growing alignment and recruitment of Abu Sayyaf members now under the banner of ISIS. A potential result of the two factions’ cooperation was believed to be that they might stage a high-profile operation similar to that which ISIS-loyal militants in Marawi, Philippines attempted in 2017 when they occupied that city for several months.



President Rodrigo R. Duterte salutes a soldier slain in an Abu Sayyaf encounter in Sulu.
Source: Ray Baniquet via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Rodrigo_R._Duterte_salutes_a_soldier_slain_in_an_Abu_Sayyaf_encounter_in_Sulu_04.jpg, Public Domain

At the same time, the Philippines army attempted to

dispel concerns about impending attacks. The article quotes an army spokesman, who stated that the rumors about more attacks were only intended to cause confusion at a time when Philippines citizens were already worried about the threat from the coronavirus. Moreover, he warned that videos circulating online from Abu Sayyaf were from 2017 but were misrepresented as being from recent confrontations. Thus, the current threat from Abu Sayyaf is not as severe as some people have made it out to be, especially in their online communications.

Furthermore, the army has assured the people that it is capable of combatting Abu Sayyaf and addressing the coronavirus in a coordinated manner. The 11th Infantry Division spokesman in Sulu, for example, was quoted in the article as stating that Abu Sayyaf and the coronavirus were considered equally deadly threats and there was no room for complacency regarding either. In order to secure peace, the 11th Infantry Division has also added countering coronavirus to its usual counter-terrorism responsibilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The recent firefight in the province, which pitted Army troops against fighters under two of the most senior and notorious terrorist leaders in Sulu, seems to support the assertion that ISIS may have completed its goal to recruit the entire ASG under its wings.”

Source: “War on Two Fronts,” *Businessmirror.com.ph*, 25 April 2020. <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/04/25/war-on-2-fronts/>

The recent firefight in the province, which pitted Army troops against fighters under two of the most senior and notorious terrorist leaders in Sulu, seems to support the assertion that IS may have completed its goal to recruit the entire ASG under its wings. Last week’s battle, where 11 soldiers were killed and 14 others wounded, was waged on the other side by around 40 combined fighters under Radullan Sahiron, the “emir” of the ASG, and Hatib Hadian Sawadjaan, leader of the IS in Mindanao. For Sahiron and Sawadjaan to collaborate and work together, along with their men, is seen as a “worrisome” development in the government’s effort to counter the IS’s recruitment of local members and stop its terrorist activities in the country.

Before the Marawi attack, a falling out between Sahiron and Hapilon was reported, with Hapilon having been booted out of the ASG because of his decision to join the IS and become its leader in Southeast Asia. The gunbattle between soldiers and the combined group of Sahiron and Sawadjaan was followed by reports, which circulated through messaging and in the form of videos of more impending attacks by the IS, but which were dismissed as a “viral rumor” by the Westmincom.

We entreat you to be prudent in using social media to prevent their becoming malicious platforms,” Encinas said. “The Western Mindanao Command is nevertheless on top of the situation. We will not let our guard down in putting an end to terrorism in the midst of this pandemic,” he assured.



Indonesia: Debating the Military's Role in Counter-Terrorism

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article for the *Jakarta Post* discusses a proposal to use the Indonesian military to fight terrorism. The proposal, put forward by President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), has been criticized by activists due to concerns that increasing the role of the military could lead to human rights abuses and infringe on law enforcement responsibilities.

Arsul Sani, a government official working in legal affairs, acknowledges that the military is already involved in and cooperates on counter-terrorism, specifically mentioning the example of Operation Tinombala. This refers to counter-terrorism efforts in central Sulawesi that have successfully rooted out militants loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in a group called Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT). However, if the military were to further expand its role in counter-terrorism, then it would need a clearer legal mandate. Arsul Sani also suggests that one way to balance the military's role in counter-terrorism is to assess it based on the scale of the threat, and he claims that this is similar to European countries.



Indonesian military police.

Source: AWG97 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indonesian_military_police.jpg, CC by 4.0

The article also notes that currently, the military is legally permitted to combat terrorism threats to former presidents and vice-presidents and their families, as well as the current president and vice-president and other high-ranking domestic and foreign officials in Indonesia. Moreover, it cites several human rights organizations that are opposed to the military expanding its role in counter-terrorism any further than current limitations. Therefore, although Jokowi supports expanding the military's counter-terrorism role, it is far from certain that this will occur. This case also shows how civil society, as well as political and legal checks and balances, can impact civil-military relations in Indonesia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

The article also notes that currently, the military is legally permitted to combat terrorism threats to former presidents and vice-presidents and their families, as well as the current president and vice-president and other high-ranking domestic and foreign officials in Indonesia. Moreover, it cites several human rights organizations that are opposed to the military expanding its role in counter-terrorism any further than current limitations. Therefore, although Jokowi supports expanding the military's counter-terrorism role, it is far from certain that this will occur. This case also shows how civil society, as well as political and legal checks and balances, can impact civil-military relations in Indonesia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The move has been widely criticized, with activists warning that the [Indonesian military’s] involvement would contradict the 2004 TNI Law and could pose a danger to law enforcement and human rights in Indonesia.”

Source: “Jokowi proposes military involvement in fight against terrorism through Perpres,” *Jakarta Post*, 13 May 2020. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/05/13/jokowi-proposes-military-involvement-in-fight-against-terrorism-through-perpres.html>

President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo has proposed involving military forces to strengthen Indonesia’s fight against terrorism through a presidential regulation (Perpres) that was submitted to the House of Representatives. The move has been widely criticized, with activists warning that the TNI’s involvement would contradict the 2004 TNI Law and could pose a danger to law enforcement and human rights in Indonesia. Arsul Sani, a member of the House Commission III overseeing legal affairs, said the Indonesian paradigm of combating terrorism was based on law enforcement practices through the criminal justice system. “We are aware that the TNI and the police have been cooperating well, for example, in the Tinombala operation,” he said. He added that he was not opposed to the TNI’s involvement in combating terrorism, but the Perpres did not have a clear framework, which would contradicts Indonesia’s political paradigm for its fight against terrorism. “The TNI’s involvement should be based on the scale of the threats, not by events like in the Perpres. We see that in modern democratic countries in Europe, there have been some cases of the military backing the police and vice versa, depending on the scale [of the threat],” said Asrul.

Article 9 of the regulation, a copy of which was obtained by *The Jakarta Post*, stipulates that the TNI’s functions in terrorism enforcement include attacks against the President and Vice President and their families, former presidents and vice presidents and their families, high-ranked state guests in the country, Indonesians abroad and representatives from other countries or international organizations in Indonesia.

Al Araf of rights watchdog *Imparsial* said the Perpres should regulate a clear authority of the TNI as it is prone to be abused.



An “Internship” in the Indian Army?

OE Watch Commentary: In late April, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) published its annual report on global military expenditures and noted that the government of India moved up one position to become the third largest military spender in the world in 2019. The accompanying excerpted article discusses a program being considered by the Indian government to bring in officers and soldiers as ‘interns’ for a period of three years, possibly as a way to cut costs for the armed forces even as military expenditures rise.

The article, from *The Wire*, reports that the Indian army “proposed a three-year ‘internship’ for young people” in light of a “resurgence of nationalism and patriotism” as well as unemployment, making this an opportune time to recruit officers and soldiers for the program. An Army spokesperson notes that “the eligibility conditions for new recruits will not be relaxed” and that it is possible that “interns’ earnings during their military stint could be made tax-free” and “they could also be given preference in public sector jobs and postgraduate courses” following their three years in service.

The article also mentions that the “proposal has come at a time when several Sangh Parivar affiliates have expressed their wishes to help the Indian Army in a situation of war” and it looks at some of the differences in cost between what the army spends now for officers and soldiers and potential savings. It notes that “even though cost-cutting is one of the primary reasons for such a proposal, the Indian Army also thinks that the new system would help “channelise the youth energy into positive utilisation of their potential.” The Sangh Parivar are Hindu nationalist organizations and it is unclear what, if any, role they would play in a future conflict or if the government will try to more actively recruit their members. Finally, the article states that the program “will first be introduced on a trial basis with limited vacancies, and if found sustainable, it will be expanded further” so it will likely be several years before the potential program would result in a reduction of expenditures. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Soldiers of the Assam Regiment.

Source: Defense Dept. photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Jerry Morrison via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Army#/media/File:IndianArmyDelhi.JPG, Public Domain

Source: “Indian Army Considers 3-Year ‘Internships’ for Young People to Reduce Costs,” *The Wire*, 14 May 2020. <https://thewire.in/security/indian-army-internship-costs>

The Indian Army appears to have taken a leaf out of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s motto of turning an aapda (disaster) into an avsar (opportunity). Two days after the prime minister, in his fifth address to the nation during the coronavirus-induced lockdown, talked about how the COVID-19 crisis has helped India manufacture two lakh personal protective equipment kits and the same number of masks everyday, the Indian Army has now proposed a three-year “internship” for young people.

Citing that there is a “resurgence of nationalism and patriotism” while acknowledging that “unemployment in our country is a reality”, the Army now plans to recruit interns, both as officers and soldiers...“The proposal is a shift from the concept of permanent service/job in the Armed Forces, towards ‘internship’/temporary experience for three years...”

...Army spokesperson Colonel Aman Anand confirmed that the proposal was being discussed currently, and said that the eligibility conditions for new recruits will not be relaxed. However, he also emphasised that if the proposal is accepted, the “tour of duty” will not be compulsory...The Indian Army has proposed that interns’ earnings during their military stint could be made tax-free, and they could also be given preference in public sector jobs and postgraduate courses.

Interestingly, such a proposal has come at a time when several Sangh parivar affiliates have expressed their wishes to help the Indian Army in a situation of war...the Army has said the cost of a three-year service per officer will be a fraction of the cost incurred on Short Service Commission (SSC) officers,”...

According to the proposal, the Indian Army spends anywhere between Rs 5 crore (around \$650,000) to Rs 6.8 crore (around \$896,000) on SSC officers who leave after 10-14 years. The cost includes pre-commission training, pay, allowances, gratuity and leave encashment among others. If the officer decides to join the service permanently, the cost increases further.

Even for soldiers, who usually serve for 17 years, the Army spends Rs 11.5 crore (around \$1.5 million) per person.

However, the new proposal pegs the estimated cost on an intern deployed for a three-year service as between Rs 80 lakh and 85 lakh (between \$105,000 and \$112,000).

Even though cost-cutting is one of the primary reasons for such a proposal, the Indian Army also thinks that the new system would help “channelise the youth energy into positive utilisation of their potential”...If accepted, the proposed scheme will first be introduced on a trial basis with limited vacancies, and if found sustainable, it will be expanded further...



Increased Attacks in Afghanistan Post US-Taliban Peace Deal

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 June, the Wazir Akbar Khan Mosque in Kabul was the target of a terrorist attack, and as the accompanying excerpted articles report, the incident was the latest in a series of attacks in Afghanistan following the agreement with the US.

The article from *Tolo News*, a privately-owned daily publication headquartered in Kabul, reports on the mosque attack, which resulted in the death of two people, including Dr. Mohammad Ayaz Niazi, “a national and regional figure” in the country’s education system. The mosque, which sits in a high-security area near the offices of several international organizations and embassies, is one of the city’s most famous places of worship. Niazi, who repeatedly took a stand against terrorist attacks, spoke out against the severity of recent terrorist attacks just a week before his death. He pointed out that within the last three months, the country’s coronavirus casualty count had reached approximately 227 deaths, yet the nation continues to suffer the same number of casualties to war on daily basis.

While the Islamic State has since taken responsibility for the 2 June attack, the violence in the Afghan capital came after a recent road side bomb explosion which took the lives of seven civilians in the Khan Abad district of Kunduz province, an area which has reportedly been under control of the Taliban. This attack was later blamed on the Taliban despite the Taliban denying any involvement in this attack. The Kabul mosque attack also follows the gruesome attack on one of Kabul’s busiest hospitals, which targeted a maternity ward run by Doctors Without Borders, killing 24 people, including newborns, their mothers, and health care workers. *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) News*, a government-owned news agency based out of Canada, reported that the Taliban vehemently denied involvement, calling the maternity attack a “vile, inhumane and an un-Islamic act.”

Al Jazeera, a government-owned news agency headquartered in Qatar, reported that Afghanistan saw an increase in violent attacks after the Taliban signed the peace agreement with the US in February. Afghanistan caught a break in the violence when the Taliban unexpectedly announced a three-day ceasefire to mark the Eid al-Fitr holiday. Since then, numerous violent attacks have resumed once again. Under the US-Taliban agreement, the Taliban pledged to stop al-Qaeda from using Afghanistan’s land to threaten the security of the US and its allies. Nevertheless, critics of the US-Taliban Agreement remain skeptical on whether the Taliban has the military capability to act as a counter-terrorism force against ISIS or al-Qaeda in the war-torn country without US assistance.

While the Afghan government has made it clear they were ready to begin negotiations with the Taliban at any moment, the Taliban have yet to announce when the talks might begin. Meanwhile, Taliban’s ties to al-Qaeda remain close. According to a report made by independent UN sanction monitors, the Taliban regularly consulted with al-Qaeda during negotiations with the US and offered assurances that it would honor their historical ties. The *Al Jazeera* article continues, stating that the success of the agreement may be contingent on the Taliban’s willingness to encourage al-Qaeda to end its current activities in Afghanistan. (See also: “An Afghan Perspective: A New Phase in Afghanistan-Iran Relations” in this issue.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Plude)**

“The success of the [US-Taliban] agreement may be contingent on the Taliban’s willingness to encourage al-Qaeda to end its current activities in Afghanistan.”

Source: “Ta’keed e Ra’is Jamhoori Bar Kayfardehi ‘Amelan e Enfejar Dar Masjed e Wazir Akbar Khan (The President Emphasized Punishment for the Attackers of the Perpetrators in the Wazir Akbar Khan Mosque),” *Tolonews.com*, 3 June 2020. <https://tolonews.com/fa/Afghanistan/سۍۍرۍدۍکاتۍنۍاخرۍبکارۍۍزۍوۍدۍجۍمۍرۍدۍرۍاۍجۍفۍنۍاۍنۍاۍلۍمۍاعۍۍۍدۍرۍفۍۍکۍرۍبۍرۍوۍهۍمۍج>

“Dr. Mohammad Ayaz Niazi was a national and regional figure. His martyrdom is a great loss to the peace process and to the country’s education system,” said Atiq Ramin, chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee.

Dr. Niazi has repeatedly taken a stand against terrorist attacks. In a speech last week at the Wazir Akbar Khan mosque he said, “Look, in a span of three months, Coronavirus casualties in Afghanistan – I think- are 227, yet we lose perhaps 230 casualties to war every day! Coronavirus is devastating, [but] when a plane bombards, there is no difference. When it comes to explosions and suicide [attacks], there is no difference.”

Attacks on religious scholars in Afghanistan are not unprecedented; But the nature of these attacks has always been hidden.



Continued: Increased Violence in Afghanistan Post US-Taliban Peace Deal

Source: “Doctors Without Borders Says Attackers Directly Targeted Maternity Ward,” *Cbc.ca*, 15 May 2020. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/afghanistan-maternity-hospital-attack-united-states-islamic-state-1.5571026>

A U.S. official said Friday the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan carried out this week’s horrific attack on a maternity hospital in a majority Shia Muslim neighborhood in Kabul, killing 24 people, including newborn babies and mothers.

Zalmay Khalilzad said the U.S. government believes the Islamic State affiliate carried out Tuesday’s attack on the hospital and an assault earlier the same day in a different province targeting the funeral of a pro-government warlord, killing 34 people. ISIS “has demonstrated a pattern for favoring these types of heinous attacks against civilians and is a threat to the Afghan people and to the world,” Khalilzad tweeted.

“They went through the rooms in the maternity, shooting women in their beds. It was methodical. Walls sprayed with bullets, blood on the floors in the rooms, vehicles burned out and windows shot through,” said Frédéric Bonnot, Doctors Without Borders head of programs in Afghanistan. “They came to kill the mothers.”

...The Taliban denied involvement in either attack, calling the maternity hospital assault a “vile, inhumane and an un-Islamic act.”

Source: “Roadside Bomb in Taliban-Controlled Area Kills Afghan Civilians,” *Al Jazeera*, 2 June 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/roadside-bomb-taliban-controlled-area-kills-afghan-civilians-200602083746155.html>

According to local officials, the area is under the control of the Taliban armed group, which has staged a number of deadly attacks on Afghan security forces there in recent weeks.

Six people were wounded in Monday’s blast, two of whom are in critical condition, according to the district chief, Hayatullah Amiri.

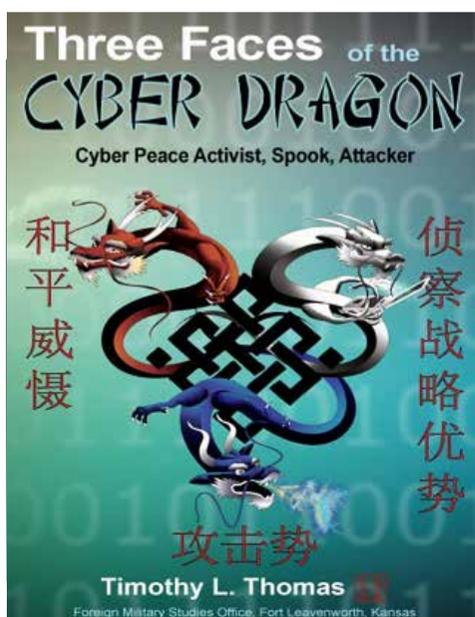
Earlier this year, a United Nations report said more than 10,000 people were killed or wounded in the Afghanistan war in 2019 alone.

Violence had surged after the Taliban signed a landmark agreement with the United States in February, which paves the way for the withdrawal of all foreign forces by May next year. However, violence across much of the country has dropped since May 24 when the Taliban announced a surprise three-day ceasefire to mark the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

....The Taliban have not yet said when the talks might begin.

“The Taliban regularly consulted with al-Qaeda during negotiations with the United States and offered guarantees that it would honor their historical ties,” they said in a report to the UN Security Council, saying the ties stemmed from friendship, intermarriage, shared struggle and ideological sympathy.

Under the February 29 US-Taliban deal, the Taliban promised to prevent al-Qaeda from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the US and its allies.



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>



Russia and Iran's Competitive Relationship in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The reported volatility of Russian-Iranian relations in Syria has been especially pronounced in recent months, as leaders and media from across the spectrum present their preferred narrative on the bilateral dynamics. The most prominent voices of recent have come from Syrian government opponents who suggest that Russia is pushing to negotiate a grand settlement at Iran's expense. This perspective portrays recent Russian media criticism of the Assad government and the sidelining of Rami Makhlouf, President Assad's cousin and Syria's wealthiest man for many years, as examples of Russian actions to dampen Iran's influence in Damascus. Further evidence for this view comes from Russian silence following recent Israeli attacks on Iranian assets in Syria, which usually elicit perfunctory Russian condemnation at minimum. The reported withdrawal of Iranian-backed militias from Deir Ezzor and the Damascus Airport environs earlier this year have also been cited as examples of Russian pushback against Iranian influence.



Vladimir Putin had a meeting with President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Hassan Rouhani, who has come to Sochi for the trilateral summit of Russia, Turkey and Iran on the Syrian peace settlement. February 2019.

Source: The Kremlin, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/photos/big2x/7hUfAaylPlvPLf1X2Dlwz0l1kwr569L.jpg>, CCA 4.0

The accompanying passage from *al-Modon*, a Lebanese news website opposed to the Syrian government, disputes the narrative of growing Russian-Iranian hostility. Its author qualifies the relationship as competitive rather than adversarial, and sees it unfolding in an orderly fashion where “each knows its sphere and takes into account the sensitivities and interests of its partner.” The article highlights three domains where this competitive behavior is most pronounced: militia recruitment, including Russian discomfort with Iran's religious militias; activities in one another's spheres of influence (for Iran, the provinces of Daraa and Deir Ezzor, for Russia the province of Idlib); and, competition over Syrian resources and infrastructure. These three fault lines could become enflamed, moving the relationship from competitive to adversarial, but the author does not see this occurring at present. He adds that the Syrian government is “doing well in satisfying both parties” by providing them with economic rewards and “exercising only symbolic authority over the local militias of both countries.”

There are reasons to believe that Russia and Iran are in fact coordinating closely these days. In May, aircraft coming from Iran landed in Russia's Hmeimim airbase on two separate occasions, for the first time since the base was established, in order to avoid Israeli targeting. Iranian-backed militias recently redeployed around Palmyra to help counter increased ISIS activity in the area. Palmyra is considered to be within Russia's sphere of influence, and the Iranian-backed militia deployments are “an affirmation of the Russians' need for the Iranians in Syria.” Even if Russia pressured Iran to lighten its Syrian footprint, Tehran would rely on “the Shiite militias it leaves behind to guarantee [its] interests, as it has done successfully in Iraq and Lebanon.” Despite Russian military and economic superiority, “the real military effectiveness on the ground is in the hands of Tehran,” according to the article from *al-Modon*.

The economic rewards available to both Russia and Iran will dwindle with the latest round of sanctions on the Syrian economy (the “Caesar Act”). Perhaps with this in mind, President Putin of Russia recently signed a directive tasking the Russian Defense and Foreign Ministries “with holding negotiations with Syria on transferring more real estate and water territory to the Russian military's possession under an agreement on the stationing of a Russian air group in Syria.” One can expect the Iranian government to launch similar efforts. While the new sanctions may alter Russian-Iranian relations, they seem unlikely to drive a definitive wedge between the two. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“Whatever the degree of Moscow's hegemony over the regime in Damascus, it will not be sufficient to force the Iranians to leave Syria so long as the real military effectiveness on the ground is in the hands of Tehran...”



Continued: Russia and Iran's Competitive Relationship in Syria

Source: وهم الصراع الروسي-الإيراني بسوريا: تقاسم مصالح لا أكثر
 “The Illusion of Russian-Iranian Conflict in Syria: Nothing More than Shared Interests,” *al-Modon*, 24 May 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yd5nebo6>

The fact is that there is a conflict between Russia and Iran in Syria. At least so far, though, it is a competitive and not a hostile one, aimed at dividing the Syrian pie and not its fragmentation. It is also an orderly competition, as the two parties have demonstrated so far, in which each knows its sphere and takes into account the sensitivities and interests of its partner, despite attempts by many to portray this rivalry as a heated war that will only be extinguished by ashes... it seems clear that the two parties have a good appreciation of each other's interests in this country, and even more than that, both sides are aware of the extent to which they need one another, beyond Syria in the regional and international spheres...

The Syrian regime is also doing well in satisfying both parties, in the economic sphere on the principle of contract by contract, investment by investment, field by field and port by port... once for Russia, once for Iran. As for the military and security sphere, the regime granted the militias of each party significant independence, as there is no local authority that leads, holds accountable, or questions the Russian mercenaries or non-Syrian Shiite fighters, while exercising only symbolic authority over the local militias of both countries and granting them both privileges that are equal enough...

Whatever the degree of Moscow's hegemony over the regime in Damascus, it will not be sufficient to force the Iranians to leave Syria so long as the real military effectiveness on the ground is in the hands of Tehran, not only qualitatively but also in terms of quantity, as the numbers indicate there are a hundred thousand Shiite fighters or Shiites affiliated with Iran in Syria today...

The foregoing leaves but a single possible scenario for Iran's departure from Syria, which is for all parties to find themselves in a truly dead end, as recently stated by the American envoy to Syria, James Jeffrey, especially after the stricter US sanctions known as the “Caesar Act” come into effect, and which will make the process of reconstruction and the flow of money to Syria impossible. This clearly worries the Russians and puts them before a losing investment by all accounts, with the Iranians alongside them. This potential scenario could lead Russia and Iran to the negotiating table over the Syrian file, this time with Moscow persuading its ally Tehran to remove its forces from Syria with guarantees to preserve its interests and provide them with benefits in other domains. Iran could rely on the Shiite militias it leaves behind to guarantee those interests, as it has done successfully in Iraq and Lebanon.

Source: “Putin orders holding talks with Syria on transferring more real estate, water territory to Russia's possession,” *Interfax*, 29 May 2020. <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/68879/>

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a directive tasking the Defense Ministry, in cooperation with the Foreign Ministry, with holding negotiations with Syria on transferring more real estate and water territory to the Russian military's possession under an agreement on the stationing of a Russian air group in Syria.

Source: إجراءات أميركية..لا تبعد روسيا عن إيران في سوريا
 “American temptations ... do not create distance between Russia and Iran in Syria,” *al-Modon*, 15 May 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y9swxq4t>

But suddenly, on May 6, an Iranian cargo plane landed at Russia's Hmeimim Airbase in northwestern Syria ... Moscow and Tehran kept secret the event, which was impossible to hide anyway. The Russian Ministry of Defense published a video on the ninth of this month showing the Iranian plane landing in Hmeimim, claiming that it was an emergency change of route for fear that Israel might target Damascus International Airport... The Russian air base again opened its doors to its “arch-ally” as another Iranian plane landed in Hmeimim on May 13.

While a wide spectrum of the opposition was celebrating news of Iranian withdrawal or retrenchment due to the American-Israeli air strikes, news came from the Syrian desert about Iranian militias, which had left the Deir Ezzor region, gathering near the desert city of Palmyra, from which ISIS was expelled at the end of 2017 and which is considered in Russia's sphere of influence. The new Iranian concentration may be justified by the recent escalation of ISIS attacks there, but this justification in itself is an affirmation of the Russians' need for the Iranians in Syria, given the weakness of the Syrian ground forces...



Scenarios for the Future of Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The first accompanying passage from the *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, discusses three possible scenarios for the future of Syria. One of these scenarios involves a change of leadership in light of the upcoming elections in 2021. The other passages from local and regional sources expand on this scenario, looking at possible successors to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

As the *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights* discusses, the first scenario involves Assad taking Syria “down the North Korea route, isolating the nation from the global economy, consolidating its status as a global pariah...” The second scenario entails Syria taking a turn for the worse, with extreme levels of “destitution, famine and worsening criminality...” In this scenario, “loyalist unity would dissolve... leaving in its wake a Somalia-type failed state that’s both a human-rights disaster and a breeding ground for dangerous extremists and regional instability.” The final scenario pertains to the upcoming elections where “instability, anger, disenchantment and perhaps a Russian push might end up unseating [Assad] for another established regime name.”



Vladimir Putin visited the command post of the Russian Armed Forces in Syria. The Russian President and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad heard military reports on the situation in various regions of the country. (January 2020).

Source: The President of Russia, Kremlin.ru, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62545>, CCA 4.0

The second passage is from *Zaman al-Wasl*, an electronic Syrian newspaper founded in 2005, whose editorial line has leaned towards the Syrian opposition since the revolution. Regarding the Syrian elections in 2021, the author notes “the United States and some European countries were expected to exert more pressure to achieve a smooth political transition and transparent elections under international supervision...” but highlights that the world is now preoccupied with fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The author also provides insight into two possible names that may be agreed upon by all conflicting powers and put forth by international institutions: Manaf Tlass --a former Brigadier General of the Syrian Republican Guard and member of Bashar al-Assad’s inner circle who defected in 2012; and Ali Mamlouk-- a special security adviser to Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and head of the Syrian Intelligence Directorate.

The third passage discusses Moscow’s position regarding Assad and the elections. The author notes that Russia would like to solidify its gains in Syria by installing a government that “represents all groups, instead of just Syrian Alawites,” in light of recent Russian polls that apparently show that Assad would get a maximum of 30% of the votes in the 2021 elections. The fourth passage further points out, “some have speculated that the Russians are grooming General Suhail al-Hassan, the head of the Tiger Forces part of the Russia-backed Fifth Corp, to replace al-Assad.” Gen. al-Hassan has been referred to as “Syria’s ‘Shoigun’ in the making” by Turkish defense expert Can Kasapoğlu, who also echoes this speculation. In the final passage, Kasapoğlu writes, “to serve Russia’s strategic interests, the Kremlin will have to contain Iran-backed Shiite militancy from now on. General Suheil al-Hassan appears to be Moscow’s hope to re-unite the Syrian Arab Armed Forces to become the only military entity across Syria.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Some have speculated that the Russians are grooming General Suhail al-Hassan, the head of the Tiger Forces part of the Russia-backed Fifth Corp, to replace al-Assad.”

“[Regarding the Syrian elections in 2021]... among the names in circulation are Manaf Tlass and Ali Mamlouk, but the nature of government is still undetermined...”



Continued: Scenarios for the Future of Syria

Source: "Is Assad about to Fall?," *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, 19 June 2020, <https://www.syriaahr.com/en/170731/>

For now, taking all current circumstances into account, three scenarios appear to be on the horizon. On the one hand, Assad could take Syria down the North Korea route, isolating the nation from the global economy, consolidating its status as a global pariah, and attempting to unify his loyalist population with a sense of solidarity in victimhood. In many ways, Assad has prepared his loyalist base, particularly Syria's many minority communities, for this very scenario over the past nine years of conflict, though the extent to which a genuine and unshakable cult of personality has been built around his rule is open to question.

Syria could also take a truly unprecedented turn for the worse, crashing into a debilitating crisis that tears every fiber of the country apart and, as hard as it is to imagine in 2020, leaving even greater levels of destitution, famine, and worsening criminality and predatory behavior. In this scenario, loyalist unity would dissolve altogether, leaving in its wake a Somalia-type failed state that's both a human-rights disaster and a breeding ground for dangerous extremists and regional instability.

Or finally, as several longtime loyalists have suggested to me in private in recent days, this extraordinary internal crisis could spark a change at the top. In their eyes, this moment may already represent a greater threat to Assad's survival in power than the one posed by the opposition at its peak in years past. In this scenario, the Assad path for Syria may emerge as so deeply distasteful for so many Syrians that instability, anger, disenchantment and perhaps a Russian push might end up unseating him for another established regime name.

Source: "Syrians hope US-Russian consensus to topple Assad as 2021 presidential election nears," *Zaman al-Wasl*, 24 April 2020. <https://en.zamanawsl.net/news/article/54384/>

Less than a year remains until the presidential elections in Syria, and while analysts predicted that by mid-2020, the new constitution would be ready, the issues of war and local, regional, and international conflicts over the country are not yet resolved.

The United States and some European countries were expected to exert more pressure to achieve a smooth political transition and transparent elections under international supervision that guarantees the participation of millions of refugees, in order to move to the next stage. However, currently, the world is preoccupied with the novel coronavirus (Covid-19)...

...

Apparently, international institutions are ... [presenting a list] meant for pushing for the selection of a person that is agreed upon by all conflicting powers. Among the names in circulation are Manaf Tlass and Ali Mamlouk, but the nature of government is still undetermined, whether it will be military, civil-military, transitional, or something else.

Source: Mehmet Koçak, "İran'ı Suriye'den çıkarma ve Esed'siz dönem hesapları (Calculations to Remove Iran from Syria and for an Era without Assad)," *Haber7.com*, 16 May 2020. <https://www.haber7.com/yazarlar/mehmet-kocak/2975289-irani-suriyeden-cikarma-ve-esedsiz-donem-hesaplari>

The commentary and debate about "the Assad dynasty is collapsing," is taking place not only in Syria, but in world capitals, while post-Assad calculations are being made...

It is no longer a secret that Moscow, Washington and Ankara are in search of new relationships regarding the future of Syria, within the context of preparations for a post-Bashar Assad [period].

Moscow wants to make its wins [in Syria] permanent via a [Syrian] government that represents all groups, instead of just Nusayris (Syrian Alawites). Because the polls that the Russians have conducted show that Bashar Assad can get a maximum of 30% of the votes in the 2021 elections.

Source: Anton Mardasov, "Has Russia grown tired of Syria's Bashar al-Assad?," *al Jazeera*, 19 May 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/rift-moscow-damascus-200517173011730.html>

Moscow does not have an Assad alternative and does not want to see his regime destabilised.... Some have speculated that the Russians are grooming General Suheil al-Hassan, the head of the Tiger Forces part of the Russia-backed Fifth Corp, to replace al-Assad.

Source: Can Kasapoğlu, "Syria's 'Shogun' in the Making: Russian-Backed General Suheil al-Hassan and Future of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces," *Edam.org [Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research (Turkey)]*, 14 November 2018. <https://edam.org.tr/en/syrias-shogun-in-the-making-russian-backed-general-suheil-al-hassan-and-future-of-the-syrian-arab-armed-forces/>

President Putin had to overcome Salafi jihadism and Sunni insurgency to 'win the war' in Syria. The Russian campaign has made a significant progress in this respect. Inevitably, for 'winning the peace' and rebuilding the civil war-torn country to serve Russia's strategic interests, the Kremlin will have to contain Iran-backed Shiite militancy from now on. General Suheil al-Hassan appears to be Moscow's 'great white hope' to re-unite the Syrian Arab Armed Forces to become the only military entity across Syria.



Talks to Unify Kurds in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The Kurdish movement in Syria is divided into two major rival parties: the self-declared Autonomous Administration (NES) led by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) which forms the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF); and the Kurdish National Council (ENKS), an umbrella group of Syrian Kurdish opposition parties. Discussions to unify Syrian Kurds go back to the inception of the Syrian civil war. In 2012, the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region at the time, Masoud Barzani managed to broker a deal between the PYD and ENKS. In 2014, the two sides signed a deal to unify their political and military powers. However, none of these deals were ever solidified. The talks to unify Syrian Kurdish factions resumed once again in April. The excerpted interview with Salih Muslim Muhammad, the most prominent leader of the Syrian Kurds and the former co-chairman of the PYD, discusses the progress of the negotiations.



YPG-SDF fighters near the Euphrates east of Raqqa.

Source: VOA News via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:YPG-SDF_fighters_near_the_Euphrates_east_of_Raqqa.png, Public Domain

Salih Muslim stated that the first round of negotiations was positive and noted that unity among the Kurds in Syria would set an example for Kurdish populations in other countries. Issues discussed in this round of negotiations included political issues among Kurds, the future of relations with the Syrian regime and relations with other Syrian opposition groups. Now all sides are expected to come back for a second round of negotiations, “to begin soon.”

The second round will focus on finding common ground regarding how Kurdish political parties and Kurdish forces will manage their relations with each other. They will also decide how the Kurdish areas will be governed. They will revisit the agreement signed in 2014 in Erbil. Once the leadership of both sides reach an agreement, the next stage will be spreading this reconciliation at the grass-roots level to achieve Kurdish national unity. Salih Muslim also warns that countries that may fear Kurdish unity may express their displeasure and try to undermine the negotiations.

End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)

Source: “Salih Muslim: Pêvajoya duyemîn a diyalogê dê di demek nêz de destpê bike (Salih Muslim: The second round of dialogue will begin soon)” *Hawar News*, 1 June 2020. <https://www.hawarnews.com/kr/roportaj/salih-muslim-pvajoya-duyemn-a-diyalog-d-di-demek-nz-de-destp-bike-r132.html>

Salih Muslim confirmed that the first phase of the Kurdish-Kurdish dialogue was positive, he pointed out that the Kurdish National Unity parties will join the second phase of discussions, which is expected to start soon, indicating that achieving the unity of the Kurdish rank and file will affect the situation in Syria, Kurdistan and the Middle East in general.

...

The most important thing was that talks took place in Rojava. Without a doubt there was divergence, different opinions and distrust between the parties, and some parties played a negative role and sought to divide the Kurds.

The first step of talks occurred between the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish National Council. We managed to agree on several common points and the talks proceeded positively.

It is noteworthy that there was no difference in political views on the main issues, such as relations with the Syrian regime, opposition forces, and external relations.

The focus of the discussions in the first phase focused on common political issues...

...

Only the Democratic Union Party and the Kurdish National Council participated in the talks. Some observers were satisfied with expressing their views on the topics discussed, and those who joined the talks from both sides were positive.

...

The first phase came at the request of the Kurdish National Council, which said that there are many issues that must be discussed with the Democratic Union Party, and they wanted to know our point of view.

During the recent talks, it was suggested that the negotiations be conducted under the terms of the 2014 Duhok agreement, but with some amendments according to the current status quo, because several changes occurred in the region, and the agreement was between the People’s Council of Western Kurdistan, the Kurdish National Council, and other parties.

...

The administration in our regions is led by the Kurds. It was established to embrace everyone within it. So unity will have a direct impact on the situation in Syria; Everyone will count on the Kurds as it will have an impact in the rest of Kurdistan and the Middle East.

I believe that if the Kurds were able to conclude an agreement between them correctly and honestly, they would be pioneers of the democratic project in the Middle East, and the Kurdish people have this ability politically, ideologically and intellectually.



Russian Power Projection in the Middle East and North Africa

OE Watch Commentary: Russia has been one of the major players in the wars and conflicts spanning from Syria to Libya. It has managed to keep the Syrian regime in power and strengthened its presence in the Middle East and North Africa by establishing military bases in Syria. These bases have given Russia direct access to the Mediterranean; enabled it to keep an eye on natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, and establish a pipeline to transit gas to European markets. As the accompanying articles discuss, Russia's presence is growing not only in the Middle East, but also in Africa, specifically in Libya. While the first article provides an overview of Russian power projection in the Middle East, the second article compares Russian involvement in the Middle East and North Africa with that of Turkey in the region.



Vladimir Putin visited Khmeimim Air Base in Syria.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_visited_Khmeimim_Air_Base_in_Syria_\(2017-12-11\)_37.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_visited_Khmeimim_Air_Base_in_Syria_(2017-12-11)_37.jpg), CC-BY-4.0

According to the first article, Russia has already formed strong relations with Iran, the Syrian regime and General Khalifa Haftar and has signaled its readiness to build stronger relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The author states that Russia tries to fill the power vacuum left by the United States rather than risk direct confrontation. While Russia does not hesitate to use hard power against the weaker players in the region, it is very cautious to directly confront equal or stronger powers in the Middle East. Israel is a good example of this. Despite Russia having control of Syrian airspace, it never blocks Israel from bombing Syrian regime forces who pose a threat to Israel or target Iran and its militias. The article explains that Israel having US support and nuclear weapons deters Russia from escalating tensions with Israel.

The second article compares Russian and Turkish involvements in the Middle East and North Africa. It states that Russia's actions in these regions are based on strategic planning, while Turkey's actions seem to be far from being products of well thought out planning. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia strives to re-establish its influence in the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa after the Soviet Union collapsed. Russia revived its naval base in Tarsus, Syria and established the Khmeimim Air Base. These bases are logistics centers extending Russia's reach into Africa and strengthening its position in the Middle East. The article also states that Russian forces are establishing another military base in Qeser Dib, a village outside of al-Malikiyah near the Syrian-Turkish border. The author notes that this base will enable Russia to monitor Turkey and the activities of American forces. Additionally, on 29 May, President Putin authorized his defense and foreign ministers to negotiate with the Syrian regime to increase Russia's bases there. The article also points out that Russia also deploys non-state actors to carry out its objectives and expand its influence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

The second article compares Russian and Turkish involvements in the Middle East and North Africa. It states that Russia's actions in these regions are based on strategic planning, while Turkey's actions seem to be far from being products of well thought out planning. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia strives to re-establish its influence in the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa after the Soviet Union collapsed. Russia revived its naval base in Tarsus, Syria and established the Khmeimim Air Base. These bases are logistics centers extending Russia's reach into Africa and strengthening its position in the Middle East. The article also states that Russian forces are establishing another military base in Qeser Dib, a village outside of al-Malikiyah near the Syrian-Turkish border. The author notes that this base will enable Russia to monitor Turkey and the activities of American forces. Additionally, on 29 May, President Putin authorized his defense and foreign ministers to negotiate with the Syrian regime to increase Russia's bases there. The article also points out that Russia also deploys non-state actors to carry out its objectives and expand its influence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“A Russian base near the Turkish border is significant to track the movement of both Turkish and American forces in the region.”

Source: “Prof. Dr. Kemal İnat, “Orta Doğu’da Rusya: Güven vermeyen müttefik, amansız düşman! (Russia in the Middle East: an unreliable ally, relentless enemy!),” *Türkiye Gazetesi*, 30 May 2020. <https://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/yazarlar/prof-dr-kemal-inat/613772.aspx>

Although not as much as during Soviet times, [Russia] has made some allies...

Iran, General Haftar who is dreaming of becoming Libya’s new dictator, Assad regime...

Apart from these, Putin gave Egypt and Saudi Arabia the message, “I am ready for all kinds of cooperation when you are bored with the USA.”

...Russia always avoids directly taking on the USA, and mostly tries to fill the gaps left by it. ...A Russia who is not afraid of using the harshest power against the weaker countries of the region and discovering the “tactics of destroying and capturing cities by aerial bombardments...”

...

The fact that Russia remains silent when Israel bombs Syria clearly shows the limitation of Russia in the face of power...

How “reliable” of an ally is Russia for the Iranian and Assad regimes if Israel can bomb Iran and the Damascus regime, which is protected by the Russian air defense system whenever it wants...



Continued: Russian Power Projection in the Middle East and North Africa

Source: Fehim Taştekin, “Türk’ün hevesi, Rus’un kalibresi (Turk’s enthusiasm, Russian’s caliber),” *Gazete Duvar*, 1 June 2020. <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2020/06/01/turkun-hevesi-rusun-kalibresi/>

Both Turkey and Russia are trying to revive the past. ...[Russia] is focused, patient, and calm; [and] its diplomacy, strategic mind, and weapons are long caliber. [Turkey, on the other hand,] has great enthusiasm and low capacity.

Turkey is now the adversary of its allies with whom it engaged in regime change in Syria...

Russia ... turned the interventions not only in the Black Sea basin but also in the Middle East and North Africa in its favor.

...

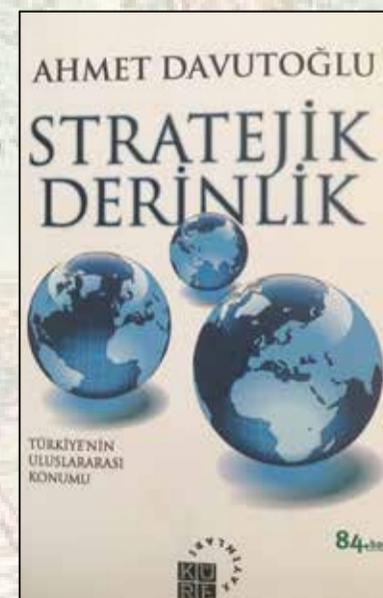
[Russia] is rebuilding its sphere of influence starting from Syria to the Mediterranean basin that it lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union... it is reconstructing Tarsus base for access to warm waters ... and adding Khmeimim Air Base which [Russia] already started using for regional operations...

According to the Russian International Relations Council researcher Anton Mardasov, Russia has been using Khmeimim Air Base as a logistics hub for flights to Libya, the Central African Republic and Sudan.

The latest information indicates [Russia] is setting up a new base in Qeser Dib village, which is near the Turkish border... Of course, this base can never be compared to the strategic bases such as Tartus and Khmeimim. Again a Russian base near the Turkish borders is significant to track the movement of both Turkish and American forces in the region.

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>



Tension between Russia and Turkey over Libya

OE Watch Commentary: Russia and Turkey have developed close ties in recent years. However, developments surrounding Idlib, an opposition held Syrian province has heightened the tensions between them as they support opposite sides of the Syrian conflict. The two countries are also on opposing sides of the conflict in Libya. Since December 2019, Turkey's increased military involvement in Libya has tilted the balance in favor of the Government of National Accord (GNA). The accompanying articles from Middle Eastern and Turkish sources argue that developments in Libya might escalate tensions between Turkey and Russia.

According to the first article, the deployment of Russian warplanes to Libya “complicated Turkey’s calculations” in Libya after Turkish supported forces captured the al-Watiya air base. The article reports that “at least six [Russian] MiG-29s and two Su-24s” landed at the bases controlled by Khalifa Haftar forces. It also analyzes possible developments after Russia’s deployment of warplanes and how they might impact the war and power balance in Libya. While Turkey has continued to blame Egypt and the United Arab Emirates for troubles in Libya, it has “realized that Russia is the essential power” a long time ago. In fact, Russia and Turkey worked out a cease-fire deal in Libya, but the deal failed after Khalifa Haftar refused to sign it. The article quotes pro-Turkish media stating that Russia will likely refrain from stoking a crisis with NATO-member Turkey. However, Turkey “is trying to build capacity to respond from al-Watiya, where a military coordination center will be set up soon.” Alternatively, a Turkish daily stated that Turkish F-16 fighter jets could take off from Turkey’s Mediterranean or Aegean coast to respond to any attack against Turkish positions in Libya.



Map of Libya.

Source: CIA via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Libya-CIA_WFB_Map.png, Public Domain

The article suggests that developments in Libya might replicate an arrangement similar to the one in Idlib, Syria between Turkey and Russia “in which collaboration and confrontation intertwine.” The alternative is a faceoff between Turkey and Russia, a scenario that both sides are trying to avoid. As the article points out, “military deterrence is likely to dictate a fresh negotiation process, steered by Turkey and Russia.”

The second article is an interview with Kerim Has, an expert on Turkish-Russian relations. According to the interview, the developments in Libya indicate that a confrontation between Turkey and Russia is likely if the conflict continues to escalate between Turkish supported forces and Russian supported forces. After the takeover of the al-Watiya air base by the GNA forces, Russian supported General Haftar threatened to target Turkish assets. The spokesperson for Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately replied by saying if Turkish assets are targeted, Haftar and his forces would pay a heavy price. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“Ankara’s general thinking is that Russia ... would not [risk] a crisis with NATO via Turkey. The planes sent by Russia [to Libya] will be reportedly operated by Egyptian pilots...”



Continued: Tension between Russia and Turkey over Libya

Source: Fehim Tastekin, “What does Libya’s ‘Syrianization’ scenario mean for key actors?” *Al-monitor*, 29 May 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/05/turkey-russia-libya-may-lead-to-faceoff-similar-to-syria.html>

Will the Libyan conflict lead to another faceoff between Turkey and Russia, similar to the one in Syria?... The arrival of the Russian jets complicated Turkey’s calculations soon after its allies seized a key air base near Tripoli, tipping the scales in the war thanks to Turkish military and intelligence support.

In fact, Ankara has long realized that Russia is the essential power it would have to deal with in Libya, no matter that it has been shaking its finger at Egypt and the United Arab Emirates as the main backers of renegade commander Khalifa Hifter and his Libyan National Army...

In a further sign of how Ankara feels pressed to deal with Moscow, Erdogan phoned Russian President Vladimir Putin on May 18, the day Turkey’s allies captured the al-Watiya air base, and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu followed suit two days later, calling his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov.

The arrival of Russian jets in Libya, however, altered the situation anew.

The Government of National Accord’s interior minister said May 21 that at least six MiG-29s and two Su-24s had flown from the Khmeimim base in Syria to Hifter’s bases in eastern Libya...

...“Ankara’s general thinking is that Russia ... would not [risk] a crisis with NATO via Turkey. The planes sent by Russia will be reportedly operated by Egyptian pilots,” Haberturk wrote.

“Ankara has no intention of withdrawing from the region, whatever the cost. So, against a possible attack, it is trying to build a capacity to respond from al-Watiya, where a military coordination center will be set up soon,” it added. Another daily, Yeni Safak, said F-16 jets could take off from Turkey’s Aegean or Mediterranean coast to respond to any attack on Turkish positions in Libya.

...

...Despite reports of Wagner mercenaries pulling out from the front lines, Russia’s “jet show” and diplomatic moves are creating a new reality that will inevitably force Ankara to seek cooperation with Moscow. This is likely to be a replication of the Turkish-Russian partnership model in Syria, in which collaboration and confrontation intertwine.

Source: “Dr. Kerim Has: Türkiye ve Rusya, Libya’da doğrudan çatışmaya doğru sürükleniyor (Dr. Karim Has: Turkey and Russia are drifting towards direct conflict in Libya)” *Ahval News*, 21 May 2020. <https://ahvalnews-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/ahvalnews.com/tr/libya/dr-kerim-has-turkiye-ve-rusya-libyada-dogrudan-catismaya-dogru-surukleniyor?amp>

Turkey transferring about eight thousand jihadists to Libya has given the Government of National Accord the upper hand against Haftar in some areas...

Mercenaries on both sides continue the war both on behalf of Turkey and Russia.

...

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu’s discussion on immediately ceasing the military activities in Libya and restarting the political process under the auspices of the UN is remarkable... [after] deployment of Russian war planes...

The risk of direct Turkish and Russian confrontation is increasing in Libya...



Turkey's Naval Power and the Role of Domestic Firms

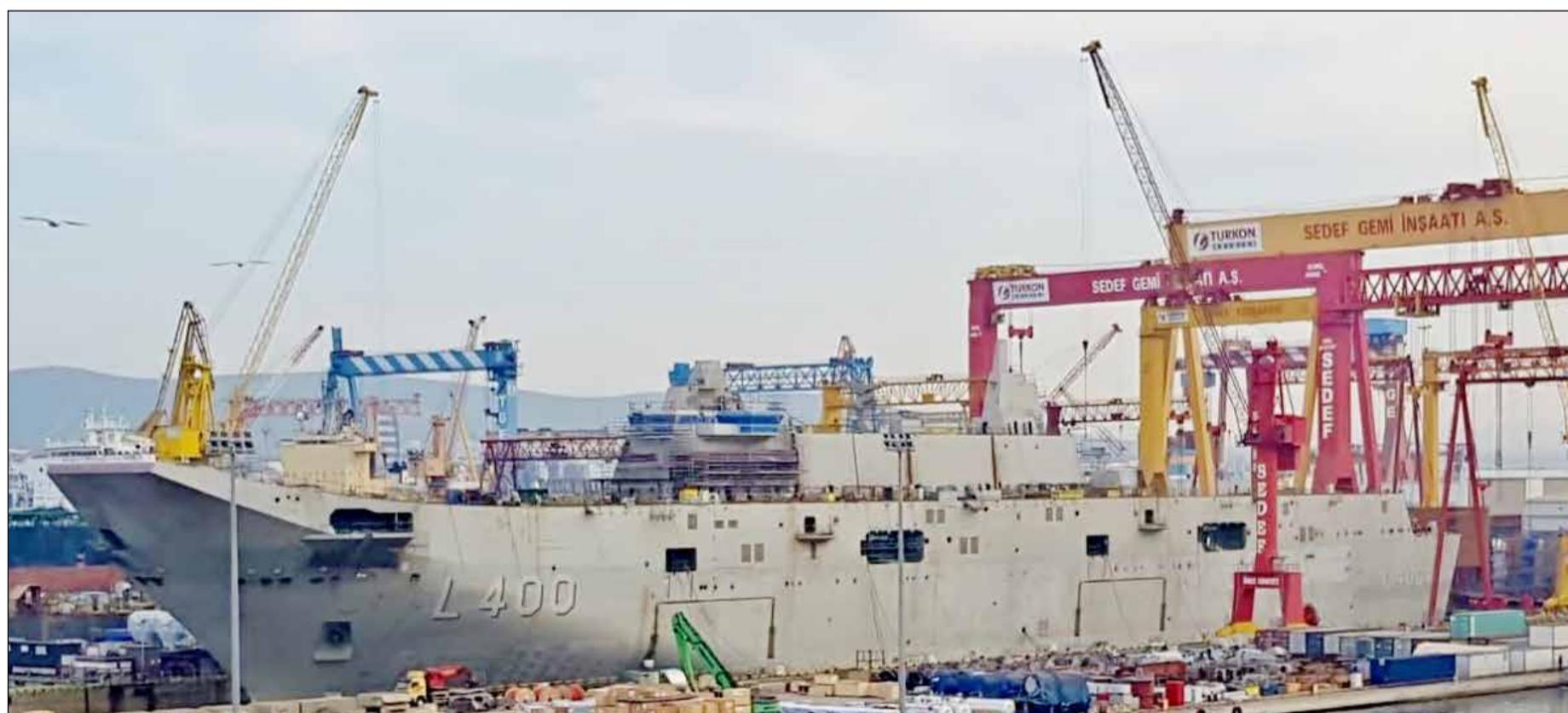
OE Watch Commentary: The past decade has been marked by Turkey's ambitious defense projects to build a self-reliant military and naval power in the region. These projects aim to increase Turkey's maritime power in the Mediterranean, Aegean and the Black Seas, as well as make Turkey into a naval power that can compete globally, while also exporting its products to other countries. The accompanying articles shed light on Turkey's efforts to increase its maritime capabilities by focusing on building a number of warships with indigenous technologies provided by Turkish defense companies.

The first article provides an overview of Turkey's "investment in improving its naval defenses over the last decade." According to the article, a number of defense projects have contributed to the development of Turkish maritime power. The first is increasing Turkey's spending on research and development (R&D) capacity on indigenous technologies by facilitating state and private sector cooperation. Since 2007, Turkey's R&D spending has tripled. Second, utilizing its indigenous technology and capabilities, Turkey has upgraded its naval force by increasing the "number of vessels and warships." Turkish officials plan to add 24 more ships to the country's fleet of 112 military vessels before 2023. One of them is the TCG Anadolu, an amphibious assault ship which can be configured as a light aircraft carrier. These naval capabilities enable Turkey to compete with actors in the Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Seas, especially regarding natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. As the second article states, Turkey's drilling ship Fatih sailed to the Black Sea to engage in drilling for natural gas exploration.

The third article argues that Turkey's growing military industrial complex is also supported by the increasing number of Turkish defense companies. The new Istanbul-class frigate, which is being developed under the MILGEM national warship program, has 80 subcontractors, about two-thirds of which are Turkish companies. As a result of proliferation of Turkish defense companies, 75 percent of the components of Istanbul-class frigates will be indigenous and "72 percent of the Ada-class corvettes will be built" with locally sourced material.

The major Turkish defense company that spearheads Turkish Naval projects is the STM Defense Technologies, Engineering and Trade Inc. which was founded in 1991. The objective of the company is "to provide system engineering, technical support, project management, technology transfer and logistics support services for Turkish Armed Forces and Undersecretariat for Defence Industries." **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“Turkey made a big investment in improving its naval defenses in the last decade, increasing the number of warships and military vessels and relying on homegrown technology.”



TCG Anadolu (L-400) amphibious assault ship (LHD) of the Turkish Navy during its construction at Sedef Shipyard in Istanbul.
Source: 2020 Istanbul via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TCG_Anadolu_\(L-400\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TCG_Anadolu_(L-400).jpg), CC-BY-SA-4.0



Continued: Turkey's Naval Power and the Role of Domestic Firms

Source: “How Turkey became a strong naval power in recent years” *Trtworld.com*, 2 January 2020. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/how-turkey-became-a-strong-naval-power-in-recent-years-32670>

Turkey made a big investment in improving its naval defenses in the last decade, increasing the number of warships and military vessels and relying on homegrown technology.

Turkey, a country between Europe and Asia, bordering three seas on its northern, western and southern flanks, has made a lot of efforts in recent years to advance its Navy to a level where it could compete with world powers.

In recent years, Ankara has not only increased its number of vessels and warships, protecting its coasts and sailing in international waters, but also made self-sufficiency a priority to upgrade its naval force, relying on its own native sources to decrease dependency on outside powers.

...

Since 2007, Turkey's spending on research and development has significantly increased, tripling its previous levels, according to a survey conducted by a leading defence industry group. Last year, it passed \$1.2 billion, the survey showed.

The Turkish Navy has had 112 military vessels until now, but Ankara plans to add a total of 24 new ships, which include four frigates, before the Republic reaches the 100th anniversary of its founding in 2023.

Source: “Fatih Sondaj Gemisi törenle uğurlandı! Yeni durağı belli oldu (Fatih Drilling Ship was sent off with a ceremony! New stop has been determined)” *Sozcu.com.tr*, 29 May 2020. <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2020/gundem/fatih-sondaj-gemisi-torenle-ugurlandi-yeni-duragi-belli-oldu-5844184/>

Turkey's first domestic drilling ship Fatih sailed to the Black Sea to carry out drilling operations...

Source: “Turkey's naval ambitions see more domestic firms rising to the challenge” *Trtworld.com*, 4 June 2020. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/turkey-s-naval-ambitions-see-more-domestic-firms-rising-to-the-challenge-36962>

Turkey is on its way to building its first frigate warship in a bid to ensure the country is able to meet future security challenges.

Built mainly from indigenous materials, the program is part of MILGEM, a national warship project aimed at ensuring that Turkey can develop and deploy multipurpose corvettes and frigates for a multitude of scenarios and strengthen its naval defense.

The Istanbul-class frigate, as it is known, will be constructed using manufacturing material made in Turkey. ...this will mean 75 percent of the components will be indigenous.

In contrast, 72 percent of the Ada-class corvettes will be built from parts sourced from Turkey.

The milestone is also supported by a growing ecosystem of Turkish defense-related companies. Around two-thirds of the 80 subcontractors for the Istanbul-class frigate consist of homegrown Turkish companies.

Over the last two decades, Turkey has accelerated its defense modernisation projects in order to ensure the army is well-equipped to deal with challenges emanating from its immediate neighbourhood.

The Naval projects are being led by the STM Defense Technologies Engineering and Trade, a company that was founded in 1991 by decree in order “to provide system engineering, technical support, project management, technology transfer and logistics support services for Turkish Armed Forces and Undersecretariat for Defense Industries.”

...

Expected to enter into service in 2023, the Istanbul-class frigate, will likely be deployed in the Mediterranean in a bid to strengthen freedom of navigation and ensure stability in the region.

Turkey's growing defense industry also has an eye on the international market.



Why Did the Turkish Naval Chief Resign?

OE Watch Commentary: On 18 May, Turkey's Naval Chief of Staff, Rear Admiral Cihat Yaycı resigned, two days after being demoted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Best known by his expansionist and nationalist views, Yaycı had been lauded by President Erdoğan after masterminding the maritime deal between Turkey and Libya. As the accompanying articles discuss, this is the demotion and resignation of one of the most popular admirals who shaped Turkey's policies in surrounding seas, including its controversial "Blue Homeland" policy in the Mediterranean. The articles debate possible explanations to this development.

The first article discusses Rear Admiral Yaycı's background and claims there is more to his demotion and resignation than many think. The author speculates that two reasons led to the demotion of Admiral Yaycı, known for his anti-Western sentiments. First, Turkey might be pushing out the anti-Western clique within its armed forces at a time when Turkey needs its Western allies due to its worryingly increasing dependency on Russia and its declining economy. Turkey is increasingly finding itself in confrontation with Russia in both Syria and Libya and needs its Western allies for support. Second, the author claims Yaycı's rising public profile seemed to disturb Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar and the Chief of General Staff Yasar Güler. The article also claims Yaycı's resignation revealed the "underdeveloped institutional structure" and the power struggle at the top of military and civilian leadership of the armed forces.



Seal of the Turkish Navy.

Source: Marinaio56 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seal_of_the_Turkish_Navy.svg, CC-BY-SA-4.0

The second article states that being "the chief architect of the so-called "Blue Homeland" naval expansion doctrine" and authoring "several books which are regarded as reference texts for Turkey's post-putsch irredentism in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean" made Yaycı very popular. This article notes Yaycı was a prominent member of the "nationalist" flank of the state, known as "Eurasianists." The failed 2016 coup gave an opportunity to the nationalist flank of the Turkish Armed Forces to gain more power by cementing their relationship with President Erdoğan. This article also claims Yaycı's removal likely had something to do with Turkey eliminating its high ranking officers who might be getting in the way of its relations with its NATO allies. Overall, the real reason behind the demotion and subsequent resignation seems to be tied to Turkey's current domestic and foreign challenges and the power struggle among different factions within its armed forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“The surprising demotion and ensuing resignation of a top navy admiral... lead[s] many to wonder whether President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is distancing himself from influential anti-Western cliques within the Turkish army.”



Continued: Why Did the Turkish Naval Chief Resign?

Source: Metin Gurcan, “Top admiral’s resignation rattles Turkey,” *Al-monitor*, 20 May 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/04/turkey-russia-usa-s400-delay-is-more-than-economy-covid19.html>

The surprising demotion and ensuing resignation of a top navy admiral, who is known as the architect of Turkey’s controversial Libya policy, came as a shock for pro-government and opposition quarters alike, leading many to wonder whether President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is distancing himself from influential anti-Western cliques within the Turkish army. ... As a prominent and popular figure within Turkey’s increasingly influential anti-Western fold, Yayci is also known as the architect of the ambitious Turkish agenda in Libya, the eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean sea. He is said to be the mastermind behind the controversial demarcation pact Ankara reached in November with one of Libya’s two main warring parties, the Government of National Accord...

Yayci has long been a vocal advocate of the “Blue Homeland” concept, a political-military agenda that suggests Turkey has to aggressively protect its maritime borders in the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the eastern Mediterranean at all costs and by all means...

Yayci’s demotion and ensuing resignation has indicated that the personal ties between Erdogan and Akar still remain strong. Akar and Chief of General Staff Yasar Guler’s annoyance at Yayci’s rising public profile has not been a secret for the past two years...

Aside from its underdeveloped institutional structure, the resignation also reveals the widening internal rifts and power struggles within the Turkish military’s ranks...

Source: Yavuz Baydar, “Turkish admiral’s resignation exposes a new showdown in Ankara,” *Ahval News*, 20 May 2020. <https://ahvalnews.com/cihat-yayci/turkish-admirals-resignation-exposes-new-showdown-ankara>

Yayci is the chief architect of the so-called “Blue Homeland” naval expansion doctrine, and the author of several books which are regarded as reference texts for Turkey’s post-putsch irredentism in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean.

In the book “The Demands of Greece: The Problems in the Aegean with Questions and Answers,” Yayci argues that Turkey has the right to territorial claims over more than 150 rocks and tiny islets - belonging to Greece - off Turkey’s shoreline.

In another book “The Struggle to Share the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey,” he developed the doctrine - titled “Blue Homeland” (Mavi Vatan) - which lays claim over a large naval zone between Turkish and Libyan waters, at the expense of Crete and Cyprus. ...

Yayci’s popularity is not without reason. His drive to realise the naval doctrine led last autumn to a controversial maritime deal with Libya’s Government of National Accord, which considerably escalated tension between Athens and Ankara. Turkish military presence in Libya is a fact, and the Aegean islands show signs of becoming powder kegs.

So, what are we to make of Yayci’s removal and subsequent resignation? Wild speculation and patchy comments have helped display only what was on the surface. A rift over military procurement was mentioned as a reason, but a few believe that. Ankara, especially the military, is far too complicated for minimalistic analysis.

There are strong undercurrents... which point to an ongoing, unresolved power struggle. This high-rank officer is a prominent member of the ‘nationalist’ flank of the state, along with the (mostly retired) officers, which are also identified as “Eurasianists”.



The RED DIAMOND is the Army’s leading e-journal highlighting current threats in the Operational Environment.

It is published by TRADOC G-2 OEE ACE Threats Integration and is posted at:

<https://atn.army.mil/tradoc-g2/operational-environment-publications/red-diamond-newsletter>



Egyptian TV Show Aims to Control the Narrative in the Sinai

OE Watch Commentary: The month of Ramadan is high season for Arabic-language TV series. Alongside their entertainment value during the lengthy month-long fast, many of the programs have a specific political purpose, seeking to influence local and even regional perceptions on particular political issues of the day. Among the most successful shows this Ramadan, which ended on 23 May, was an Egyptian production called “The Choice.” The show was produced by a company owned by a quasi-government media conglomerate established in 2017 and that has since begun to dominate Egyptian television. As one of the excerpted passages suggest, the show aims to “restore the military’s respect and prestige, especially with regard to its ‘war on terror’ and the ongoing campaign against extremists in the Sinai since 2013...”

Based on true events, the show tells the life story of Col. Ahmed Mansi, the commander of a battalion in the Egyptian army’s elite “Thunderbolt” (al-Saika) special forces units, who was killed in an insurgent attack on a Sinai checkpoint in July 2017. An effective and charismatic leader in the show, “Mansi the Legend” is contrasted with Hisham Ashmawy, a Thunderbolt commando who defected from the military to lead a deadly militant insurgent group during the 2010s. Egypt’s most-wanted man for several years, Ashmawy was captured in Libya last year and executed in March after being sentenced to death by an Egyptian court.

Critics of the “The Choice” contend that it distorts history and presents Egyptians with a false choice between a negative caricature of Islamic radicalism and a positive one of the Egyptian military. Prominent Qatari-backed media outlets, such as *al-Jazeera*, published a bevy of stories and opinion pieces critical of the show. Nonetheless, “The Choice” represents a rare victory for the Egyptian military in its eight-year long Sinai campaign, which has been marred by strategic and tactical blunders that have arguably fueled the insurgency, produced thousands of casualties and provided never-ending fodder for critics of the Sisi-led government.

As audiences across Egypt tuned in to watch “The Choice” though, the Egyptian military reported 15 casualties in a late April attack in the Sinai. About a week after the end of Ramadan, another insurgent attack killed or injured five Egyptian soldiers. For critics of the Egyptian military, these incidents were proof that the picture portrayed in “The Choice” did not necessarily align with reality. The Egyptian government may be winning the information war in the Sinai, but the actual insurgency seems long from over. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



An Egyptian Special Forces commando signals for reinforcements during an Egyptian military demonstration for observers during Bright Star 2017, Sept. 19, 2017, at Mohamed Naguib Military Base, Egypt.

Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Battles, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/3792360/egypt-hosts-14-nations-bright-star-17-military-demonstration>, Public Domain

“The... [show] is an attempt to restore the military’s respect and prestige, especially with regard to its ‘war on terror’ and the ongoing campaign against extremists in the Sinai since 2013...”

Source: “Ramadan Series 2020: Our Top 3 Must-Watch Ramadan Shows of the Year,” *Egyptian Streets*, 11 May 2020. <https://egyptianstreets.com/2020/05/11/ramadan-series-2020-our-top-3-must-watch-ramadan-shows-of-the-year/>

Based on true events surrounding the life of Egyptian army commander Ahmed el Mansy (commander of the Sa’ka (Thunderbolt) Forces), El Ekhteyar (The Choice) is worth watching as it is both well-made and introduces audiences to a human side of the army – the people behind the camouflage attire.



Continued: Egyptian TV Show Aims to Control the Narrative in the Sinai

Source: “A Ramadan series brings Egypt’s fight against extremists to TV screens,” *The Arab Weekly*, 30 April 2020. <https://thearabweekly.com/ramadan-series-brings-egypts-fight-against-extremists-tv-screens>

The series tries to frame the story as part of the eternal conflict between the forces of good, personified by the character of Mansi, and the forces of evil, embodied by Ashmawy. The story contrasts the life and personality of an officer who believes his mission in life is to love and protect his country with that of another former fellow army officer who is rude and violent to his military comrades. In one scene, Ashmawy is seen mistreating a soldier just because the latter was singing country songs with his companions instead of reading the Quran.

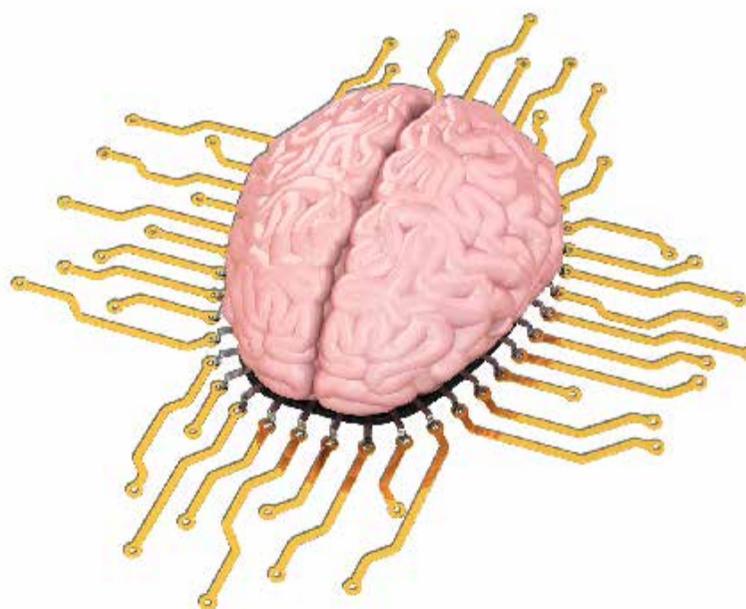
Source: بؤس الاختيار بين العسكر والإسلاميين في مصر
 “The Misery of ‘The Choice’ between the Military and Islamists in Egypt,” *al-Jazeera*, 7 May 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y8akkcl5>

The main goal of the series, in our view, is an attempt to restore the military’s respect and prestige, especially with regard to its “war on terror” and the ongoing campaign against extremists in the Sinai since 2013. The campaign does not seem to be bearing fruit, especially in light of the repeated attacks by the followers of the “Sinai Province” organization and its sympathizers and collaborators in the police and army there, especially in the cities of Rafah, al-Arish, Sheikh Zuweid and recently in Bir al-Abd. The most recent attacks, ironically, took place a few days ago, as the show began airing.

THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

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

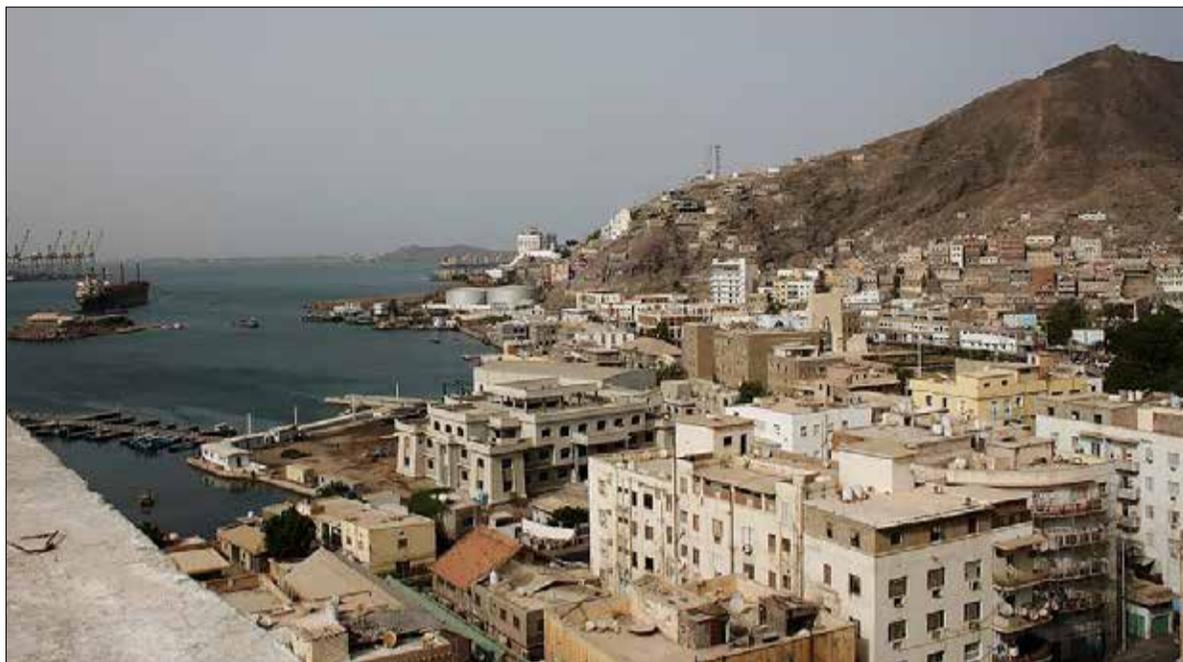
Mad Scientist Laboratory engages global innovators to report on the Operational Environment (OE), emergent disruptive technologies and their convergent impacts, and the changing character of warfare.





Yemen's South-South Divisions Continue to Plague the Saudi-Emirati Coalition

OE Watch Commentary: Last April, the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) declared the independence of what was known as the Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) or South Yemen until 1990. Control over the former PDRY is split between the STC and the Saudi-backed government of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. The announcement signaled a breakdown of the November 2019 Riyadh Agreement, whereby the STC was to be folded into the Hadi government, which opposes Yemeni partition. Shortly after the announcement, forces loyal to the Hadi government launched an offensive to retake Zinjibar, capital of Yemen's Abyan Province, from the STC. Although nominally allied in the fight against the Houthis, Saudi and Emirati partner forces in Yemen are increasingly at odds with one another.



Aden. Steamer Point. Aug 2013.

Source: Brian Harrington Spier from Shanghai, China via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aden_Steamer_Point_Aug_2013_\(9727325813\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aden_Steamer_Point_Aug_2013_(9727325813).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0

The Saudi-backed Hadi government and the Emirati-backed STC have competed and occasionally fought for control over territories and resources in former South Yemen for several years. They espouse incompatible national visions, with the STC seeking southern secession and the Hadi government purporting to represent all of Yemen, including the Houthi-controlled north. While the Hadi government is recognized by the United Nations as the country's legitimate government, the STC and other Emirati-trained and sponsored forces control most key strategic positions, infrastructure and natural resources, including the port city of Aden, the Hadi government's purported "temporary" capital. According to the highlighted excerpt from the pro-Hadi Yemeni news website *al-Masdar*, STC control of southern resources has undermined the Hadi government ability to serve Yemeni citizens at the expense of narrow Emirati strategic and economic interests. Most recently, the Hadi government accused the STC of encouraging international piracy on Yemen's vital coastline by preventing the Saudi-backed coastguard from patrolling areas effectively under STC control.

Factions from former North Yemen may begin injecting themselves into the South-South conflict. Tareq Saleh, nephew of former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, has recently been mentioned in local media as a northerner who is becoming involved in the intra-Southern fray. Saleh leads the National Resistance Forces, the bulk of whom are former Republican Guard fighters that were first marginalized by the Hadi government following the overthrow of Ali Abdullah Saleh and subsequently by the Houthis, following the killing of Saleh in December 2017. The accompanying excerpt from *al-Mawqea* claims that as of early June, the National Resistance Forces had sent "three batches of weapons and fighters" from Yemen's west coast to Aden, to help the STC in its fight against the Hadi government. The embrace of Saleh, whose uncle was viewed by many southerners as the key obstacle to achieving independence, has according to the article "seriously damaged the reputation of the Council," making it appear as a "tool to fulfill the desires of the Emirates" rather than its own goals. A deeper relationship between Tareq Saleh and the STC could change the balance of power in Yemen's south, though it remains unclear to what extent Saleh and his forces would embrace the STC's calls for a return to the pre-1990 status quo, when Yemen was two separate political entities.

A recent analysis, published by a local think tank called *The Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies*, sees Saudi Arabia as having two options for emerging from its growing quagmire in Yemen: keep the country in perpetual low-level conflict or split it into various small political entities. Neither option has much upside but both come with substantial risk, according to the article's author, who characterizes Saudi Arabia as a brittle empire with various latent fault lines. "A miscalculation in Yemen," he argues, "could cause [the Saudi Empire] to shatter." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“The Southern Transitional Council is preventing the Yemeni coast guard forces from performing their operational tasks...”



Continued: Yemen's South-South Divisions Continue to Plague the Saudi-Emirati Coalition

Source: من ميناء بلحاف في شبوة إلى الضبة في المكلا والمخا في تعز وباب المندب وحتى ميناء عدن.. الإمارات تواصل السطو على موانئ اليمن
 “From Balhaf Port in Shabwa to al-Mukalla and Mocha in Tazz, to Bab al-Mandab and even Aden Port... The UAE Continues to Control Yemeni Ports,”
al-Masdar Online, 30 May 2020. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/194391>

A local official in Taiz Province (southwest) told Al-Araby Al-Jadeed that there is a large financial deficit that prevents local authorities from playing its role due to the loss of its most important financial resource, which are the revenues from the port of Mokha, which is under the control of the Emirates and its partners under the so-called “Republican Guards” led by Tariq Saleh, which also controls the coastal region of Dhubab...

The UAE and its oil and mining companies use ports bordering the Arabian Sea in Hadramawt Governorate, eastern Yemen, such as al-Daba, Burum and al-Shihr, without coordinating with the relevant authorities in the Yemeni government. Economic researcher Abdul Wahid Al-Awbali considered that for years the UAE’s strategy has focused on controlling and managing several of the largest and most important ports in the Arabian Sea and the Horn of Africa, the most important of which is the port of Aden...

He explained these actions by the Emirates’s focus on preventing any port in the region from developing, so that Dubai and Jebel Ali do not lose their economic viability. Experts considered that the presence of another port that provides the same services as Dubai’s ports would decrease demand for it. In less than a few years, Dubai and Emirati ports will in general be used only to export Emirati oil products. In addition, al-Awbali added: “The port of Aden falls within the map of the Silk Road ports in which China aspires to invest.”

Source: التحالف: «الانتقالي» يمنع «خفر السواحل» اليمنية من أداء مهامها
 “‘The Coalition’: ‘The STC’ Prevents the Yemeni ‘Coastguard’ from Performing its Duties,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 17 May 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yb2uxrwq>

An official source in the coalition to support legitimacy in Yemen said today (Sunday) that the Southern Transitional Council is preventing the Yemeni coast guard forces from performing their operational tasks... For his part, Yemeni Information Minister Muammar Al-Iryani said ...on Twitter, “The Transitional Council bears full responsibility for obstructing the legitimate government’s efforts to establish security and stability in Aden Province and the southern coast, preventing the Yemeni coast guard forces from carrying out their duties to protect merchant ships, thwarting terrorist activities, and stopping Iranian arms smuggling to the Houthi militia.”

Source: اليمن.. حين يتحالف “الأعداء” لخدمة الإمارات
 “Yemen: When ‘Enemies’ Ally to Serve the UAE,” *al-Mawqea*, 9 June 2020. <https://almawqeaopost.net/news/51114>

Pro-government activists have spoken of evidence of the participation of forces of “Brigadier” Tariq Salih alongside the STC in fighting in Abyan. Local media also reported on Thursday, quoting military sources, that three batches of weapons and fighters had arrived in Aden Governorate (south), coming from the west coast. The sources stated that these forces belong to Tareq Saleh, and they are being repositioned in the camps of West Aden, in preparation for their transfer to the front lines against government forces in the countryside of Zinjibar, the capital of Abyan. Looking at the Yemen conflict over the last three decades, the embrace of prominent figures from the former Saleh regime came as a surprise to many in the Southern Movement, which calls for the separation of the south from the north. [Ali Abdullah] Saleh was accused by them of waging war on the south in May 1994 and of destroying the “voluntary unity” with the North beginning in 1990... Although Abu Dhabi intervened under the banner of the coalition, whose goal was to support the government against the Houthi rebels and their allies, much intelligence continued to confirm the existence of Emirati coordination with the second “coup” party, that is the Saleh regime... This defeat led a number of Saleh regime figures, led by Tareq Saleh, to flee to the south, in one of the strange paradoxes of the conflict in Yemen... Observers believe that the acceptance of the symbols of the Southern Transitional Council in alliance with opponents who for more than two decades have been calling for a revolution against them, has seriously damaged the reputation of the Council.

The image of the council was also shaken in the south as it appeared as a “tool to fulfill the desires of the Emirates,” which was accused of seeking to achieve its own goals in Yemen, rather than those of the coalition, something that Abu Dhabi denies.

Source: Abdulghani Al-Iryani. “Serious Risks in Saudi Options for Leaving Yemen,” *Sana’a Center for Strategic Studies*, 5 June 2020. <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/analysis/10147>

The option of leaving Yemen in a state of perpetual war is likely to produce long-term security threats to Saudi Arabia, which can generally be countered, albeit at a high cost. The second option of breaking Yemen apart, while achieving some Saudi interests, also presents Iran, and, ironically, some lesser Gulf states, with the opportunity to challenge Saudi hegemony over the region. The Saudi Empire is already showing hairline cracks. A miscalculation in Yemen could cause it to shatter.



IRGC Navy Showcases Unmanned Underwater Vehicle

OE Watch Commentary: On 28 May, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy unveiled a series of naval vessels in a ceremony in Bandar Abbas. Of particular interest was the unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV). According to Iran state media outlet *Mehr News Agency*, the IRGC Navy developed this underwater vessel in response to activities in the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf. The unveiling was done before a group of high-profile officials, including IRGC Commander General Hossein Salami, Minister of Defense Amir Hatami, Commander of the IRGC Navy Admiral Alireza Tangsiri, the Governor of Hormozgan, and a group of other commanders and senior ranking officials stationed in Bandar Abbas.

Another Iran-state media outlet, *Mashregh News* discussed the latest development within the greater context of unmanned military equipment for operation at sea level and below sea level, covering a variety of submarines and other vessels, and their importance to Iranian missions in the region. The report indicates that the UUV has a range of up to 12,000 kilometers and can be equipped with various types of weapons and sensor systems for reconnaissance operations. The cargo capacity is 8 tons and it uses a combination of GPS receivers, inertial routing systems, sensor systems and submarine locators for navigation. The report points to the accompanying image of the UUV with two men on each side, noting that the metal cover on the surface of the vessel is part of the floating surface and the steering system at the front of the vessel controlled the unmanned system. In terms of how to communicate with the UUV, the report says that the IRGC Navy may turn to developing low frequency waves.

Increasingly, the Iranian military is developing the capacity to threaten and engage commercial shipping—and also foreign naval vessels—within its regional seas by means of manned and unmanned surface, underwater, and aerial systems. The growing unmanned capability is meant to augment its traditional force structure and provide new operational approaches including using those systems in advance of manned systems, deployed amongst them (in a human-machine teaming role), or in a singular manner relying solely upon unmanned system strikes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bunker & Keshavarz)**

“The UUV has advanced hydraulic dynamics, high speed maneuverability, low radar cross section and high offensive power. This vessel closely resembles the Ghadir series, but smaller and without a command bridge.”



IRGC Navy UUV (Unmanned Underwater Vehicle).

Source: Mashregh News, <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1077418/> مهم-هدهدو-ققحج-یمزرن-شیرس-نودب-یی-ایردری-ز-ا-ه-اپ-س-یم-س-ری-ام-ن-ور

Source: “Vorood Iran beh club nokhbgan nobgan zeerdaryae bedoon sarnsheen (Iran enters elite unmanned underwater vessel club),” *Mehr News Agency*, 28 May 2020. <https://www.mehrnews.com/news/4937326/> نیشنرس-نودب-یی-ایردری-ز-ان-ا-گوان-ن-ا-گبخن-پولک-هب-ن-ار-یا-دورو

The IRGC Navy developed these unmanned unwater vessels in response to activities in the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf.

Source: “Roonmayee rasmee Sepah az zeer daryae bedoon sarnsheen razmee/tahgheegh va’dee mohem sarleshkar Salami zarf comtera az 8 mah + ax (IRGC unveiled unmanned combat submarined/fulfillment of Major General Salami’s promise in less than 8 months + photo),” *Mashregh News*, 28 May 2020. <https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/1077418/> یمزرن-شیرس-نودب-یی-ایردری-ز-ا-ه-اپ-س-یم-س-ری-ام-ن-ور

The IRGC Navy said that they have passed the development stage of the UUV and are not in experimental. They are working on whether the vessel can carry a torpedo or if it will be used to attach from a depth to sink heavy vessels.

According to the official announcement, this underwater drone has a range of up to 12,000 kilometers and can be equipped with various types of weapons and sensor systems for reconnaissance operations, depending on operational needs. The cargo capacity of this submarine is 8 tons and it uses a combination of GPS receiver, inertial routing systems and sensor systems and submarine locators to understand its route.

...
In discussing how to communicate with this submarine, the IRGC may have moved towards developing low frequency waves to communicate the long submarine range, which is not unattainable technology due to the relatively small area of the region and of course the long coasts of our country.



IRGC Navy Announces Construction of Two New Ships and Unveils New Speedboats

OE Watch Commentary: The US killing of Iranian Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani on 3 January 2020 outside the Baghdad airport shocked Iranian leaders who believed Soleimani untouchable. Soleimani regularly polled among Iran's most admired figures ("Qassem Soleimani Voted Man of the Year in Iran," *OE Watch*, May 2015). Even if the Iranian regime manipulates such polls, at a minimum they indicate the personalities and the mythologies that the Iranian regime seeks to promote.

While the Iranian military launched a missile barrage at Iraqi bases co-hosting American forces, reportedly injuring more than 100 US servicemen and contractors, there is little more Iranian officials can do without precipitating a direct military confrontation with the United States which, since their devastating loss in 1988's Operation Praying Mantis, they have always sought to avoid. To react symbolically to public anger, however, they have sought to continue Soleimani's cult in murals, pronouncements and now, according to this excerpt from a story run on the news



The 28 May 2020 ceremony to unveil 100 new boats into the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy. Source: Defa Press, https://defapress.ir/files/fa/news/1399/3/8/996785_169.jpg

agency of the Islamic Republic's Defense Ministry, by naming a ship after him. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Navy will also name a new ship after Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an Iraqi militia member, who died alongside Soleimani. Such a move seems to undercut the Popular Mobilization Forces' insistence that they are entirely Iraqi nationalist and not under the command-and-control of the IRGC. It is not often if ever that Iranian military vessels are named after non-Iranians.

The ceremony at which the IRGC-Navy chief Alireza Tangsiri announced the pending construction of the new ships was one in which he unveiled 100 new "vessels," the bulk of which are speedboats of the type that the Islamic Republic uses to harass the US Navy and other ships in international waters, according to photographs of the event. However, his claim that the two new ships named after Soleimani and Muhandis will be helicopter-carriers should be taken with a grain of salt, as many recent Iranian "helicopter-carriers" have instead been designed to launch UAVs.

End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)

“Two large military vessels named after the martyrs Soleimani and Al-Muhandis will be built.”

Source: "Vezhgiha-ye Shanavarha-ye 'Shahid Soleimani' va 'Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis' az Zaban-e Daryadar Tangsiri (Characteristics of 'Martyr Soleimani' and 'Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis' from Tangsiri's point of view)," *Defa Press*, 28 May 2020. <https://defapress.ir/fa/>

Characteristics of "Martyr Soleimani" and "Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis"

The commander of the Revolutionary Guards of Navy Forces said that, "Two large military vessels named after the martyrs Soleimani and Al-Muhandis will be built in the navy."

According to the Defe-Press group, Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said this morning on the sidelines of the ceremony of joining 112 new and aggressive high-speed vessels to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Navy in a conversation in Bandar Abbas: Construction will begin soon.

He said: "This vessel will be 65 meters long and capable of carrying helicopters, and its special design will soon be finalized."

The commander of the IRGC-Navy stated that various types of modern weapons and equipment built inside [Iran] will be installed and used on this vessel, which we will start soon. He said that there are a variety of facilities capable of firing surface and air missiles also considered in this vessel.

Admiral Tangsiri stated that the combat vessel of Martyr Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis has also been designed and we will start its construction work in one of the people's factories of the IRGC-Navy soon.

He said that the ability to build all kinds of boats, both in the hull and in the motor section and the rehabilitation/reparation of diver boats... have been provided to the IRGC-Navy, and in other areas we are cooperating in with the defense industry."

Admiral Tangsiri also pointed out Martyr Soleimani's vessel and stated that, "This large vessel will be bigger than Martyr Nazeri's vessel and we will see more variety of equipment installed on it."



The Three Main Missions of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Republic of Iran has a bifurcated military structure with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the regular army having overlapping missions. However, the IRGC is the regime's more trusted military pillar, often raising questions about whether the regular army has any main mission besides taking the secondary missions, which the IRGC passes to it. It is against this context that Army Chief Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi's comments, excerpted in the accompanying *Defa Press* article, are interesting.

Mousavi's visit to the 23rd Takavar Division in Parandak, about 50 miles southwest of Tehran, may have been meant as a moral boost to the regular army, but it also hinted at some problems within the military. He noted that the three main missions of the army were "improving the quality and quantity of the combat [forces], capability, and the capacity to be combat ready; spiritual and insightful excellence; and meeting the living needs [of army employees and their families]." Mousavi emphasized the need to increase combat readiness at all levels of command, an entreaty he would be less likely to make should the regular army already be combat ready. His promise to upgrade facilities also suggests that years of neglect and of the IRGC receiving the bulk of Iran's military investment are undercutting morale among Iran's non-IRGC forces. That he grounds the needs to upgrade and "beautify" facilities in a command by the "Supreme Commander-in-Chief" suggests that the problem of deteriorating facilities is serious enough that it has come to the attention of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei himself. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



The Islamic Republic of Iran Army on Parade in Zahedan, April 2016.

Source: Tasnim News, <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1395/01/29/139501291300051897529714.jpg>

“Improving combat readiness... is the task of all levels of command.”

Source: “Seh Mamoriyat-e Asli Artesh-e Jomhuri-ye Islami Iran (Three Main Missions of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran),” *Defa Press*, 31 May 2020. <https://defapress.ir/fa/news/399130>

Three main missions of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran

The Commander-in-Chief of the Army said: “Improving the quality and quantity of the combat [forces], capability, and the capacity to be combat ready; spiritual and insightful excellence and meeting the living needs are our three main missions, which should be taken care of in all categories.”

According to the Defa Press media group, Major General Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi, commander-in-chief of the Army, visited the operational base of the 23rd Ranger Division and assessed the combat capabilities of 223 special forces and 123 offensive mobile units in the Ground Forces. He said: “Let’s do our best to observe justice and ask God Almighty to give us the ability to implement and serve justice.”

He further talked about the improvement in the combat capability and spiritual readiness and insight and added that, “Improving combat capability both in terms of quality and quantity and in proportion to the mission and threats is on our permanent agenda.” Improving combat readiness means keeping and preparing what we have in the best way and using it in the best way; this is the task of all levels of command.

Major General Mousavi said: “Spiritual and insightful excellence are two powerful wings for culminating and correctly recognizing the path and goal that all employees and their families are subject to this command.”

The commander-in-chief of the army also stressed the need to beautify organizational premises and remove the antiquity from the faces of houses and barracks: the issue of beautification is one of the orders of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief and should be a priority.



An Afghan Perspective: A New Phase in Afghanistan-Iran Relations

OE Watch Commentary: Iran-Afghanistan relations are historically fraught. Much of Western Afghanistan—the Herat, Nimruz, and Farah provinces—were Iranian territory until the settlement ending the 1856-1857 Anglo-Persian War assigned them to Afghanistan. The issue is not simply historical or military, but also diplomatic and cultural. Afghans resent the condescension and arrogance with which Iranians view and treat them. Millions of Afghans have experienced Iranian abuses and discrimination while living as refugees or temporary workers inside the Islamic Republic.

In the attached account from Afghanistan’s main news site of record, chief editor Wahid Payman reports an incident in which Iranian border guards allegedly threw into a border river and drowned several Afghan workers and migrants seeking to enter Iran. Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan initially denied the incident, but Payman reports both eyewitness accounts and



The Zur al-Faqr border region between Iran and Afghanistan.

Source: BaharNews.ir, <http://www.baharnews.ir/images/docs/000215/n00215101-b.jpg>

subsequent investigations corroborate reports by Afghans who survived the encounter. Payman reports that the Afghan government reacted in an unprecedented manner by swiftly appointing a delegation to investigate the incident and issuing harsh statements. He points out that this is unprecedented, and claims that this signals “a new phase in Afghanistan-Iran relations.”

The incident highlights the obstacles Iranian leaders will face even as they try to influence the elected Afghan government in Kabul and perhaps also serve as a mediator between Kabul and the Taliban following any US withdrawal (see: “Iran Talking to the Taliban,” *OE Watch*, June 2020). Part of this tension rests with President Ashraf Ghani’s annoyance that Iranian officials have not more openly sided with him against challenges to his legitimacy by former Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah who held a competing inauguration. Also of interest are reports included in Payman’s overview of Iran-Afghanistan ties that both Tehran and Kabul have quietly expelled diplomats from each other’s missions over the past year without publicly saying why.

The major obstacle Iran will now face in asserting its influence in Afghanistan, however, will be public opinion. Tehran might have sought to sweep the abuse of Afghans at the border under the carpet, but statements issued both by Ghani and Acting Foreign Minister Atmar suggest that both are more keenly attuned to Afghan public opinion and anger than leaders have been for the past half century when chaos and war precluded Afghanistan’s diplomats from effectively advocating for and protecting its citizens living and working abroad. Simply put, Iran might seek to reassert itself in Afghanistan and balance Pakistani influence, but until Iran addresses what Afghans perceive as Iranian racism, it will be difficult for Iran to win hearts-and-minds or, at a minimum, be viewed with anything other than disdain. (See also: “Increased Attacks in Afghanistan Post US-Taliban Peace Deal” in this issue.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Iranian border police did not allow local residents to rescue the drowning.”



Continued: An Afghan Perspective: A New Phase in Afghanistan-Iran Relations

Source: Wahid Payman, “Faz-e Tazeh dar Ravabet-e Afghanistan va Iran (A New Phase in Afghanistan-Iran Relations),” *Hasht-e Sobh*, 6 May 2020. <https://8am.af/a-new-phase-in-relations-with-afghanistan-and-iran/>

A New Phase in Afghanistan-Iran Relations

The Afghan government is investigating allegations made by a number of Afghan workers. These workers claimed on Friday [1 May] that they had been arrested by Iranian police after crossing the border illegally and then thrown into the river. In response, the Afghan Foreign Ministry appointed a delegation to investigate the incident. The results of the investigation have not yet been officially announced, but the Arg [Presidential Palace] and the Foreign Ministry have both issued strong statements in connection with the incident.

With the publication of these statements, it can be inferred that the death of a number of Afghan workers on the border between the two countries has started a new phase in Afghanistan-Iran relations. Two statements issued by the Presidential Palace of Afghanistan and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have a very strong tone condemning the act, the killing of a number of Afghan job seekers in the Zur al-Faqr border region. The Presidential Palace called the incident a “crime” and an “inhumane” act, and “unforgivable.”

President Ghani’s spokesperson, Siddiq Siddiqui tweeted in response to the killing of a number of Afghan job seekers on the border with Iran:

“The brutal and inhumane acts that martyred a number of our oppressed citizens on the border with Iran are unforgivable crimes. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is seriously pursuing this unfortunate event in order to ensure justice....”

[Acting Foreign Minister Hanif] Atmar’s tweet reads: “This grief is our common grief. We assure our compatriots that we will pursue this unforgivable crime with all the diplomatic means of the country until we achieve justice and fairness.”

We do not recall any such statements from the Afghan government in the past decade in response to any case. From time to time, some relatively sharp statements from the government’s address have been limited in response to some Pakistani political-security actions....

At least three factors can be analyzed for the Afghan government’s quick response to the incident.

Factor One: Identification of the realities of this event

Narratives published from the addresses of survivors and eyewitnesses are “astonishing” and “sad.” Eyewitnesses spoke to the media about how the incident took place. Some claimed that in addition to dumping workers in the river, Iranian border police did not allow local residents to rescue the drowning. The Afghan government has been in contact with eyewitnesses for four days. Eyewitnesses to the incident may have provided evidence to the Afghan Investigative Committee and the Afghan government...

Factor Two: The Recent History of Relations between the two countries

Relations between the Afghan government and Iran have been strained for the past six weeks. The unrest began when no representatives of the Iranian embassy in Kabul attended the inauguration of the President of the Republic of Afghanistan. When Iranian President Hassan Rouhani invited Mohammad Ashraf Ghani to attend his inauguration in 2017, Mr. Ghani went to Tehran as a senior guest. Two months ago, when Mr. Ghani’s inauguration took place in Kabul, no representatives, even at small levels, attended Mr. Ghani’s inauguration. However, the difference between Mr. Rouhani’s swearing-in ceremony and Mr. Ghani’s swearing-in ceremony was that two swearing-in ceremonies were held in Afghanistan at the same time....

The Third Factor is the Policy of Diplomatic and Political support

... In Afghanistan, the policy of protecting the interests of citizens and diplomatic support for Afghan citizens outside Afghanistan has been limited in the last 50 years. The main reason was the consequences of the war and the lack of codified policies and programs in foreign policy. Afghanistan has been largely embroiled in internal strife for the past five decades. On the first day of his tenure, Afghan Foreign Minister Hanif Atmar promised to protect the rights of Afghan citizens in other countries as well....



China-Africa Relations in the Time of COVID-19



While China has funded large-scale projects in Africa, such as this railroad in Kenya, relations between Africa and China have at times been rough since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Macabe 5387 via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nairobi_Terminus_-_platform.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

overcome its difficulties. Though China has been sending aid, big investments from the Chinese such as those in the past may, at least temporarily, remain in the past as China struggles with its own faltering economy.

Still, despite the many problems, in the long run China's prospects in Africa might actually benefit from the pandemic, according to the article. To begin with, there are an estimated one million Chinese living in Africa. They are one reason China has been so generous with aid to the continent during the pandemic despite its own economic troubles. Notably, that money is not just from the government, with many mainland Chinese and their businesses having also made donations. Those funds flowing into Africa help buy goodwill.

Additionally, since it appears growth within China might be constrained for a while, Chinese investors are looking abroad. Facing increasing restrictions from the US and Europe, they are searching in Africa for opportunities. However, some Africans are increasingly wary of the imbalance in trade between the two parties as well as the increasing debt to China that Africa is piling on. Thus, as the article discusses, it is expected that the relationship between China and Africa may continue to be strong in the short to medium term, but changes are possible in the long term, if Africa pushes to decrease the massive trade imbalance. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The coronavirus outbreak has revealed cracks in the China-Africa dynamic. Gone are the days of Chinese big loans and major borrowing. Beijing’s relationship with its African partners is changing, experts say.”

Source: Chiponda Chimbelu, “COVID-19 pandemic to transform China-Africa relations,” *Deutsche Welle*, 8 June 2020. <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-19-pandemic-to-transform-china-africa-relations/a-53724530>

The coronavirus outbreak has revealed cracks in the China-Africa dynamic. Gone are the days of Chinese big loans and major borrowing. Beijing’s relationship with its African partners is changing, experts say.

But despite many negative headlines, China looks like it could still benefit from the ongoing pandemic in Africa. Beijing was the first of the continent’s partners to get the coronavirus outbreak under control, and that’s not its only advantage.

It is hardly a surprise that official Chinese aid has been outstripped by private donations in the COVID-19 response. Beijing has already pumped significant amounts of cash in Africa. It is now the continent’s largest bilateral creditor, accounting for around 20% of external debt on the continent, according to several estimates. So while the Chinese economy falters, private involvement in the Chinese response may be a sign of what’s to come.

Still, the relationship between Beijing and its African partners is largely unequal. The trade deficit is staggering, and the incidents in Guangzhou were also a sign of the dynamic. African traders do not have the same economic power and access to the market that Chinese migrants have on the continent.



South Africa's Military in Decline

OE Watch Commentary: Though still viewed as one of Africa's most powerful militaries, South Africa's armed forces have found themselves in a precipitous decline for at least the past eight years. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African site *DefenceWeb* points out, this decline can mainly be traced to deep budget cuts, which have left the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) with only 63% of the funding necessary to meet its requirements, according to Defence and Military Veterans Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula. The Minister further reports that money had to be shifted from goods and services, such as purchasing equipment and training, just to be able to pay salaries.



South African troops conducting an exercise.

Source: Africom/Flickr/Wikipedia, https://mg.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sary:Shared_Accord_2013.jpg, CC BY 2.0

The result of these stopgap measures has included a reduction in the equipment available, both from lack of maintenance on older stock and an inability to purchase a significant number of new items. Additionally, with the lack of adequate training, troops are unable to maintain an appropriate level of combat readiness. Other problems include degrading facilities, and obsolete communications equipment, especially dangerous in this era of cyber warfare.

As the article discusses, adding to South Africa's security-related troubles, the budget cuts have also meant less money for the country's defense industry, a large manufacturing base whose innovation has led to many of its products being purchased by other nations. Without funding from the government, some of the research and development capacity necessary for that innovation could suffer. Besides bringing in less currency from export sales, the decline in defense industries could lead to the country purchasing military equipment from foreign defense industries, resulting in what their DoD describes as an erosion of South African sovereignty.

The accompanying article briefly mentions that SANDF's future funding may also be cut. This is in line with other articles reporting that South Africa will likely see further budget tightening, especially in the wake of economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some economists are even predicting a recession for the country, suggesting that this situation will not be reversed anytime soon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Successive budget cuts are causing the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to lose its capabilities and are... threatening South Africa's defence industry...”

Source: “Budget cuts mean South Africa is losing its sovereign capability, defence industry,” *DefenceWeb (South Africa)*, 31 May 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/budget-cuts-mean-south-africa-is-losing-its-sovereign-capability-defence-industry/>

Successive budget cuts are causing the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to lose its capabilities and are also threatening South Africa's defence industry, a parliamentary committee has heard.

On 27 May, the Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans (PCDMV) was briefed by the Department of Defence (DoD). It heard that the SANDF has been in a critical decline since the last defence review (drafted in 2012 and approved in 2015). The review then described the SANDF as being “characterised by force imbalance, unaffordability of its main operating systems, inability to meet current standing defence commitments, and the lack of critical mobility”.

The JSCD said it is concerned that the Defence Force is fast losing its capabilities, owing to successive budget cuts that have also impacted on its defence material acquisition programmes, with the resultant knock-on effect on the defence industry. The Chairperson of the committee, Cyril Xaba, said: “With the Defence Force in a state of decline, the country is losing its sovereign capability, something that will take many years to rebuild.”



Kenya's Exit Plan from Somalia

OE Watch Commentary: With regards to AMISOM withdrawing from Somalia by December 2021, the die is cast... sort of. There is still great concern that the Somali National Army (SNA) is not yet ready to assume full responsibility for the country's security, especially with al-Shabaab still active in several areas. This creates a huge security risk for neighboring Kenya (among others), which has contributed soldiers to AMISOM. In light of a possible resurgence of al-Shabaab or the rise of a similar extremist movement after the withdrawal of AMISOM, the Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) now have a plan to guide their withdrawal. As the accompanying excerpted article from the Kenyan news site *The Daily Nation* relates, the plan is in the form of a book written by the immediate former Chief of Defense Forces and is based on six pillars, which envision a comprehensive approach to the problem.



Kenyan soldiers serving under AMISOM.

Source: AMISOM/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2015_12_25_Kenya%27s_CDF-7_\(23614641219\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2015_12_25_Kenya%27s_CDF-7_(23614641219).jpg), Public Domain

The first pillar involves reforming the SNA, which will be no easy task, especially in the limited time available. The second is to create a stable Jubaland, as a corridor free of al-Shabaab and as a potential buffer between Kenya and al-Shabaab in Somalia. The third is a comprehensive border management system between Kenya and Somalia; once again no easy task based on how porous the border presently is.

The next three pillars are also quite ambitious. The fourth one is the creation of multi-agency command and control centers to enhance intelligence and security operations. The fifth is creating partnerships with Somalia and Ethiopia regarding enhancing collective security, though the article does not mention some of the rivalries and other issues among the countries that make reaching such agreements difficult. The final pillar is countering violent extremism through raising public awareness. This pillar also involves collaborative training and counter-terrorism exercises.

It is unclear if the six pillars - essentially objectives - outlined in the book can be met by the December 2021 deadline. It is also uncertain whether AMISOM's withdrawal deadline would be extended if they are not met. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) has established pillars that will guide its withdrawal from Somalia after eight years.”

Source: Nyambega Gisesa, “KDF draws exit plan for war in Somalia,” *The Daily Nation (Kenya)*, 13 May 2020. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/KDF-draws-exit-plan-for-war-Somalia/1056-5550976-lwa0kpz/index.html>

The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) has established pillars that will guide its withdrawal from Somalia after eight years.

*The plans are contained in a new book, *War for Peace: Kenya's Military in the African Mission in Somalia, 2011-2020* launched on Friday by immediate former Chief of Defence Forces Samson Mwathethe.*

“Neighbouring countries are more concerned about the possibility of the resurgence of al-Shabaab or the rise of a similar extremist movement after the end of Amisom in 2020,” the book says.

“These legitimate concerns are informed by the history of interventions in Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries.”

“Two key factors should be considered. First, a transition of Amisom work to Somali-led operations and; secondly, from military to police-led operations,” it says.



Kenya Criticized for Law Enforcement Response to COVID-19

OE Watch Commentary: As the accompanying excerpted article from South Africa's *Institute for Security Studies* discusses, Kenya's security forces are in the spotlight as they attempt to implement curfews and quarantines to combat the spread of COVID-19. Although the article does not mention specifics, it points out that Kenyan security forces have been criticized in the past for using excessive measures in counterterrorism operations, and "despite a period of apparent reform, it seems old habits die hard." Now, as the country struggles to contain the spread of COVID-19, law enforcement is "once again center stage, with rights groups warning that excessive use of force by security services could undermine efforts to contain the pandemic." **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Kenyan security forces during a civil affairs training exercise.
Source: US Army Africa/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kenyan_Soldiers_Train_Prepare_for_Civil_Affairs_Mission_-_Flickr_-_US_Army_Africa_\(3\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kenyan_Soldiers_Train_Prepare_for_Civil_Affairs_Mission_-_Flickr_-_US_Army_Africa_(3).jpg), CC BY 2.0

“Kenya’s security services have a long history of questionable conduct, and despite a period of apparent reform, it seems old habits die hard.”

Source: Karen Allen, “Kenya’s Counter-terrorism Trade-off,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 28 April 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/kenyas-counter-terrorism-trade-off>

Following the disputed presidential elections in 2007-8, the Commission of Inquiry into Post-election Violence found that most assaults were perpetrated by security forces. Fast-forward more than a decade and the reflex to shoot first, ask questions later, remains.

Kenya’s security services have a long history of questionable conduct, and despite a period of apparent reform, it seems old habits die hard. As the country battles to contain COVID-19, the police service is once again centre stage, with rights groups warning that excessive use of force by security services could undermine efforts to contain the pandemic.

Despite warnings by ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda of ‘witness intimidation, bribery and the withholding of information’ by Kenyan elites with close links to the security forces, the ICC cases collapsed. Yet there was little sanction by international players.

Kenya cannot afford to fall behind on police reform. It matters because police impunity erodes constitutional obligations to protect human rights. That impunity is also used by Islamist groups to justify their own violence. Research done for the United Nations on the drivers of extremism bears this out.



Funding and Logistics for West African Terrorists

OE Watch Commentary: Terrorists in the inland nations of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are supporting themselves in part by using their southern neighbors - the coastal nations of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo - for sources of funding as well as transit zones for trade and needed supplies. As the accompanying excerpted article from the South African *Institute for Security Studies* points out, not only do these activities enable terrorists in the inland countries to have the necessary funds and materiel to carry out attacks, but there is also a spillover risk to the coastal nations, with the result that they too will see increasing terrorist activity, including recruitment from their local populations.



Extremists in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso are using the coastal nations of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo for funding and as transit zones.

Source: Peter Fitzgerald/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:West_Africa_regions_map.png, CC BY-SA 3.0

One of the many examples of the funding and logistics connections provided throughout the article relates to livestock stolen from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which is then transported and sold in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Ghana. The money from this illicit trade, after passing through several networks, is then used to buy weapons, fuels, motorbikes, and food. These items are then sent north to the terrorists, with those motorbikes being especially valued. This can be attributed to their durability and mobility through rough terrain, as well as being easy to maintain, having low fuel consumption, and capable of carrying more than one person for a terrorist operation.

Also making its way north is fertilizer - a key ingredient in making explosives - stolen from Ghana. While border police are able to intercept some of the fertilizer in the northern part of the country, much of it is smuggled into Burkina Faso.

To prevent the southward spread of terrorism from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the four coastal nations launched the Accra Initiative in 2017. This is essentially a collaborative security mechanism that involves operations such as sharing intelligence and conducting joint military exercises. Attacks in southern Burkina Faso in 2019, close to the borders of those coastal nations, have deepened their concerns.

Despite the Accra Initiative, weak border surveillance, porous borders, and strong communal and socioeconomic ties make it extremely difficult to counteract the illicit trade and other activities in the coastal nations that fuel terrorism in their northern neighbors. An additional obstacle to stopping these activities is that many of the coastal nations own people depend on these activities for their livelihood, and ending them could create harsh economic conditions as well as unrest.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Extremists use Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo as sources or transit zones for funding and logistics.”

Source: Sampson Kwarkye, “Breaking terrorism supply chains in West Africa,” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 8 June 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/breaking-terrorism-supply-chains-in-west-africa>

Extremists use Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo as sources or transit zones for funding and logistics

Coastal states acknowledge the importance of addressing the root causes of violent extremism, including governance and developmental deficits. Extremists could exploit the lack of basic services, such as roads, health and education facilities, and socio-economic opportunities, to penetrate and implant themselves in communities. The 2020-2024 ECOWAS Priority Action Plan outlines actions to tackle these shortcomings.

West Africa's coastal states must also address the weaknesses that allow these groups to operate. Capacity is needed to track trade consignments between countries, beef up border control and surveillance, enhance intelligence gathering and analysis, and garner the support of people living in border areas. This could help identify extremists who may be exploiting cross-border ties.

The disruption of supply chains could set the stage for more terrorist attacks. Violence could be used to protect hideouts, secure supply routes, or attack border posts that extremists believe are impediments to their supply of materials. This means that – to avoid generating community resentment – strategies aimed at disruption must be balanced with preserving the livelihoods of individuals and communities who rely on cross-border trade.



Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso Coordinate on Counter-Terrorism

OE Watch Commentary: As jihadist groups continue to expand their operational reach in West Africa, countries that have rarely had to coordinate counter-terrorism operations are now finding themselves on the frontlines together. The excerpted French-language article discusses Burkina Faso's coordination with Côte d'Ivoire to halt the progress of al-Qaeda-loyal militants who are intent on crossing into the latter's territory. As a result, the article notes the countries' armies conducted joint operations and flushed the militant cells from their hideouts.

The operation was codenamed Comoé after the river that separates the two countries. The Ivorian military chief of staff, Lassina Doumbia, asserted the operation was necessary because jihadists had united from different parts of Burkina Faso to target Côte d'Ivoire. If the two countries did not unite, they would not have been able to dislodge the jihadists. The article also notes that cooperation had been increasing for some time because Côte d'Ivoire had been tracking the jihadists setting up bases on its territory for one year before the recent joint counter-terrorism operations were launched.



Burkina Faso Gourma.

Source: Baliola via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Burkina_Faso_Gourma.JPG, CC by SA 3.0

The article also implies the jihadists may be communicating with disaffected Ivorian politicians. For example, it notes Ivorian security officials believe some jihadists were informed about the impending operation. Whether true or not, it indicates that the problem of terrorism in Côte d'Ivoire might not only be a matter of bilateral relations and external threats, but also one of maintaining internal stability. Considering the article notes that nearly 1,000 people have died in jihadist attacks since 2015 in neighboring Burkina Faso, it is in Côte d'Ivoire's interest to prevent any internal or external factors from allowing jihadists to gain a foothold on its territory. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“According to security sources, these were jihadists operating in Burkina Faso, who came to seek refuge on the Ivorian side of the border.”

Source: “Terrorisme: opération antidjihadiste à la frontière entre la Côte d'Ivoire et le Burkina Faso (Terrorism: anti-jihadist operation on the border between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso),” *Le Nouvelliste*, 23 May 2020. <https://www.lenouvelliste.ch/articles/monde/terrorisme-operation-antidjihadiste-a-la-frontiere-entre-la-cote-d-ivoire-et-le-burkina-faso-940663>

A major military operation was launched on the border between Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. The two armies want to dislodge jihadists hidden in the area and who threaten all of West Africa. The Ivorian and Burkinabe armies carried out a joint operation in the north of Côte d'Ivoire for several days. They sought to flush out jihadists who have found refuge in the area and crossed borders.

“They (the terrorists) managed to join forces between terrorist groups. If we did not do it of course we will lose the war,” said Ivorian military chief of staff Lassina Doumbia. The operation, which began earlier this month, took place to the northeast of Ferkessedougou, near Sangopari, which is a small village where former Ivorian rebel leader Guillaume Soro has family ties. The operation was unsuccessful, however, but led to the arrest of the squadron chief of the gendarmerie in Kong (northeast), which is the village of the family of Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara.

The presence of jihadist elements north of Comoé National Park has been detected for over a year. According to security sources, these were jihadists operating in Burkina Faso, who came to seek refuge on the Ivorian side of the border. Hundreds of dead Burkina Faso faces jihadist attacks which have left nearly 900 dead since 2015.



Burkina Faso Faces Jihadists and Coronavirus

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted French-language article from *France 24* asserts that Burkina Faso has been a weak link in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. The article notes that the north of the country is under constant attack by jihadists and that entire provinces in the country are threatened. According to the article, this problematic security situation is compounded by the fact that the coronavirus is spreading in the country. Hence, the article claims that Burkina Faso is caught between two fires.

The article also notes insurgents are loyal to both Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda and there is yet to be any decisive victory over them. Rather, there have been nearly 850,000 displaced people as a result of the fighting, and that number continues to grow. The one encouraging sign, according to the article, is that even though there have been significant levels of inter-communal fighting, communities have remained hospitable to taking in displaced people.

In terms of tactics, the article highlights how the jihadists have consistently targeted schools that they accuse of propagating Western culture and French language. Teachers have also been killed. As a result, schools have to hold emergency drills to prepare students for the possibility of escaping an attack. Some school closings have forced other students to crowd into other schools that are still open.

Lastly, the articles notes that the coronavirus has been reported in northern Burkina Faso. This poses a significant risk for an already vulnerable population. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The first cases of coronavirus have been reported in this part of the country. And even if their number is currently limited, the spread is underway.”

Source: “Le Burkina Faso face au péril jihadiste (Burkina Faso Faces Jihadist Peril),” *France 24*, 24 April 2020. <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20200424-le-burkina-faso-face-au-p%C3%A9ril-djihadiste?ref=tw>

With the Burkinabè army, French soldiers of the Barkhane force recently carried out several major operations in this area bordering Mali and Niger without winning a decisive victory. Caught between two fires, the population flees en masse and the flow of displaced people grows exponentially. There are nearly 850,000 today, according to the United Nations, ten times more than just a year ago. They are hosted by the local population, who proudly display their unconditional hospitality. An attitude that has symbolic value, while inter-community violence regularly provokes bloodshed.

Schools are also targeted by jihadists. In particular French-speaking establishments, accused of propagating Western culture. Many teachers have been murdered, as explained by the director of a school in Dori, which welcomes hundreds of displaced children. He regularly organizes safety exercises to instill good reactions in students in the event of an attack.

The first cases of coronavirus have been reported in this part of the country. And even if their number is currently limited, the spread is underway.

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>



Germany Continues Military Support to Mali

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article published by a Mauritanian organization called *CRIDEM* (Crossroads of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania), discusses Germany's considerations regarding its military presence in Mali. The article notes that Germany views the security situation in Mali as alarming and plans to strengthen its presence there by 100 troops. German troops will also remain in Mali for at least one more year until the end of May 2021. In total, German troops in Mali will amount to 450 of the 11,000 international soldiers in Mali. The German government spokesperson further highlights concern about the spread of organized crime in Mali as well as terrorism.

According to the article, German troops in Mali do not engage in combat but instead train Malian soldiers and police. The article notes that the German troops enhance the operations of French-led Operation Barkhane, whose troop contingents also include soldiers from the Estonian and British armies. Coinciding with Germany's renewed commitment to Malian security, France has also increased its troop total in the country from 4,500 to 5,100 troops.

However, the article also points out additional risks. It states that Malian public opinion has generally been against France, despite France's commitment to the country's security. Further, the German government spokesperson also notes that the poor security in Mali was affecting Niger and Burkina Faso. Therefore, Germany faces the dual challenge of winning the support of the Malian population and preventing the continued spread of violence throughout Mali and the West African region more generally. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Berlin believes that the precarious situation of the Sahel is well worth its presence in the region.”

Source: “Attaques jihadistes : l’Allemagne renforce son contingent militaire au Mali (Jihadist Attacks: Germany Reinforces its Military Contingent in Mali),” *Cridem.org*, 9 May 2020. http://www.cridem.org/C_Info.php?article=735877

The security situation in the Sahel is considered “alarming” by Berlin, so the German army will maintain and even strengthen its presence in Mali. The participation of the Bundeswehr in the training mission of the The European Union in Mali (EUTM) has thus been extended until May 31, 2021, and its contingent will increase by 100 soldiers to reach a total of 450.

Germany does not fight, but it trains Malian soldiers and Berlin believes that the precarious situation of the Sahel is well worth its presence in the region. Considering the poor security to be “alarming” in Mali, but also in other Sahel states such as Niger and Burkina Faso, Demmer said that the army missions would fight against “the jihadists and militias.”

The presence of Bundeswehr soldiers in Mali also strengthens the visibility of Operation Barkhane (ex-Serval) which, since August 2014, has been led by the French army, with the help of the Estonian and British armies. Barkhane's force has recently increased from 4,500 to 5,100 soldiers after a decision announced by Emmanuel Macron at the G5-Sahel summit in Pau in January 2020.



The RED DIAMOND is the Army's leading e-journal highlighting current threats in the Operational Environment.

It is published by TRADOC G-2 OEE ACE Threats Integration and is posted at:

<https://atn.army.mil/tradoc-g2/operational-environment-publications/red-diamond-newsletter>



France Publishes Updated Mali Security Assessment

OE Watch Commentary: On 10 May, the same day Mali's President Kéita addressed the nation in regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs updated its security assessment for Mali. The report, excerpted here, contains few surprises. Most of the country is considered “red” and is to be avoided unless one is part of the security apparatus trying to hold on to the central and northern regions of the country. The rest of the country is designated orange and there are no green (safe) areas in Mali.

At least some locals from both Bamako and areas further south think the “orange” designation is unfair and could hinder access to international humanitarian activities in the south where a steady, yet almost unnoticeable, influx of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) have increased the need for outside assistance. Much of this assistance comes from smaller western NGOs with little ability to provide their own security.

This may be a valid point. The French assessment considers both acts of terrorism and abductions a continued threat. But in both cases the French report reference incidents that occurred three and four years ago respectively. At the same time, the fact that there have been no instances of either terrorism or abduction in the south of the country for at least four years, despite thousands of refugees arriving from the “red” parts of the country, supports the notion that the south has been safer than the intelligence suggests.

The French ministry also updated its guidance on the COVID-19 crisis in Mali. While the pandemic has closed nearly all travel to and from the country, it hasn't slowed down the struggle between Mali and its international and regional partners battling Islamic terrorist organizations.

Since the assessment was published on 10 May, there have been a number of violent clashes. On 11 May, the UN reported that three peacekeepers were killed and four wounded as their vehicle hit an IED in northern Mali. A week earlier two French soldiers died days apart from an IED attack on their vehicle. Most recently it was reported that armed men in military uniform killed at least 20 people in the village of Binedama. According to South Africa-based *Defense Web*, there is local suspicion that the attack may have been the work of Malian government forces or attached militias. Such sentiment only adds to the many frictions fueling the conflict and instability in Mali.

While the pandemic continues to isolate Mali from the international community, it has not stopped the fight for the north and central regions of the county. The French assessment, as sobering as it is, is likely realistic and continues to demonstrate that there is no end in sight for the fight against Islamic extremists in the Sahel. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“Maintain real vigilance during night trips and reduce them as much as possible in urban areas. Night trips outside the cities are to be avoided.”

Source: “Risques Encourus Et Recommandations Associees: Mali (Risks and Related Recommendations: Security Update Mali),” *Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (France)*, 10 May 2020. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/conseils-aux-voyageurs/conseils-par-pays-destination/mali/#securite>

In the center and north of the country, the attacks target in priority the settlements and convoys of Malian and international military forces. The possible presence of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or mines, as well as frequent attacks on highways prohibits any traffic by road outside urban centers. Attacks are also likely to be carried out in the rest of the country, including against Malian security forces and symbols of the Western presence. The risk of an attack in Bamako, particularly targeting public places frequented by Westerners (restaurants, hotels, leisure places, shops), is particularly high.

The threat of kidnapping is high in Mali. Several kidnappings of Western nationals have taken place in recent years, including one of our compatriots in Gao on December 24, 2016. The risk is particularly high in the center and north of the country. The abduction of a Colombian national in early 2017 in the north of the Sikasso region showed the geographical extension of the capacities of action of criminal and terrorist groups.

Source: “Men in military fatigues kill at least 20 Malian villagers,” *DefenceWeb (South Africa)*, 8 June 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/civil-security/men-in-military-fatigues-kill-at-least-20-malian-villagers/>

Fulani association Tabital Pulaaku said 29 people were killed, including a 9-year-old girl. It blamed the attack on Malian soldiers, who it said surrounded the village in pick-up trucks before killing the villagers and setting houses on fire.

“The victims are all from the peaceful civilian population. who had not committed any crime except for their ethnic identity,” Tabital Pulaaku said in a statement.

Mali's army spokesman did not respond to requests for comment.

Human rights groups have accused the Malian military in the past of conducting extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, torture and arbitrary arrests against suspected jihadist sympathizers – charges it has promised to investigate.



Mozambican Government Perspectives on Insurgent Tactics

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from the Portuguese-language website *Moz24Horas* sheds light on Mozambican officials' perspectives on insurgents loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), that they are combating in the north of the country. The country's Minister of Interior, Amade Miquidade, for example, acknowledges the complexity of the problem, which began in October 2017 but has escalated in recent months. He claims that the root of the complexity is the guerrilla strategy adopted by the insurgents, which makes them hard to track down but still capable of launching major attacks.

He also attributes the insurgents' effectiveness to some of their sophisticated tactics, including using drones for reconnaissance. Other tactics were less sophisticated, but still worrisome, such as capturing youths and forcibly recruiting them into their ranks. This allows overall insurgent numbers to increase.

Despite the levels of violence inflicted by the insurgents, the minister remains optimistic and points to a recent offensive against them. He also notes that a number of insurgent attacks have been repelled and the armed forces would fight until final victory. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Msumbiji Cabo Delgado.

Source: Kipala via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Msumbiji_Cabo_Delgado.PNG, Public Domain

“The Interior Minister said that insurgents use sophisticated reconnaissance techniques, such as drones, providing them some effectiveness.”

Source: “Amade Miquidade diz que terroristas usam drones (Amade Miquidade says terrorists use drones),” *Moz24Horas*, 29 May 2020. <https://www.moz24h.co.mz/post/amade-miquidade-diz-que-terroristas-usam-drones?postId=5ecf6984f3f8c900179b984c>

The Minister of the Interior, Amade Miquidade, speaking yesterday the Assembly of the Republic (AR) described the military situation in Cabo Delgado province as “complex,” as it has been the scene of terror since October 2017. Miquidade said the complexity is due to the attempt at using the guerrilla strategy by the terrorists who claim to be from the “Islamic State.” On the other hand, the Interior Minister said that insurgents use sophisticated reconnaissance techniques, such as drones, providing them some effectiveness, however, he also said that the Defense and Security Forces continue to repel the group, and it will be so “until final victory.”

“Insurgents also resort to guerrilla techniques, kidnapping members of the population to integrate their brigades in part to make it seem they are numerous,” described Miquidade.



Zimbabwe: Amid Economic Crisis, President Tries to Strengthen Grip on Power

OE Watch Commentary: Though Zimbabwe's astronomical hyperinflation from the 2000s has been tamed so that now it is only measured in triple digits each year; it is still way too high. However, as the accompanying excerpted article from the *Zimbabwe Independent* website reports, despite the country's fragile economic situation, numerous military officers including lieutenant colonels, colonels, and brigadier generals have been provided new cars such as the Toyota Hilux and Land Cruisers. Particularly interesting is the timing of these purchases, which occurred while President Emmerson Mnangagwa's government was seeking an economic bailout package from international financial institutions. The article also notes the timing coincides with "growing disquiet within the rank and file of the army over the deteriorating economic environment."

It is not just cars that Mnangagwa has purchased to apparently appease his military chiefs. In June last year his government procured AK rifles, millions of rounds of ammunition, and over 50,000 grenades. Actually determining how much has been spent on military hardware is difficult as information related to such expenditures is quite opaque. Additional reporting points to many of the arms being acquired from Asia and Eastern Europe.

Zimbabwe's already weak economy was recently dealt a further blow by the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the country's finance minister to request US\$200 million from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. However, as the article points out, the country's tumbling finances have not stopped the Mnangagwa administration's latest round of profligate spending.

Mnangagwa, who became president during a 2017 coup, is concerned about the growing protests over the economic crisis. He also appears wary of the presidential ambitions of his deputy, former Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) commander Constantino Chiwenga. Thus, apparently to strengthen his grip on power, Mnangagwa has shuffled commanders around. This maneuvering may pay off for him, though he likely realizes from his own coup that rising discontent among the masses coupled with a perceived better alternative can lead to change. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Zimbabweans protesting Robert Mugabe, who was eventually toppled in a coup, leading to Emmerson Mnangagwa becoming President.
Source: Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/137689151@N08/26122299177/>, Public Domain

“Zimbabwe’s cash-strapped government has splurged millions of United States dollars on top-of-the-range vehicles, which include Toyota Hilux and Land Cruisers, for senior military officials at a time President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s government is pleading for an economic bailout package from international financial institutions.”

Source: Tinashe Kairiza, “Government Splurges Millions on Military Chiefs’ cars,” *Zimbabwe Independent*, 5 June 2020. <https://www.theindependent.co.zw/2020/06/05/govt-splurges-millions-on-military-chiefs-cars/>

Zimbabwe’s cash-strapped government has splurged millions of United States dollars on top-of-the-range vehicles, which include Toyota Hilux and Land Cruisers, for senior military officials at a time President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s government is pleading for an economic bailout package from international financial institutions.

A source who spoke on condition of anonymity said: “Security bosses from the rank of lieutenant-colonel to brigadier-generals were recently bought vehicles that include Toyota Hilux and Toyota Land Cruiser cars while they were given the option to buy the old ones for a nominal fee. Lieutenant-colonels received a lower edition of the Toyota Hilux from what colonels received.

At the time of going to print, Zimbabwe Defence Forces spokesperson Mugwisi had not responded to questions sent to him. He was not answering his mobile phone.

Contacted for comment on the number of vehicles bought for military chiefs, Defence minister Oppah Muchinguri said: “What has got that to do with you? Can you put your questions in writing.”



More Iran in Venezuela

OE Watch Commentary: Reportage indicates that tanker ships carrying gasoline from Iran recently arrived in Venezuelan ports. As the accompanying references note, the fuel might do little to alleviate the severe shortage of gasoline inside Venezuela, and much of it might even be destined for Cuba. In any case, as the opinion in the second accompanying reference highlights, the significance of the news is not so much the arrival of some gasoline, but the continuing embrace by the Bolivarian regime of the Iranian regime as a strategic ally. The article lists a number of intentions by the two regimes to build stronger economic bonds, but highlights two observed collaborations likely to raise international security concerns – that the Iranians seem to be using flights from Venezuela as a way to get things in and out of Syria, and that Iranians seem to have been welcomed into the Bolivarian military and intelligence schema. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Iranian President Rouhani meeting with Nicolás Maduro, 2015.

Source: Tasnim News Agency via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Rouhani_in_meeting_with_Venezuelan_President_Nicol%C3%A1s_Maduro_02.jpg, CC BY 4.0

“Of the myriad of joint activities, two fields are particularly noteworthy... flights apparently commercial between Caracas and Tehran that frequently include stopovers in Syria, flights whose cargo of equipment, materiel and even Iranian operators or of Hezbollah is unclear. The other issue is of the existence of active Shia militia cells on Venezuelan soil to train, jointly with Cuba, soldiers of the military forces in matters of security and intelligence.”

Source: Daiana Orellana, “Venezuela: La gasolina iraní podría terminar en Cuba (Venezuela: The Iranian gasoline is likely to end up in Cuba),” *Venepress*, 25 May 2020. <https://venepress.com/article/Gasolina-irani-podria-terminar-en-Cuba1590427757465>

“In a satellite image that was disseminated on social media one can identify the tanker “Petion” together with the “Fortune,” which arrived this Saturday, 23 May in Venezuelan waters from Iran and carried to the port of the refinery El Palito, located in the county of Puerto Cabello, on the coast of Carabobo state...Tareck El Aissami [Bolivarian Petroleum Minister] tweeted: ‘Now the ships of the sister Islamic Republic of Iran are in our Exclusive Economic Zone, as our beloved comandante Chávez would say, blue Venezuela.’...”

Source: Beatriz de Majo, “¿Es la de Irán una alianza perniciosa? (Is the Iran alliance a pernicious one?),” *El Nacional and Analítica.com*, 2 June 2020. <https://www.analitica.com/opinion/es-la-de-iran-una-alianza-perniciosa/>

“How much the man on the street will be aided by the arrival of gasoline that the Iranian ships are transporting is a matter which has no spectacular side. At the national scale of fuel consumption, those shipments are like a band aid for an open wound....

What is worth highlighting is the decision of Nicolas Maduro to recur to Iran to resolve the supply difficulties...

These rapprochements between Iran and Venezuela have taken difference forms of industrial cooperation, in joint investment firms and in ‘strategic’ activities that in almost all cases have not succeeded in materializing: gold, tractors, weapons, cement, petrochemicals... Of the myriad of joint activities, two fields are particularly noteworthy... flights apparently commercial between Caracas and Tehrán that frequently include stopovers in Syria, flights whose cargo of equipment, materiel and even Iranian operators or of Hezbollah is unclear. The other issue is of the existence of active Shia militia cells on Venezuelan soil to train, jointly with Cuba, soldiers of the military forces in matters of security and intelligence.”



Iranian Gasoline Support to Venezuela Linked During Pandemic

OE Watch Commentary: According to several media sources, Iran is providing Venezuela with gasoline during the COVID-19 pandemic. Iran publicly confirmed this and threatened that any attempts made by the US to stop support would be met with repercussions. Details regarding what type of repercussions were not stated. Additionally, Maduro publicly backed Iran and pledged support no matter what the consequences. These ideas were captured during a Youtube video released by Colombian news source *El Tiempo*. During the same video, Maduro discussed that he was willing to use the Venezuelan military to escort Iranian shipping barges into port if their passage was impeded. However, this was not necessary as the barges were not stopped. Prior to the arrival of the Iranian vessels in late May 2020, Venezuela's Minister of Industries and National Production, Tarek El Aissami and Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza, also took stances regarding their views of US presence in the Caribbean and how it was affecting the Venezuelan gasoline industry. Both individuals were quoted in Venezuelan news source Telesur as noted in the accompanying excerpt. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Tarek El Aissami.

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

“Islamic Republic of Iran, thank you for all the support we are receiving from you. We are ready for whatever happens, no matter what. Thank you, Iran.”

Source: “Maduro celebra envío a Venezuela de buques petroleros de Irán entre tensiones con Washington (Maduro Celebrates Departure of Oil Filled Barges Headed to Venezuela from Iran Despite Tension from Washington),” *YouTube Video*, 1.41, 21 May 2020. <https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/venezuela/maduro-celebro-envio-de-buques-petroleros-de-iran-a-venezuela-497902>

Tehran threatened repercussions if shipping barges carrying gasoline were not allowed to enter Venezuela during the covid-19 pandemic and has stated there would be consequences if they were stopped. At the same time, Maduro was seen in the Youtube video stating: “Islamic Republic of Iran, thank you for all the support we are receiving from you. We are ready for whatever happens, no matter what. Thank you, Iran.”

Source: “Venezuela denuncia persecución de EE.UU. a buques de petróleo (Venezuela Denounces US Pursuing Petroleum Tankers),” *Telesur*, 18 May 2020. <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/venezuela-denuncia-persecucion-eeuu-buques-petroleo-20200518-0026.html>

“How much the man on the street will be aided by the arrival of gasoline that the Iranian ships are transporting is a matter which has no spectacular side. At the national scale of fuel consumption, those shipments are like a band aid for an open wound....

What is worth highlighting is the decision of Nicolas Maduro to recur to Iran to resolve the supply difficulties...

These rapprochements between Iran and Venezuela have taken difference forms of industrial cooperation, in joint investment firms and in ‘strategic’ activities that in almost all cas The following comments were made by Venezuelan Officials Tarek El Aissami and Jorge Arreaza:

El Aissami:

“US presence (in the Caribbean) interferes with the distribution of gasoline additives, parts and technicians by any and all countries willing to help support the Venezuelan people.”

Arreaza:

“Any actions by the US (to stop Iranian barges from entering Venezuela during the covid-19 pandemic) would represent flagrant violations of international law and the fundamental rights of Venezuelans.”

es have not succeeded in materializing: gold, tractors, weapons, cement, petrochemicals... Of the myriad of joint activities, two fields are particularly noteworthy...flights apparently commercial between Caracas and Tehrán that frequently include stopovers in Syria, flights whose cargo of equipment, materiel and even Iranian operators or of Hezbollah is unclear. The other issue is of the existence of active Shia militia cells on Venezuelan soil to train, jointly with Cuba, soldiers of the military forces in matters of security and intelligence.”



Social Protests in Venezuela, in the Streets and Online

OE Watch Commentary: Venezuelan citizens have been expressing social unrest in the streets at almost the same level as through digital means. After two months of quarantine imposed in Venezuela in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, these complaints continue to be about gasoline, food shortages and human rights violations, among others.

According to the accompanying excerpted article from the opposition publication *Runrun.es*, a Venezuelan news, opinion, and analysis website founded by Venezuelan investigative journalist Nelson Bocaranda, a study in April showed discontent regarding economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues on social networks have increased considerably since the beginning of the quarantine. On Twitter, political and social trends registered a growth of 65 percent in comparison with the average of the previous six months. Data in the study indicated 60 percent of pro-government tweets were produced by possible bot accounts (computer programs designed to tweet, replicate or expand messages), while 73 percent of the content posted by the civilian population appeared to be generated by authentic users.

Six subcategories of social protest have emerged: food, human rights, teacher issues, gasoline, public services, and miscellaneous (including looting and protests against Nicolás Maduro). The public services subcategory, which covers shortages of water, electricity, gas, telephony, and internet, registered the highest activity in April.

Protests in the street mirrored the activity seen on social networks. According to analysis by the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS) 716 protests were held in April (an average of 24 protests per day) related to economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights. The OVCS has reported that since the beginning of 2020 to date, 2,693 protests have been held throughout the country for various reasons, of which 44 percent (1,192) refer to the lack of basic services and more than a thousand demonstrations were held in April and May.

Regarding claims for electricity, water and domestic gas, Venezuelans staged 464 protests. Other demands included food (146), health (102), labor (97) and civil and political rights (50). The states in which the most demonstrations were held were Táchira (125) and Mérida (115), followed by Miranda (72), Falcón (50) and Anzoátegui (46). **End OE Watch Commentary (Lundell)**

“According to the Probox digital activity observatory, ‘the growth of social protests shows the dissonance between what is happening in the country and what the ruling party is communicating.’”

Source: “La protesta social en Venezuela también es digital (Social protest in Venezuela is also digital),” *Runrun.es*, 31 May 2020.
<https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/409398/la-protesta-social-en-venezuela-tambien-es-digital/>

Human Rights

On the afternoon of 13 March, Nicolás Maduro announced the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the country. By 16 March, a collective quarantine was imposed in the Metropolitan Area (Capital District, Vargas, and Miranda) and a day later it became effective for the entire nation.

In just over 60 days of confinement for the vast majority of the population, human rights-related trends ranked second with the highest number of trills. Of 16 trends registered by Probox, nine of them were related to COVID-19.

56,106 tweets were registered regarding human rights violations. The digital activity observatory asserted only 7.99% of the trills generated were from automated accounts or with characteristics consistent with bots.

On 01 April, four trends related to human rights were recorded. #LiberenAHenderson, #LiberenADarvinson, #Loppna20Años and #InformarNoEsDelito. The first two refer to the arbitrary arrests of lawyer Henderson Maldonado in Barquisimeto and journalist Darvinson Rojas in Caracas, respectively, due to their participation in protests or for having released information related to the coronavirus.

Five days later, a new trend related to Human Rights was posted on Twitter: #LiberenASerrano. This claim was for the arrest of activist Luis Serrano, from Redes Ayuda, for having medical protection material that was to be distributed to several journalists.



Gulf Cartel Conducts Psychological Operations During COVID-19 Pandemic

OE Watch Commentary: Mexican drug cartels need the support of the local populace for their success. They need lookouts to provide cartel leaders with information regarding enemy, police, and military movements. They also need places to store drug shipments and locations where they can count on respite when moving from one area to another. Overall, the local populace is incredibly important to cartels; especially to the Gulf Cartel. According to the accompany article and other social media, most recently, the Gulf Cartel provided food to families in need during the COVID-19 pandemic, making its competition with the state clear.

Pictures of this activity flooded social media platforms and quickly went viral. Mexican news source *El Debate* reprinted tweets made by the Gulf Cartel indicating that that the support was from the “Gulf Cartel and not the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF).” Boxes seen in pictures were also stamped with a message that read: “in support of Ciudad Victoria. Senor 46 Vaquero.” This sort of assistance follows in a pattern of taking advantage of crises and other events to win over the local populace, such as after hurricanes and in support of local holiday celebrations. It reinforces a well-worn psychological operations instrument in the Gulf Cartel tool kit. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“So that you know who is doing this and where this is coming from, it is the Gulf Cartel, not the DIF (National System for Integral Family Development).”



Logotype used by the Gulf Cartel.

Source: BaptisteGrandGrand via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:C%C3%A1rtel_del_Golfo_logo.png, CC by SA 4.0

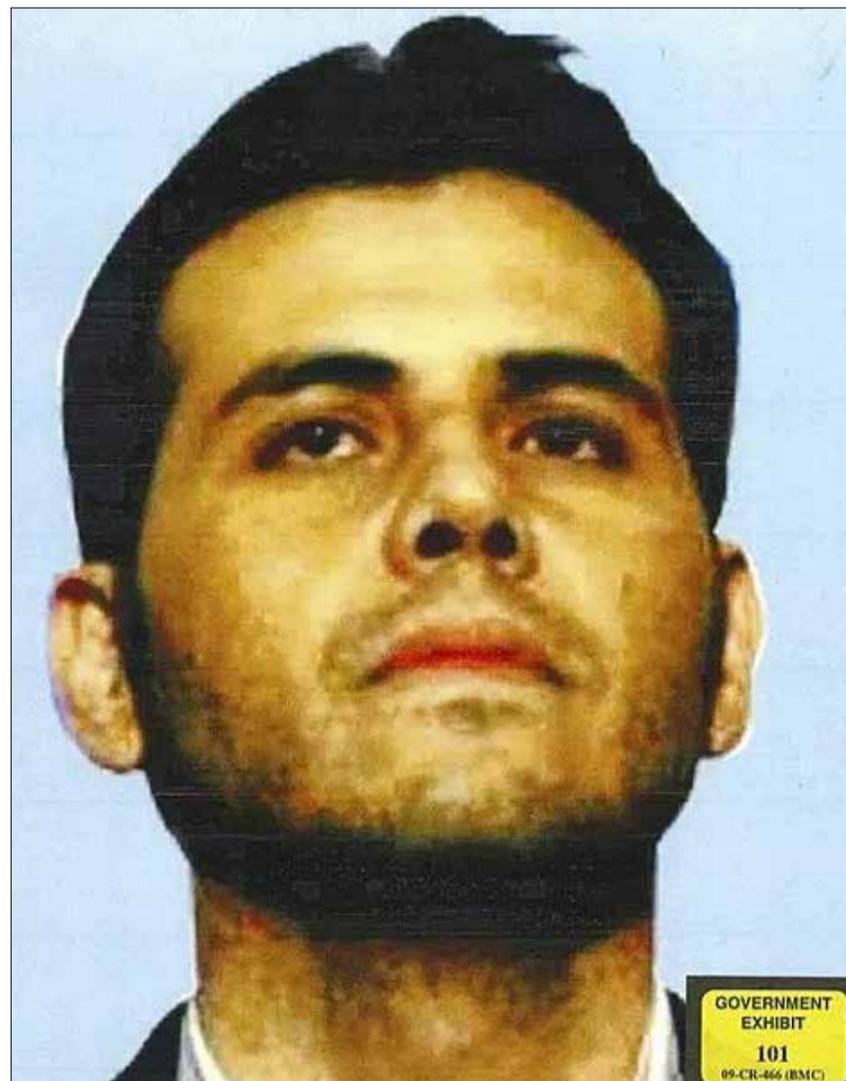
Source: “Narcos y sicarios reparten comida a familias que sufran por el coronavirus en Mexico (Narcos and Gunmen Hand Out Food to Families in Need because of the Coronavirus),” *El Confidencial*, 20 April 2020. https://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2020-04-07/cartel-golfo-reparte-comida-familias-coronavirus_2537767/

Although Mexico has not been hit by the coronavirus as hard as the United States, the pandemic is still affecting its population. Many people are stuck in their homes and cannot work so they do not have an income. In the most vulnerable populations, some families do not even have food available to them every day. The answer to the problem? Drug cartels who hand out food to those families most in need. In some poverty-stricken barrios located in Ciudad Victoria, they have been seen handing out food filled boxes with the Gulf Cartel stamped on top. Other boxes contain the message, “In support of Ciudad Victoria, Senor 46 Vaquero.” Citizens are also advised that: “So that you know who is doing this and where this is coming from, it is the Gulf Cartel, not the DIF (National System for Integral Family Development).”



Coronavirus-Affected Trade Causes Challenges for the Sinaloa Cartel

OE Watch Commentary: The Sinaloa Cartel relies on Chinese sources to provide chemical precursors for their manufacture of synthetic drugs such as fentanyl and methamphetamines. However, Argentinian news site *Infobae* reports that shipping delays of certain precursors from China are causing supply shortages in Mexico. Consequences of this situation are that the Sinaloa Cartel cannot produce the same quantity of drugs or export the amount needed to meet market demand. This same source indicates that decreased supply shortages have prompted the Sinaloa Cartel to increase the price of fentanyl from \$40,203/kilogram to \$46,211/kg. *Infobae* also suggests that coronavirus related restrictions along the US/Mexico border could affect the modus operandi of all cartels, though no specific changes were noted by the source. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Mayo Zambada Niebla (leader within the Sinaloa Cartel).

Source: US Government via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vicente_Zambada_Niebla.jpg, Public Domain

“Lack of supply caused the price of fentanyl to increase from \$40,203/kg to \$46, 211/kg as of early April 2020.”

Source: “El coronavirus golpea los negocios criminales del Cartel de Sinaloa: incrementarian precio de las drogas por falta de suministros (The Coronavirus Affects Criminal Activities of the Sinaloa Cartel: Price of Drugs Increases Due to Shortages in Precursor Chemicals),” *Infobae*, April 03, 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2020/04/03/el-coronavirus-golpea-los-negocios-criminales-del-cartel-de-sinaloa-incrementarian-precio-de-las-drogas-por-falta-de-suministros/>

The Sinaloa Cartel exports large quantities of illegal drugs into the United States, but the coronavirus has affected the organization’s supply chain.

China is a principal supplier of chemical precursors used by Mexican drug cartels to produce fentanyl and methamphetamines.

Lack of supply caused the price of fentanyl to increase from \$40,203/kg to \$46, 211/kg as of early April 2020.

Increased coronavirus reporting in the United States prompted some border restrictions along US/Mexico entryways; a change that could represent challenges for drug trafficking organizations. Especially those that traffic illicit goods in motor vehicles.



Mexican Cartels Expanding Operations in Colombia

OE Watch Commentary: Mexican cartels are actively working with Colombian criminal groups to obtain territorial control over coca fields and ultimately, cocaine production in Colombia. The fact that Mexican cartels are in Colombia is not surprising as known Mexican drug traffickers such as Amado Carillo aka El Señor de los Cielos and Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán were already making deals with Pablo Escobar in the 90s.

In recent years however, Mexican cartels have directly influenced increased coca growth and at present time, Argentinian news source *Infobae* indicates that they control more than 100,000 hectares of Colombia’s 171,000 hectares of coca fields. Furthermore, Mexican cartels purchase more than two-thirds of all coca paste and refined cocaine produced in Colombia. This same source reports that Mexican cartels to include the Sinaloa Cartel, Los Zetas and the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco have a significant presence in Colombia. To protect their coca fields, Mexican cartels have hired between 1,000-3,500 armed criminal organizations to protect their interests in Colombia. Mexican news source *Proceso* indicates that Mexican cartels can import large quantities of weapons into Colombia and hire so many gunmen because they earn billions annually.



Cocaine field.

Source: Aurimaz via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:258_-_this_is_Yungas.jpg, CC by SA 4.0

Fabian Laurence Cardenas, the Anti-Narcotics Director of the National Police also provided insight as to why Mexican cartels are so vested in growing their operations in Colombia and made the following comment to *Infobae*. “Mexican cartels have expanded so rapidly that they do not want to work with intermediaries. Instead, they want to work directly with cocaine producers in Colombia and for this reason, they (Mexican cartels) maintain a significant presence in Colombia.” *Proceso* also points out that Mexican cartels send their own people to supervise all phases of cocaine production from the growth of plants to production in cocaine labs where they ensure that the quality of the product is in line with what Mexican cartels have negotiated with their Colombian counterparts. This same source indicates that with the help of Colombian criminal organizations, Mexican cartels are quickly acquiring territory which is important to them as it will provide increased access to coca growing sites, and expand their direct link to the entire coca leaf lifecycle. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“To maintain their power base, Mexican cartels are constantly looking to acquire more territory.”

Source: “Cómo los cárteles mexicanos se han apoderado de casi todo el mercado de la cocaína en Colombia (How Mexican Cartels Have Gained Control of the Cocaine Market in Colombia),” *Infobae*, 22 January 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2020/01/23/como-los-carteles-mexicanos-se-han-apoderado-de-casi-todo-el-mercado-de-la-cocaina-en-colombia/>

Fabian Laurence Cardenas, the Anti-Narcotics Director of the National Police stated that

“Mexican cartels have expanded so rapidly that they do not want to work with intermediaries. Instead, they want to work directly with cocaine producers in Colombia and for this reason, they (Mexican cartels) are doing business in Colombia.”

According to Colombian Anti-Narcotics police, Mexican cartels have directly impacted increased coca growth in Colombia. At present time, it is believed they (Mexican cartels) control more than 100,000 hectares of coca fields in Colombia. They also purchase more than two-thirds of coca paste and refined cocaine. To protect their coca fields, Mexican cartels have hired FARC dissidents.

Source: “Cárteles mexicanos, en la mira de la ONU (Mexican Cartel on the Radar of the United Nations),” *Proceso*, 02 March 2020. <https://www.proceso.com.mx/619971/carteles-mexicanos-en-la-mira-de-la-onu>

Mexican cartels have such vast amounts of money that they can pay criminal groups and FARC dissidents in Colombia to control cocaine production. At present time, Mexican cartels control cocaine distribution and also productions so that they are able to ensure the overall quality of the cocaine they distribute. To maintain their power base, Mexican cartels are constantly looking to acquire more territory. They do this by hiring Colombian criminal organizations to work for them.

Colombian Senator Ariel Avila indicates that “Mexican cartels have established operational bases in Colombia to ensure that adequate amounts of cocaine are being produced. They (Mexican cartels) bring large amounts of money into the country and provide weapons to Colombian criminal organizations working at their service.”



Colombia's Pandemic Recovery

OE Watch Commentary: Colombia, like many countries, is approaching re-opening from the COVID-19 pandemic in a mixed manner, depending on the locality. In general, it appears that the country is well into the process of reemergence economically. The first three of the accompanying references are parts of a series by a leading broadcast news outlet that reports matter-of-factly on the differing reopening attitudes and pace in the country's three major cities. The fourth reference, from a different outlet, indicates that businesses are eager to end the COVID-19 restrictions as soon as possible. It appears from the reportage that the national ministry of health is being cautious about the reopening, and the fifth accompanying reference indicates a national level decision to maintain strict control over international movement into and out of Colombia until the end of August at least. The last of the accompanying reference gives us a possible hint as to the military significance of all of the above. The Colombian government, at least by its own admission, did not slow down its physical pursuit of criminal organizations (notably including the ELN guerrilla) during the pandemic. It appears that the government's pandemic controls may have helped the armed forces get an advantage. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Editors, "Medellín planea una apertura masiva: Daniel Quintero Calle (Daniel Quintero Calle [mayor]): Medellín plans a massive opening)," *RCN Noticias*, 1 June 2020. <https://noticias.canalrcn.com/nacional/nacional/heroes-de-la-fauna-colombiana-liberan-tigrilla-lanuda-357754>

"The Mayor of Medellín, Daniel Quintero Calle, explained what constitutes a massive opening that is planned for the city in order to reactivate the economy... 'Today we open the shopping centers and we will do pilots in general right now, we have pilots in the barbershops, hair salons, really in all sectors of the economy'..."

Source: Editors, "Bogotá: Claudia López extendió la cuarentena obligatoria hasta el 15 de junio Bogotá: Claudia López [mayor] extends the obligatory quarantine until 15 June)," *RCN Noticias*, 1 June 2020. <https://noticias.canalrcn.com/nacional/conozca-las-ciudades-que-se-reactivan-y-las-que-no-partir-del-1-de-junio-357759>

"...In the Colombian capital, Mayor Claudia López extended the obligatory quarantine for 15 additional days, that is, until 15 June... Additionally, the Kennedy locality remains closed and under special vigilance due to the high number of persons infected with COVID-19 that are presenting themselves in that part of the city..."

Source: Editors, "Los vamos a mantener cerrados": alcalde de Cali sobre centros comerciales (Mayor of Cali regarding shopping centers: 'We're going to keep them closed')," *RCN Noticias*, 1 June 2020. <https://noticias.canalrcn.com/nacional/los-vamos-mantener-cerrados-alcalde-de-cali-sobre-centros-comerciales-357752>

"The Mayor of Cali, Jorge Iván Ospina, said that he hopes to be able to initiate the reopening of shopping centers with the approval of the Ministry of Interior... regarding the re-opening the city's shopping centers, the Cali executive explained that although everything is ready for their reactivation, the Interior Minister informed them that it is not possible..."

Source: Gremios piden al Gobierno que no se aplase reapertura de la economía en Cali (Trade unions ask the Administration not to delay the reopening of the economy in Cali)," *El País*, Cali, 31 May 2020. <https://www.elpais.com.co/valle/gremios-piden-al-gobierno-que-no-se-aplace-reapertura-de-economia-en-cali.html>

"This Sunday, the Valle del Cauca Inter-union Business Committee asked the national government administration... to allow, the gradual reopening of additional willing sectors in Decree 749 of 28 May 2020'... This is the case, for example with the city center and the shopping centers, that have everything ready to return to activities this Monday, 1 June, but had to postpone their return in observance of orders from the Ministry of Interior..."

Source: Editors, "¿Se ha vuelto loco Iván Duque? Colombia extiende el estado de emergencia hasta el 31 de agosto (Has Iván Duque gone crazy? Colombia extends the state of emergency until 31 August)," *Hispanidad*, Madrid, 25 May 2020. https://www.hispanidad.com/confidencial/colombia-extiende-estado-emergencia-hasta-31-agosto_12018762_102.html

"The Transportation Minister, Ángela María Orozco, informed that international flights will continue to be restricted. Colombia's borders will also remain closed and all national transportation will continue on pause until further orders... The country is sealing its borders until 31 August under a health emergency declared by the President this week... National flights will not be permitted until at least July..."

Source: Ariel Cabrera, "Ofensiva de Fuerzas Armadas redujo grupos criminales durante pandemia de Covid-19 (Armed Forces Offensive reduces criminal groups during the Covid-19 pandemic)," *Radio Santafé*, 27 May 2020. <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2020/05/27/ofensiva-de-ff-mm-redujo-acciones-de-grupos-ilegales-delincuencia-comun-y-narcotrafico-durante-pandemia-de-covid-19/>

"The Commander of the Military Forces, General Luis Fernando Navarro, stated this Tuesday that operations... by the Public Force during the COVID-19 pandemic have permitted the reduction of criminal activity by illegal armed groups, common criminality and also drug trafficking... 214 ELN neutralizations. The officer referred to the blows delivered against 'Gallero', member of the national directory of this criminal organization, and alias 'Mocho Tierra', head of the south-south region of the 'Jesús Darío Ramírez' front, who died in an operation carried out in southern Bolívar [department]. General Navarro also indicated that the operations resulted in the demobilization of 36 members of the ELN's 'Jesús Darío Ramírez' front, that commits crimes in Cauca [department]... With respect to the dissidents of the disappeared FARC guerrilla, General Navarro indicated that they have now recorded 396 neutralizations, and as to the 'Clan del Golfo', 'Los Caparros' y 'Los Pelusos', he indicated that the number rises to 688."



Former Colombian President Uribe in Social Media Crosshairs

OE Watch Commentary: A rising star among Colombian leftist personalities and propagandists, Daniel Emilio Mendoza, recently teamed up with a well-known leftist journalist from an earlier generation, Gonzalo Guillén, to try a more current model of propagandistic initiative. The two successfully seized on recent innovations in the format and distribution of presentations, creating a “micro-series” in 50 short presentations that were distributed on social media. The series is based around a villain, former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe Vélez. President Uribe has for decades been a lightning rod for leftist attacks and some time ago he became the go-to personification of what the radical left, especially in northern South America, has stated to be its enemy. This latest effort, however, has attracted an unusual amount of attention and commentary, both in and outside of Colombia. According to the first accompanying reference at least, the public attitude toward the series is more negative than positive. The second reference is to the beginning of the series in question. The third reference is a countering piece of investigative journalism pointing out that Mr. Mendoza has several unrelated civil suits pending against him for financial matters, filed prior to the micro series. The drama of the mini series might hint to a few possibilities bearing on armed conflict in the region. While it is no surprise that former President Uribe might be the target of a massive propaganda attack, it is notable that current Colombian President Iván Duque is only tangentially attacked. It may be that the far left intuitively supposes that a return to power by Álvaro Uribe, or significant gains by the political coalition associated with him, would be a most negative prospect for their militancy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

Source: Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%C3%81lvaro_Uribe_V%C3%A9lez.png, CC BY-SA 2.0

“Colombia is abuzz, more against than in favor, with the micro series ‘Matarife, un genocida innombrable’ [Butcher, an unspeakable genocider]. The material is 50 chapters of six minutes duration, where the target to take down is ex-President Álvaro Uribe Vélez.”

Source: Carmen de Carlos, “Una microserie colombiana donde el objetivo a derribar es el expresidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez (A Colombian micro series where the target to be knocked down is ex-President Álvaro Uribe Vélez),” *Diario ABC, Madrid*, 10 June 2020. https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-carmen-carlos-matarife-202006100137_noticia.html

“In a satellite image that was disseminated on social media one can identify the tanker “Petion” together with the “Fortune,” which arrived this Saturday, 23 Ma “Colombia is abuzz, more against than in favor, with the micro series ‘Matarife, un genocida innombrable’ [Butcher, an unspeakable genocider]. The material is 50 chapters of six minutes duration, where the target to take down is ex-President Álvaro Uribe Vélez. The production, the financing of which is not very clear, is disseminated fundamentally by way of the networks Telegram (Russian) and WhatsApp (American)...

Both Marta Lucía Ramírez and Álvaro Uribe recurred to their attorneys. Most likely both will win this dispute, but without a doubt the party most harmed is the ex-president, who has suffered 17 attempts [against his life], put an end to the United Self Defense Forces (paramilitaries) and was a step away from liquidating the FARC and the ELN...Calling him ‘Butcher’ and comparing him to Videla or Hitler is unjust, but even more that his colleagues, who owe him so much, have not raced out to defend him.”

y in Venezuelan waters from Iran and carried to the port of the refinery El Palito, located in the county of Puerto Cabello, on the coast of Carabobo state...Tareck El Aissami [Bolivarian Petroleum Minister] tweeted: ‘Now the ships of the sister Islamic Republic of Iran are in our Exclusive Economic Zone, as our beloved comandante Chávez would say, blue Venezuela.’...”



Continued: Former Colombian President Uribe in Social Media Crosshairs

Source: Daniel Emilio Mendoza and Gonzalo Guillén, “MATARIFE Capítulo 1 TEMP (1),” *Investigations, J.R.*, and *Youtube*, 6 Jun 2020. <https://www.bing.com/videos/h?q=matarife+capitulo+1&&view=detail&mid=2521E4FE97B7DE762CD02521E4FE97B7DE762CD0&&FORM=VRDGAR&ru=%2Fvideos%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dmatarife%2520capitulo%25201%26qs%3Dn%26form%3DQBVDMH%26sp%3D-1%26pq%3Dmatarife%2520capitulo%25201%26sc%3D3-19%26sk%3D%26cevid%3DF5624F929B594379AB11D79611B630D4>

“I am Daniel Emilio Mendoza, lawyer, Colombian criminologist and expert in human rights and freedom of expression. Journalist Gonzalo Guillén was looking for defense against an action brought against him for defamation. The trill of the journalist against this personality were very incendiary: butcher, murderer, mafia, paraco [pejorative for paramilitary]...”

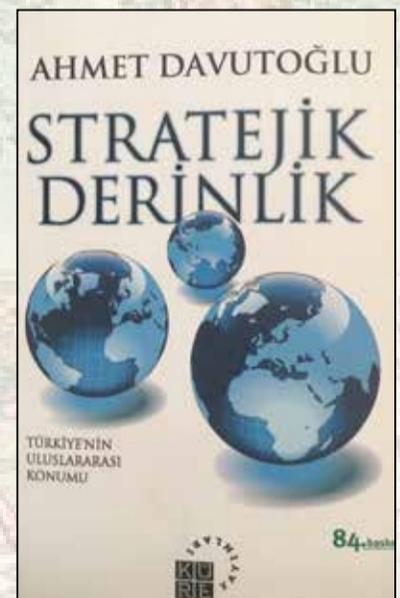
Source: Editors, “El prontuario judicial de Daniel Mendoza y sus socios en el negocio que montaron con la serie ‘Matarife’ (The criminal record of Daniel Mendoza and his associates in the company that mounted the series ‘Macarife’),” *El Expediente*, 26 May 2020. <https://elexpediente.co/el-prontuario-judicial-de-daniel-mendoza-y-sus-socios-en-el-negocio-que-montaron-con-la-serie-matarife/>

“...Lawyer Daniel [Emilio] Mendoza Leal, who directs together with Gonzalo Guillén the series against ex-President Álvaro Uribe with the yellow-journalistic name ‘Matarife’ [Butcher], [and] from which they wish to wrest commercial advantage and have now asked to trademark, have numerous civil suits against them both individual and corporate...”

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>



Revolutionary Chile Dogs

OE Watch Commentary: For students of K9 applications in military and police work, there comes a warning from violent street protests in Chile. In late 2019, what are referred to internationally as antifas became known locally as “capuchas,” loosely translatable as the hooded ones. About the time they gained their nickname, the capuchas found a new revolutionary hero dog named ‘Rucio Capucha’. Whatever side one might take in protest battles, it is hard to watch the video in the first accompanying reference and not admire Rucio’s enthusiasm for a noisy brawl. The video starts out with Rucio taking the full force of a water cannon blast from a Chilean Carabinero. The dousing didn’t seem to discourage Rucio, however. He is later shown being dried off for his next exploit. He isn’t the first or only Chilean revolutionary dog, either, and maybe not even the most heralded. The second accompanying reference tells of another, Pepe Matapacos. “Matapacos” translates roughly to policeman-killer. Pepe didn’t kill any policemen. As the reference notes, Pepe got his Matapacos nickname from an earlier generation. El Negro Matapacos, a black Labrador mix who was also in his element as a street fighter, became a legend during student protests in 2012. The fourth reference is from the same period and features another dog (NFI). The video has no accompanying text, but it speaks for itself. In it, a mid-size dog is seen to have latched his maw onto a carabinero’s gauntlet, and the dog won’t let go. The Carabinero is a bit puzzled, obviously talking with bemused companions and bystanders about what exactly to do. Which brings to the fore a relevant warning to law enforcement: The authorities in Chile might have been tolerant of the dogs (although both Rucio and Pepe had to be withdrawn from action due to eye irritation from riot sprays), but many videos of their exploits show they can constitute a dangerous distraction at least. It would seem a good idea to study the challenge and possible solutions to the phenomenon of the protest dog. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“[The dog] is considered a revolutionary loyal to his companions, whom he would defend to death.”

Source: Editors, “Este es ‘Rucio Capucha’, el perro revolucionario de las protestas de Chile (This is ‘Rucio Capucha’, the revolutionary dog of the Chilean protests),” *Youtube* and *Noticias con video*, 22 November 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EgA4YgKEC4>

“Chile: When we talk of the Chilean protests against the government, the images that come quickly to mind are of repression, hooded youths, violence and ...a dog?...The dog isn’t able to understand the political situation of the country (we think at least). Maybe his struggle is not even for better living conditions for Chileans, but he is considered a revolutionary loyal to his companions, whom he would defend to death. Nevertheless, his struggle ended.”

Source: Editors, “Pepe Matapacos, el perro luchador de Concepción, Chile (Pepe Matapacos, the fighting dog of Concepción, Chile),” *Mundo Mascota* and *Youtube*, 17 November 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqXs_akzuAY

“...He tries to bite the jets of water fired by armored vehicles at the demonstrators...his behavior has made him heir to the nickname Matapacos that was flaunted by renown Negro Matapacos during the student protests of 2012...”

#FIRULIAS #CHILE “Pepe Matapacos”: the history of the dog that became a symbol for the people of Concepción during protests. Instagram de Pepe Matapacos: <https://instagram.com/pepematapaco?ig...>”

Source: Editors, “El Negro: el perro revolucionario de Chile (El negro: Chile’s revolutionary dog),” *Mundo Mascota* and *Youtube*, 26 October 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsKu6vzIDF8>

“Activist, anarchist, man’s best friend, defender of Chilean students: this is the dog El Negro Matapaco...a symbol, an emblem, a legend...”

Source: Freddy Rivera Nuñez, “Carabineros de Chile, detiene un perro, can se niega ir preso, protesta estudiantes 20011 (Chilean Carabineros detain a dog, dog rejects being taken prisoner, student protest 2011),” *Youtube*, 23 March. 2012 <https://www.bing.com/videos/h?q=chile+canine+protestas+detenida+carabinero&docid=608041504922208502&mid=E6B05B98C72A730D21E3E6B05B98C72A730D21E3&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>



Bolivia's 2020 Elections

OE Watch Commentary: In Bolivia, general elections are scheduled for 6 September of this year. The last regular election was in October 2019, but was so evidently fraudulent that the police and military imposed on then-President Evo Morales to resign and exile himself along with numerous other senior officials of the Movement to Socialism (MAS) party. Interim President Jeanine Áñez, of the Democrat Social Movement (MDS) party, filled the presidency as the constitutionally most senior governmental official remaining in office after the resignations. Special elections had been set for 3 May, but have been postponed due to the Wuhan virus, as reported in the first reference. The Electoral Commission determined that ex-President Morales was not eligible to run again, but his MAS party has a viable candidate, Luis Arce. Although Bolivian foreign policy changed notably after the removal of Evo Morales, the internal electoral balances did not change that much. The legislature was not overthrown with the executive, and continued to be controlled by the MAS. If anything, the removal of President Morales has made the legislature assert itself. The second accompanying reference is a 1,000-word essay written shortly before the elections were to occur before the pandemic hit. The author, Guido Áñez Moscoso, an exiled anti-MAS politician, explains in detail how the electoral system is rigged geographically and mathematically so as to make it highly unlikely that any party besides the MAS can win a majority in the legislature, and it is the legislature that decides the rules for elections. It should not come as a surprise that in 2021, while Bolivia probably won't rejoin the bloc of Bolivarian countries that includes Cuba and Venezuela, it will probably continue to provide sanctuaries to fugitive members and criminal activities of that bloc. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the... drug mafias, the strength of cocaine unions and the organizing of international mafia groups like the Brazilian PCC [Communist Party of Brazil], the Colombian FARC and Sendero Luninoso [from Peru] are determinant in elections...”

Source: Editors, “Sin trabas, diputados del MAS aprueban ley que posterga elecciones generales hasta el 6 de septiembre (Without obstacles, MAS Legislators approve the postponement of general elections until 6 September),” *Hoybolivia.com*, 9 July 2020. https://www.hoybolivia.com/Noticia.php?IdNoticia=316420&tit=sin_trabas_diputados_del_mas_aprueban_ley_que_posterga_elecciones_generales_hasta_el_6_de_septiembre

“Tuesday, the House of Representatives, whose majority belongs to the Movement to Socialism (MAS), approved the bill that delays realization of general elections until 6 September...He [the president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE)] added that the TSE works with international experts for the training of election observers, the management of electoral material and security protocols for election day.”

Source: Guido Áñez Moscoso, “El MAS y su ventaja electoral (The MAS and its electoral advantage),” *El Deber*, 7 April 2020. https://eldeber.com.bo/169401_el-mas-y-su-ventaja-electoral

“...There are 130 representatives, of which 60 are plurinominal [meaning in most cases that select identities are granted numbers of seats above their mathematical percentage of the population in a territory] that are chosen with the list of candidates for president and vice-president [by the parties], and 70 are uninominal [one per electoral territory] and seven indigenous circumscriptions [special gerrymandered districts] located in rural zones...The unity that the population clamors for in a country in which seven of every ten Bolivians rejects the MAS, but paradoxically due to the egocentricity and irresponsibility of our politicians will likely give power to the MAS in the first round, even though it doesn't win the presidency, can only be attenuated by a strong campaign of penetration in those difficult places where even the State doesn't enter, like the Altiplano, rural zones of Oruro and Potosí, Chapare, San Julián y Yapacaní, populations that for the presence of the drug mafias, the strength of cocaine unions and the organizing of international mafia groups like the Brazilian PCC [Communist Party of Brazil], the Colombian FARC and Sendero Luninoso [from Peru] are determinant in elections...”