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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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ON THE COVER:

Densus 88 element raid (Indonesia).

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Densus_88_element_raid.jpg, Attribution: CC x 4.0

OEWATCH

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The Future of Peacekeeping in the Collective Security Treaty Organization

OE Watch Commentary: The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has stated that its collective force, made up of units from member states, is capable of taking part in a UN peacekeeping mission. The units in the collective force from member states Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have carried out a number of joint peacekeeping exercises. The CSTO has been criticized in the past for not intervening with peacekeepers during a conflict involving a member state, notably during the June 2010 violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, though not much criticism came up during Armenia's recent clashes with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. The accompanying excerpted articles report on the CSTO's ongoing efforts with peacekeeping and provide one example of criticism of the organization for not acting during the recent clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh. They also provide insight into what the organization could do with peacekeeping moving forward.

The article from *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, a newspaper in Kazakhstan, reports on a recent CSTO meeting “held in the format of a video conference.”

The article mentions how “leaders of the states exchanged views on international and regional security” at the meeting and that “special attention was paid to practical measures to counter current challenges and threats, to combat terrorist manifestations, drug trafficking, and joint measures in the field of cyber security.” The article also includes statements from the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who “praised the role of the mediation of Russian President Vladimir Putin in ending hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh.” He also stated that he believed it was “the only correct decision in the current critical situation and this agreement will contribute to the establishment of long-term peace in the region.” The article did not bring up the possibility of deploying CSTO peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh, but it did note how member states signed off on new documents, including “on the basic educational and methodological organization for the training of personnel of the CSTO Peacekeeping Forces” and “on the protocol on the composition and deployment of peacekeeping contingents of the CSTO member states.”

The article from Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses the response of the CSTO to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, specifically that “a Russian peacekeeping mission is being deployed, but the CSTO troops were not involved in it.” The author of the article notes how “CSTO leaders even planned to participate in UN missions, preparing special battalions of blue helmets for this” and that “just a month ago, Belarus hosted the command post exercise with the CSTO peacekeepers ‘Indestructible Brotherhood – 2020’.” The author brings up how during the clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh, “CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas stated that ‘the organization will provide military assistance to Armenia in the event of a real threat to its territorial integrity or a direct military attack.’ But, in his words, Yerevan did not apply to the CSTO for such help.” The author also notes how Secretary Zas stated that he “welcomed the entry of Russian peacekeepers,” but that “he did not say anything about the readiness to do this of other CSTO countries.” The CSTO has a collective defense article, but the organization's officials have stated in the past that the article has not been enacted in the case of any of Armenia's clashes over Nagorno-Karabakh because it is not Armenian territory. Additionally, CSTO members have stated in the past that they would only participate in a peacekeeping mission with the organization if it is through a UN mission. This notably came up a few years ago when Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan rejected a call by the Russian government to participate in peacekeeping in Syria because of a lack of UN involvement in it. In any case, the recent CSTO summit shows that the organization continues to prepare for a peacekeeping mission, even if it has yet to happen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Flag of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Collective_Security_Treaty_Organization.svg
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“Kassym-Jomart Tokayev made a number of proposals for the further development of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, including the establishment of a new institution - a special representative of the CSTO Secretary General on peacekeeping issues.”



Continued: The Future of Peacekeeping in the Collective Security Treaty Organization

Source: “Liliya Syzdykova, “Безопасность – задача общая (Security is a common issue),” *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 3 December 2020. <https://www.kazpravda.kz/articles/view/bezopasnost--zadacha-obshchaya>

The session of the Collective Security Council of the Collective Security Treaty Organization was held in the format of a video conference. It was attended by the President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, President of Russia Vladimir Putin, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, Acting President of Kyrgyzstan Talant Mamytov, and CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas.

The leaders of the states exchanged views on international and regional security, summed up the results of the implementation of the priority areas of the CSTO activities in the outgoing year, and outlined plans for the coming period.

Special attention was paid to practical measures to counter current challenges and threats, to combat terrorist manifestations, drug trafficking, and joint measures in the field of cyber security...

...Speaking about the current situation in the field of regional and global security, characterized by the growing potential for conflict in interstate relations, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev praised the role of the mediation of Russian President Vladimir Putin in ending hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. The agreement reached with the most active participation of Russia, in my opinion, is the only correct decision in the current critical situation and this agreement will contribute to the establishment of long-term peace in the region...

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev made a number of proposals for the further development of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, including the establishment of a new institution - a special representative of the CSTO Secretary General on peacekeeping issues...

...The practice of military exercises of the CSTO member countries has been continued. Much attention is paid to joint work on combating terrorism and organized crime... “In light of the current tense situation in the world and the region, the relevance of building up the CSTO’s potential to effectively counter threats and security challenges is increasing many times over,” said President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon...

Following the summit, 15 documents were approved and adopted... According to President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the adoption of these documents convincingly demonstrates the common commitment of the member countries of the organization to further strengthen and develop international dialogue and cooperation to address global and regional problems.

Including:

...“On the basic educational and methodological organization for the training of personnel of the CSTO Peacekeeping Forces”

“On the Protocol on the composition and deployment of peacekeeping contingents of the CSTO member states”...

Source: “Vladimir Mukhin, “Почему в Карабахе нет миротворцев ОДКБ (Why there are no CSTO peacekeepers in Nagorno Karabakh),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 17 November 2020. https://www.ng.ru/armies/2020-11-17/1_8016_karabakh.html

...In Nagorno-Karabakh, for example, a Russian peacekeeping mission is being deployed, but the CSTO troops were not involved in it... There is no definite answer to this question.

There is also no explanation why, given the low efficiency of the CSTO, the countries that belong to this organization (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan) will not dissolve it...While Moscow is taking large-scale and very costly peacekeeping steps related to the organization in the Karabakh conflict zone of measures to separate the warring units, return refugees, deploy observation posts, demining, etc., the secretaries of the security councils of the CSTO countries have, as it were, worked through all these questions on Tuesday in virtual mode...

Recall that creating peacekeeping forces within the framework of collective defense, the CSTO leaders even planned to participate in UN missions, preparing special battalions of blue helmets for this. But where are these battalions now?

Just a month ago, Belarus hosted a command post exercise with the CSTO peacekeepers “Indestructible Brotherhood - 2020”, in which the peacekeeping units of the organization participated, including the servicemen of the brigade of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, which is now actually operating in Nagorno-Karabakh...

In October 2020, when the Karabakh war was in full swing, CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas stated that “the organization will provide military assistance to Armenia in the event of a real threat to its territorial integrity or a direct military attack.” But, in his words, Yerevan did not apply to the CSTO for such help. On November 11, the CSTO Secretary General welcomed the entry of Russian peacekeepers into the Karabakh conflict zone. But for some reason he did not say anything about the readiness to do this of other CSTO countries...



Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations Joins Peacekeeping Force in Nagorno-Karabakh

OE Watch Commentary: After the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia signed a cease-fire agreement on 10 November, the Russian government quickly deployed a peacekeeping force to Nagorno-Karabakh as part of the agreement. The Russian peacekeepers immediately went to work establishing checkpoints, carrying out demining and explosive ordnance disposal, as well as participating in searches for missing Armenian and Azerbaijani service members. The Russian government announced that the strength of the peacekeeping contingent would be around 2,000 personnel and as the accompanying excerpted articles report, personnel from Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations have also deployed to take part in the peacekeeping mission.

The articles come from *Panorama*, a news website in Armenia. The first article reports how “an operational detachment of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia deployed to Stepanakert” not long after the peacekeepers deployed and that personnel from the ministry “will assess the situation on the ground and coordinate activities to provide the necessary assistance to the civilian population.” The second article from *Panorama* reports on some of the work the ministry is involved with, including restoring “residential buildings before the start of winter” and “working on the issue of optimizing the route for delivering additional humanitarian aid using railway transport.” The article notes that “this will save time for delivering items and speed up the process of rebuilding the infrastructure of the affected areas.” Lastly, the article mentions that “on 26 November, an additional group of Russian Emergency Situations rescuers arrived in Stepanakert.” While there is no information about exactly how many personnel from the ministry are working in Nagorno-Karabakh, they could be there for some time alongside the peacekeeping force and the impact they have will be worth watching. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Great emblem of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Great_emblem_of_the_Russian_Ministry_of_Emergency_Situations.svg, Attribution: Public domain

“The Ministry of Emergency Situations is also currently working on the issue of optimizing the route for delivering additional humanitarian aid using railway transport.”

Source: “Оперативная группа МЧС России направлена в Степанакерт (An operational detachment of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia has deployed to Stepanakert),” *Panorama*, 16 November 2020. <https://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2020/11/16/МЧС-России-Степанакерт/2402376>

On 16 November, an operational detachment of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia deployed to Stepanakert. It will enter the interdepartmental humanitarian response center, where it will assess the situation on the ground and coordinate activities to provide the necessary assistance to the civilian population...

Source: “МЧС России прорабатывает вопрос доставки гумпомощи в Арцах с задействованием железнодорожного транспорта (The Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia is working on the issue of deliveries of humanitarian aid to Artsakh with the use of rail lines),” *Panorama*, 27 November 2020. <https://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2020/11/27/МЧС-России-Арцах/2409984>

On 27 November, within the framework of providing assistance to the Republic of Artsakh, the operational group of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations are involved in the distribution of building materials to the affected population... rescuers also continue work to restore residential buildings before the start of winter...

The Ministry of Emergency Situations is also currently working on the issue of optimizing the route for delivering additional humanitarian aid using railway transport. This will save time for delivering items and speed up the process of rebuilding the infrastructure of the affected areas.

As a reminder, on 26 November, an additional group of Russian Emergency Situations rescuers arrived in Stepanakert...



Russian Brigade and Division Commanders' to Receive 'Iskander-Junior'

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russian plans for a Klevok-D2 small hypersonic missile. The Klevok-D2 is considered a Precision Guided Tactical Missile System (VTRK) in Russian military parlance. The Klevok-D2 is reportedly derived from the current Hermes family of hypersonic missiles, with this particular system being referred to as an “Iskander-Junior,” as it is envisioned to be a brigade and division commander’s long reach capability (100 km), just as an Army Group (Combined Arms Army, Tank Army, Army Corps) commander has an Iskander system (500 km) for the same purpose.

The Klevok-D2 is intended to give brigade and division commanders an organic capability to strike throughout the tactical depth. Currently, these commanders’ organic artillery assets, such as howitzers and 122mm MLRS, can only hit targets up to approximately 20-60 km, depending on equipment types and availability of extended range munitions. Since UAVs with a 120 km range are assigned to Russian brigades and divisions, these units already have sufficient intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance to provide necessary targeting data to the VTRK, thereby creating a substantial organic deep strike capability for the brigade or division. Unlike the Iskander, which is mounted on a heavy multi-axle chassis and requires several command-and-control and support vehicles, the VTRK is envisioned to require only one vehicle for operation. It has been displayed being mounted on both a heavy multi-axled chassis and on a Tigr two-axle utility vehicle (similar to a U.S. Humvee). **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Hermes Missile System, Nickel nitride.

Source: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Гермес_\(ракетный_комплекс\)#/media/Файл:Army-2020-169.JPG](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Гермес_(ракетный_комплекс)#/media/Файл:Army-2020-169.JPG), Attribution: CC BY 1.0

“The ‘Tochka’ missile complexes, which were obsolete and were removed from the inventory, were previously in the composition of the combined-arms divisions. And the divisions received nothing to replace them... As a result, they did not have any long-range weapons left. In so doing, the area of responsibility of the motorized rifle and tank brigades and divisions expanded, and the scale of operations also increased, which they must conduct in accordance with the new combat documents. And these formations now only have tube artillery and multiple rocket launcher systems. These systems’ ranges do not permit them to operate throughout the entire depth of the division’s area of responsibility. As a result, the commander is compelled to request resources from the senior commander. This is an abnormal situation. A commander must have at hand his own weapons, which are capable of accomplishing reconnaissance-strike missions...”



Continued: Russian Brigade and Division Commanders' to Receive 'Iskander-Junior'

Source: Anton Lavrov and Roman Krezul “«Искандер-младший»: военные получают гиперзвуковые миниракеты (The “Iskander-Junior”: The Military Will Get Hypersonic Mini-Missiles),” *Izvestiya Online*, 3 November 2020. <https://iz.ru/1081898/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul/iskander-mladshii-voennye-poluchat-giperzvukovye-minirakety>

Russian Ground Troops will be able to destroy enemy headquarters, command and control posts, artillery, and armored vehicles in a matter of seconds. The development of the latest light class hypersonic missile has begun in the country, sources in the defense industrial complex told Izvestiya. According to their information, the development is being conducted within the realization of the concept of the precision tactical missile complexes. The new item is capable of destroying targets at a range of 100 kilometers—it will require a matter of seconds in order to negotiate this distance. Experts maintain that Russian troops will radically increase their firepower now.

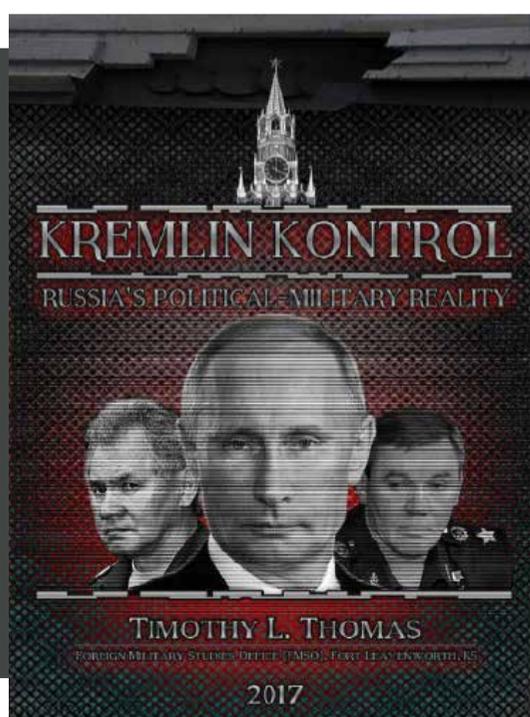
The development of the new missiles began based upon the technical solutions of the “Hermes” missile complex project, Izvestiya’s sources in the OPK [Defense Industrial Complex] clarified. The use of a new ramjet engine (PVRD) will be the fundamental difference of the weapon, which has received the working designation “Klevok-D2”. It will actually accelerate to hypersonic speed, which will drastically increase its ranges and will make it invulnerable to state-of-the-art air defense systems.

Izvestiya previously reported that the Military Department had approved the concept of the introduction of precision-guided tactical missile complexes into the ground troops brigades and divisions. One will be able to mount the compact launchers on “Tayfun” and “Tigr” armored motor vehicles. Unmanned aerial vehicles and soldiers with “Strelets” KRUS [Reconnaissance, Command and Control, and Communications Complex] sets will detect the targets for them. The new weapon will occupy the intermediate position between artillery and the “Iskander-M”.

According to the technical specifications for the development of the complex’s components (Izvestiya has the documents at its disposal), one will be able to employ the new munition from the most varied platforms, both ground-based and also airborne. The launch weight in the transporter-launch canister will not exceed 150 kilograms. The caliber of 207-millimeters that was taken from the “Hermes” will also not change. A warhead weighing 57 kilograms should be adequate to destroy both armored vehicles and also light shelters or individual buildings.

According to our sources’ information, the missile will be equipped with wings that deploy after launch. After launch using a jettisonable booster stage and imparting initial acceleration, the flight will already continue on the cruise ramjet engine. It will accelerate to several thousands of kilometers per hour on it in 40 seconds. The performance specifications state that it must be optimized for movement at the level of up to Mach 5, which is the official border of the initiation of hypersonic speed.

“The “Tochka” missile complexes, which were obsolete and were removed from the inventory, were previously in the composition of the combined-arms divisions. And the divisions received nothing to replace them,” Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy told Izvestiya. “As a result, they did not have any long-range weapons left. In so doing, the area of responsibility of the motorized rifle and tank brigades and divisions expanded, and the scale of operations also increased, which they must conduct in accordance with the new combat documents. And these formations now only have tube artillery and multiple rocket launcher systems. These systems’ ranges do not permit them to operate throughout the entire depth of the division’s area of responsibility. As a result, the commander is compelled to request resources from the senior commander. This is an abnormal situation. A commander must have at hand his own weapons, which are capable of accomplishing reconnaissance-strike missions...



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 Armed Forces Conduct First ‘NCO of the Year’ Competition

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses the Russian Armed Forces first “NCO of the Year” competition. The Russians have struggled with enlisted professionalization since Soviet times, and while doing so, have experimented with several different models to meet the military’s needs. This experimentation has resulted in Russia choosing a different model of enlisted professionalization than the one practiced in the US/West. The US/Western model is not considered a good fit by Russians due to a different military decision making process and cultural reasons.

Russia’s enlisted professional system promotes the idea that professional enlisted soldiers, including warrant officers, are intended to be technical experts in their fields, but are generally not considered to be leaders. Even when in positions similar to that of US/Western platoon sergeants and first sergeants, these enlisted professionals are considered commander’s assistants and not leaders in their own right. Although leadership opportunities are limited for enlisted professionals in the Russian Armed Forces, there are other opportunities, including training, better pay, and other benefits. As an example, the Russian Aerospace Forces offer at least one almost four-year NCO course that grants a bachelor’s degree to graduates. Other such courses are under consideration. The Russian Armed Forces’ pay system considers both rank and position, with the greater importance on the latter. Therefore, it is likely that these airmen’s salaries are much closer to that of an officer’s salary than that of most of their enlisted brethren. In addition, these NCOs are usually allowed to homestead at the duty station of their choice.

According to the article, the competition involved more than 6,000 contestants, and was conducted under the auspices of the Deputy Defense Minister for Logistics, General Dmitriy Bulgakov. This competition was apparently of keen interest to Russian senior military leadership, as the personal interest of General Bulgakov and other senior Russian senior military leaders was noted. Although the Russian Armed Forces have chosen a different model for enlisted professionalization, it is clear that Russian senior leaders perceive enlisted professionalization to be an important issue concerning Russian military modernization. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



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Soldiers from 2nd Guards Tamanskaya Motor Rifle Division, Vitaly Kuzmin.

Source: https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Commonwealth-Warrior-2011/i-p4XhB9b/0/b9bf2b17/X3/SoldierofCommonwealth_04-X3.jpg, Attribution: CC BY 4.0



Continued: Russian Armed Forces Conduct First ‘NCO of the Year’ Competition

“The goals of the competition include improving the level of training of subunit senior NCOs, testing their knowledge and practical skills managing a company, checking the status of internal order and the condition and safekeeping of arms, military equipment, and other military assets in subunits in compliance with the requirements of guidance documents of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation.”

Source: “Roman Biryulin and Andrey Kaliy, “Кто лучший в заботе о солдатах? (Who Best Cares for Soldiers?),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 27 November 2020. <http://redstar.ru/kto-luchshij-v-zabote-o-soldatah/>

The final part of the competition held at the 100th Separate Support Regiment in Alabino, near Moscow, was attended by 10 of the best senior NCOs. The winners of the stages in the districts, arms, and branches of the Armed Forces in the struggle for the right to bear the title of the best senior NCO of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation demonstrated knowledge in theoretical issues, skills, and abilities in performing practical tasks. This competition was held for the first time.

According to the results of the two-day competition, the highest number of points (174) was scored by Senior Warrant Officer Yevgeniy Sachko, a member of the Russian Federation Defense Ministry 12th Main Directorate. The second was Senior Warrant Officer Roman Lyaykht, a member of the Aerospace Forces. He has 165 points to his credit. Senior Warrant Officer Dmitriy Mukhametshin from Chita, speaking from the Eastern Military District, took third place. One hundred and fifty-three points were enough for the bronze award. Also in the top 10 of more than 6,000 NCOs of various subunits...

“The fact that you made it to the final is already a victory,” Deputy Defense Minister Dmitriy Bulgakov said. “Because you became the best in your districts and you won the qualifying stages in your arms and branches of the Armed Forces. I have always believed that the subunit’s senior NCO is one of the most important positions in the Armed Forces. It is not for nothing that a normal senior NCO in the army is called a father. Because for boys who joined the army from civilian life, in fact, you become second fathers. After all, you have a lot of tasks. Starting with the soldier’s appearance right up to his food and washing. Russian Defense Minister General Army Sergey Shoygu pays great attention to these issues... I would like to say that the final competition will become traditional, like the “Field Kitchen” or “Masters of Artillery Fire.” In addition, it is also planned to establish a special distinguishing badge – “Best Senior NCO of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.”...

The final competition was held in four stages. At the first stage, unit commanders identified the best subunit senior NCO in their military units. The second stage determined the best among the winners in the military units of the armies, arms, and branches of the Armed Forces. In the third stage, the winners of the previous stage competed for the opportunity to compete in the final. The final, fourth stage was conducted under the leadership of the Russian Federation Armed Forces chief of staff of logistics.

The goals of the competition include improving the level of training of subunit senior NCOs, testing their knowledge and practical skills managing a company, checking the status of internal order and the condition and safekeeping of arms, military equipment, and other military assets in subunits in compliance with the requirements of guidance documents of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation. The final part of the competition was attended by the top 10 senior NCOs who won the stages in the districts, arms, and branches of the Armed Forces.

As noted by Lieutenant-General Vladimir Trishunkin, Russian Federation Armed Forces chief of staff of logistics, the idea of the contest, which belongs to Deputy Defense Minister General of the Army Dmitriy Bulgakov, is correct and timely, because senior NCOs are not born, they become so in the course of intensive combat training. By the way, Vladimir Viktorovich himself was a sergeant and senior NCO at the beginning of his service. Before entering military school, he served two years as a conscript...



Possible Reasoning for Russian Extraterritorial Naval Bases

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses Russian plans to put a naval base in Sudan. Although a formal agreement has yet to be signed, it appears that the broad brushstrokes have been agreed upon. Reportedly, the base will garrison up to 300 personnel and have berths for four ships. The author of the article proffers that this base is an opportunity to again exert influence in the Indian Ocean.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Novaya Gazeta*, written by renowned journalist and military scholar Pavel Felgenhauer, discusses the general reasoning behind Russian extraterritorial naval bases. Felgenhauer posits that due to Russia cannot adequately project power on the high seas because of its lack of large naval vessels. This lack of a blue-water navy has lead Russia to pursue other means of controlling strategically important seas and shipping lanes, namely through the use of extraterritorial naval bases. These naval bases not only support the operations of naval vessels, but also provide ground-based area denial capabilities in the form of anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles. Felgenhauer believes that Russia's current activities in Syria have little to do with fighting Islamic extremism and are, instead, oriented on more traditional strategic concerns and force projection. If Felgenhauer's theories prove correct, it suggests that Russian efforts to secure extraterritorial naval bases in Crimea, Syria, and Sudan were not opportunities of chance, but instead part of a broader Russian strategy of globally integrated operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Russia is awaited in the region [Indian Ocean]. Moreover, not only by countries that were previously in the zone of the Soviet influence, such as Mozambique, Madagascar and the Seychelles, but also other states on the coast of East Africa and islands of the Indian Ocean. In the conditions of Chinese, Indian, European, American economic expansion, the presence of another interested player will give them an opportunity to pursue a more flexible policy, maneuver and negotiate, in exchange providing Russian companies with contracts, and the navy with bases and supply centers.”



Steregushchiy-class (Project 20380) corvette.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/NAVY-Day-2018-Saint-Petersburg/i-zBFmjFC/0/4385608f/X3/NAVYDay2018SPb-026-X3.jpg>, Attribution: CC BY 4.0



Continued: Possible Reasoning for Russian Extra-territorial Naval Bases

Source: “Aleksey Kupriyanov, “В Африку гулять: что даст России военное присутствие на берегах Индийского океана (To Africa for a Stroll: What Will Russia Gain From Military Presence on Shores of Indian Ocean),” *Izvestia Online*, 16 November 2020. <https://iz.ru/1086965/aleksei-kupriyanov/v-afriku-guliat-cto-dast-rossii-voennoe-prisutstvie-na-beregakh-indiiskogo-okeana>

Russia received the right to establish a “logistics support center” for its navy on the territory of Sudan. In fact, we are talking about the return of our country to the big politics of the Indian Ocean. Details -- in the material... the creation of the modest logistics center in Port Sudan is no less important than the freezing of hostilities in the Transcaucasus. Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh ensure that the conflict on Russia’s southern borders does not escalate into a full-scale humanitarian crisis; Russian sailors in Port Sudan seem to be an indication of the fact that Russia intends to seriously engage in the complex foreign policy game now unfolding in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

After the collapse of the USSR, the once formidable Soviet Navy turned into a sad shadow of its former power. Cruisers, destroyers, large anti-submarine warfare ships and large landing ships rusted at the berths, waiting to be cut into scrap metal, and they had to forget about the demonstration of force in distant sea areas. This period lasted almost two decades -- not a lot by historical standards, but long enough to turn into a difficult task even the limited restoration of the ocean-going fleet in a situation when it was suddenly needed. If in Soviet times the presence of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean was provided by the ships of the Pacific Fleet, then the honor to restore this presence was granted to the Black Sea Fleet. It so happened that Russia started its return to the big chess game from the Middle East, not from the Far East, and therefore Port Sudan, as the next operating base after Tartus, looked logical.

A convenient location that allows one to control traffic in the Red Sea and, if necessary, to protect one’s ships from pirate raids from the territory of the nearby Somalia, a good bay, a relatively developed infrastructure, absence of foreign policy problems with the country’s leadership give reason to hope that this time the base will not have to be urgently moved.

“The typical peacetime personnel for such a base are to repair ships, a rescue tug, 3-4 units of lower-rank ships,” believes Ilya Kramnik, a Russian International Affairs Council expert. But the key there will most likely be presented in the form of inconspicuous means of intelligence and special forces -- the region needs special tools more than purely military ones. For the latter, if necessary, large ships will obviously be sent there -- up to and including nuclear submarines and nuclear missile cruisers, given that Russia has obtained an agreement on a possible entry of nuclear-powered ships, but their presence will clearly not be permanent.

The key question now is what are Moscow’s future plans? Figuratively speaking, will Port Sudan remain a southern bastion ensuring Russia’s presence in the Middle East, or will it become the first step towards a full-fledged return of Russia to the Indian Ocean. Russia is awaited in the region. Moreover, not only by countries that were previously in the zone of the Soviet influence, such as Mozambique, Madagascar and the Seychelles, but also other states on the coast of East Africa and islands of the Indian Ocean. In the conditions of Chinese, Indian, European, American economic expansion, the presence of another interested player will give them an opportunity to pursue a more flexible policy, maneuver and negotiate, in exchange providing Russian companies with contracts, and the navy with bases and supply centers.

India is waiting for Russia. More than once the author of these lines had to hear from Indian experts and high-ranking military officials regret that the Russian flag is no longer visible in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi fears the growing appetite of Beijing, which is gradually intensifying its presence in the Indian Ocean, seeking to ensure the security of the supply of hydrocarbons from the Persian Gulf countries and its goods to Europe; these fears are pushing India into the arms of the United States. The Russian squadron in the Indian Ocean, on the one hand, will give New Delhi an alternative to rapprochement with Washington, and on the other hand, it will guarantee Beijing that the safety of its ships in the region will be ensured. It is still difficult to say whether Russia will live up to these expectations and whether it will take the risk of declaring its interests in one of the most strategically important regions of the world. But at least the first step in this direction has already been taken.



Continued: Possible Reasoning for Russian Extra-territorial Naval Bases

Source: “Pavel Felgenhauer, “Базовые ценности: Российский военный флот расширяет свое присутствие (Base Values. Russian Navy Expanding Its Presence: Bases Being Set up From Crimea to Sudan),” *Novaya Gazeta Online*, 19 November 2020. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/11/19/88019-bazovye-tsennosti>

...In 2015, Russia dramatically expanded its military presence in Syria. There is no airbase near Tartus, although now, when this formerly sleepy place is being rapidly rebuilt and expanded, there are plans to build a runway somewhere there. So far in 2015, the Khmeimim military airbase was deployed near the Syrian port of Latakia, north of Tartus, based on the runway of a local civilian airfield. Khmeimim became the headquarters of the Russian operation in Syria, while providing air support and cover for the permanent Russian squadron in the Mediterranean, which is based in Tartus, where they deepened the fairway, built new berths, warehouses and deployed a multilayer air defense system.

Two new Project 636.3 diesel-electric submarines (with potential long-range nuclear cruise missiles Caliber), which were built in the Baltic Sea for the Black Sea Fleet and were to be permanently based on the Taman Peninsula, are permanently based in Tartus. Later it was decided to leave them in Tartus due to the fact that the Turks, according to the Montreux Convention, do not allow submarines (unlike surface ships) to freely navigate through the Black Sea straits, except for repairs or back from repairs. In 2015, it was announced that the Russian military was sent to Syria solely to fight Islamist terrorists, and having solved the problem, they would quickly return home. Putin several times since 2015 announced the defeat of the terrorists and the beginning of the withdrawal of troops, but it all turned out to be mere PR. The base in Tartus continues to expand and, according to Sergey Shoigu, “is capable of receiving dozens of warships; all ship mooring spots are equipped with systems of essential supplies, unloading platforms, a repair complex for servicing and minor repairs of ships and vessels.”...

The Russian Federation does not have capable strike aircraft carriers, and in order to (with any hope of success) withstand the US Navy and its NATO allies in the Mediterranean, it needs an air base in the region covered by a multi-layered modern air defense system. It was for this, in fact, that the Syrian campaign was launched -- to deploy a powerful naval base in Tartus, and with it an equally powerful air force base in Khmeimim. The Montreux Convention prohibits aircraft carriers from crossing the Black Sea straits. In wartime, all this may not be important, but American attack aircraft carrier groups have no need to get into the Black Sea basin and become targets of attacks of anti-ship missiles deployed in Crimea anyway. For example, the Americans will be able to strike the Black Sea Fleet directly from the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, which means that it is there that you need to prepare to meet them, developing infrastructure and practicing the deployment of a powerful group of naval and air forces. This has nothing to do with Islamists. Russian forces are concentrated on the Syrian coast in Tartus and Khmeimim, where there are no Islamists, and Alawites, loyal to Damascus, live. And they project our military force from Tartus and from Khmeimim, first of all, to the sea to the west, and not to the interior of the country, to the east.

Now the next step has been taken -- further south to Sudan... The base on the Red Sea coast is, in fact, not about Africa, but about the Indian Ocean, where there is an American strategic base on the island of Diego Garcia; there is also the headquarters of the 5th Fleet in Bahrain and the main regional air base in Qatar... Due to scarcity, our frigates now play the role of independent ocean-going flagships. In the Russian Federation, quite a few new ships are being built, but very small ones: small rocket ships and all kinds of corvettes. They are equipped with universal launchers, and they can fire Kalibr cruise missiles, on which a nuclear warhead can be installed. But these “babies” have poor seaworthiness and air defense, small sailing autonomy, and a small ammunition reserve. To somehow confront the Americans in the Indian Ocean with this “mosquito fleet,” of course, a base in the region is needed.

The Red Sea in itself is a strategically important maritime artery linking Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal. American warships and carrier strike groups often cross the Red Sea to and from the Persian Gulf. From the basin of the Red Sea, which was considered by the Americans to be completely safe before the appearance of the base in Sudan, they more than once bombed or struck with cruise missiles, for example, against targets in Syria. The naval base in Sudan may change this alignment, but, like in Syria, here you can get bogged down in local problems not related to naval strategy and global confrontation... Russia, in confrontation with the “main enemy” (the United States), is deploying new bases or reviving Soviet ones along the entire strategic perimeter...



Karabakh War Might Spur Russian Attack UAV Development

OE Watch Commentary: As reported last month (*OE Watch*, December 2020, “Early Lessons-Learned from Nagorno-Karabakh”) Russian military analysts continue to examine how Azerbaijani forces prevailed over their Armenian counterparts. The popular daily, *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, interviewed the deputy director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), Konstantin Makienko, regarding his assessment of “Azerbaijan’s victory over Armenia.” The accompanying excerpt from his analysis merits closer scrutiny.

Makienko begins by asserting that “Turkey’s participation [on the Azeri side] was, of course, very significant or even decisive.” He claims that it is likely that “the entire operation was planned by the Turkish headquarters,” and that it was not just planning, but that “Turkish officers provided support both at the headquarters level and directly on the battlefield.” He further states that, “Turkish aviation carried out jamming of radio communications of the Armenian troops.” Makienko goes on to assert that “in the Karabakh conflict, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have become not just a means of reconnaissance, target designation and carriers of high-precision weapons. In this war, with their help, air supremacy was first established.”

Makienko also describes Russia’s continued inability to produce and field an attack UAV. He recounts attending a press conference 15-20 years ago with the Russian Air Force Commander, and asking “why are we lagging behind in the development of unmanned aircraft and, in particular, in the creation of strike drones?” At the time, the commander answered, “why do we need them? We have enough planes and pilots.” Later, questions developed in the military over “who should have command of unmanned aircraft—pilots or ground forces? Who needs it more?” Makienko asserts that no one took ownership for producing an attack UAV, and the “programs for the development of unmanned aircraft were not considered a priority in the system of research and development work of the Ministry of Defense.” Even today, he argues that “there are still no centralized inter-service management bodies for such programs, including the creation of systems necessary for unmanned aviation (engines, optoelectronic systems, control systems), no proper political and administrative support, no purposeful policy to create centers of competence in this area.”

Makienko concludes the interview by repeating “as of today, there are still no attack drones in Russia... [and that] we are 20-25 years behind our American ‘partners’ in this area.” He posits that “in a typical domestic style, the demonstration of the use of drones in the Karabakh war will spur Russian unmanned programs, forcing, finally, some in Russia to finally see the importance in fielding such a weapon system.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Russian Attack UAV Sukhoi S-70 Okhotnik (still in development).

Source: Wikimedia Commons. <https://bit.ly/2LvUo20>, Attribution: CCA SA 4.0 Intl

“...As of today, there are still no attack drones in Russia....”

Source: Olga Bozhiev, “Эксперт объяснил, почему Россия отстала в области ударных дронов на 25 лет (An expert explains why Russia is 25 years behind in the field of attack drones),” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 5 December 2020. <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/12/05/ekspert-obyasnil-pochemu-rossiya-otstala-v-oblasti-udarnykh-dronov-na-25-let.html>

The Karabakh war, its course and results are being actively discussed, including in Russia. It is not uncommon to hear statements that Azerbaijan’s victory over Armenia is actually a victory of Turkish weapons over Russian ones. And it was not Armenia that lost in this war, but Russia. Are these statements true? Is the Karabakh war really a bell for our defense industry, which has not done everything for the Russian army? Why don’t we still have strike drones? These questions were asked by “MK” analyst, deputy director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST) Konstantin Makienko.

Has Turkey increased its military presence in Azerbaijan following the war?

-Yes, it is quite obvious that the Turkish presence in Azerbaijan has increased dramatically.... First of all, Azerbaijan won, of course.... But Turkey’s participation was, of course, very significant or even decisive.



Continued: Karabakh War Might Spur Russian Attack UAV Development

Source: Olga Bozhiev, “Эксперт объяснил, почему Россия отстала в области ударных дронов на 25 лет (An expert explains why Russia is 25 years behind in the field of attack drones),” *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, 5 December 2020. <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/12/05/ekspert-obyasnil-pochemu-rossiya-otstala-v-oblasti-udarnykh-dronov-na-25-let.html>

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Has Turkey increased its military presence in Azerbaijan following the war?

-Yes, it is quite obvious that the Turkish presence in Azerbaijan has increased dramatically.... First of all, Azerbaijan won, of course.... But Turkey’s participation was, of course, very significant or even decisive.

In all likelihood, the entire operation was planned by the Turkish headquarters. During the operation itself, Turkish officers provided support both at the headquarters level and directly on the battlefield. There is good reason to believe that Turkish advisers were present in battle formations at the battalion level and above, and in some cases were also at the company level.

Turkish aviation carried out jamming and jamming of radio communications of the Armenian troops...

Did the war in Karabakh show the increased importance of attack unmanned aircraft?

-Of course. But unmanned vehicles in this case are interesting mainly as another mechanism for reducing the cost of using precision weapons and increasing their proliferation.... But the main thing – I draw your attention to this fact – in the Karabakh conflict, unmanned aerial vehicles have become not just a means of reconnaissance, target designation and carriers of high-precision weapons. In this war, with their help, air supremacy was first established.

So why the Russian army, in contrast to the Turkish or Israeli, lagged behind in this segment of weapons?

-The lag of the Russian Armed Forces in the implementation and development of unmanned technologies is primarily caused not by some technological reasons, but is a consequence of problems with the definition of development priorities.

-Exactly! I remember very well how 15-20 years ago at a press conference I asked the Air Force Commander: why are we lagging behind in the development of unmanned aircraft and, in particular, in the creation of strike drones. To which he answered absolutely seriously: why do we need them? We have enough planes and pilots.

...And at the General Staff, everyone was arguing: who should give command of unmanned aircraft - pilots or groundmen? Who needs it more? And it turned out that no one needed her.

-Yes, programs for the development of unmanned aircraft were not considered a priority in the system of research and development work of the Ministry of Defense. And this has become a very important reason for our lag. We are still reaping the fruits of that policy. There are still no centralized inter-service management bodies for such programs, including the creation of systems necessary for unmanned aviation (engines, optoelectronic systems, control systems), no proper political and administrative support, no purposeful policy to create centers of competence in this area.

Programs for the creation of unmanned aerial vehicles are still “on their own” and are left to the mercy of industrial organizations, sometimes rather weak. As a result, we have only a mass of light small apparatuses with extensive use of imported components.

But the use of imported components in military equipment for the Russian army is prohibited. So there is still a problem with attack drones?

-As of today, there are still no attack drones in Russia.... That is, we are 20-25 years behind our American “partners” in this area.

But now, especially after the Karabakh war, have we started to reduce this gap?

We are maturing ... In my opinion, so far in the domestic military-political circles there is no clear understanding that unmanned aerial vehicles in combination with high-precision weapons offer a cheaper and more economical version of modern warfare... So, perhaps, in a typical domestic style, the demonstration of the use of drones in the Karabakh war will spur Russian unmanned programs, forcing, finally, some of the Russian men to ‘cross themselves.’ Thunder has burst out.



Airmobile Brigades Getting Helicopter Augmentation

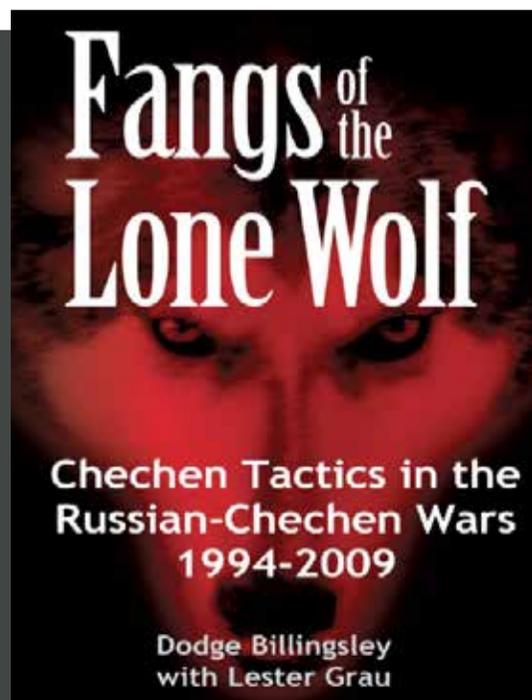
OE Watch Commentary: Soviet/Russian airmobile units and training have been around for a long time, but according to these two excerpted *Izvestia* articles, Kavkaz 2020 gave the boost to collocate necessary helicopters with re-energized air assault regiments. Unlike the US Army, Russian Army Aviation actually belongs to Russia's Aerospace Forces, so this will require collocating forces from separate services. Russian airborne and airmobile forces are mechanized forces once they land, so their insertions demand a quantity of air transport and specialized combat vehicles.

The 31st Air-Assault Brigade will be the first upgraded test unit. The 31st Air-Assault Brigade was formed from the disbanded 104th Airborne Division at Ulyanovsk in the Central Military District. The 31st was reported to have been in the Crimea in 2014 and had some apparent connections to the fighting in the Donbas. There is an active airfield at Ulyanovsk (located on the Volga River). During Soviet times, there were 16 airmobile regiments, one for each military district. Although these airmobile forces were trained for both parachute and helicopter insertion, they were sometimes second-class citizens since they were in the airborne community, but not under their direct command. It will be interesting to see if each of the four military districts receives an air assault regiment or if air assault will stay primarily under airborne command.

Unlike in the US Army, Russian airborne and air assault forces are a separate branch and do not belong to ground forces, but they cooperate closely with them when deployed. Airborne and air assault forces are Russian rapid reaction and strategic reserve forces. Training of motorized rifle ground force subunits for airmobile insertion is coming back as well. While the 31st is located in the Central Military District, the announced training of ground force subunits in airmobile insertions will be conducted in the Southern Military District. The first article briefly discussed fast-roping helicopter troop landings from hovering helicopters. Fast-roping is nothing new, but evidently some of the Russian fast-rope gear is.

According to both of these Kavkaz-related *Izvestia* articles, airmobile forces are particularly useful on a fragmented/nonlinear battlefield. This goes hand-in-glove with the Russian pronouncement that maneuver defense, rather than positional, is now the primary form of tactical defense.
End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“During the “Kavkaz 2020” exercise, airmobile units conducted successful heliborne assaults. Which paratroop regiments will become airmobile regiments is currently being determined. These units will radically increase Russian forces defensive and offensive capabilities. Experts determined that airmobile insertions are effective during maneuver where there is no solid front line.”



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: Airmobile Brigades Getting Helicopter Augmentation

Source: “Включили аэромобильник: части ВДВ усилили вертолетами (Airmobile included: Airborne units augmented with helicopters)”, *Izvestia*, 19 October, 2020, <https://iz.ru/1075255/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul/vkliuchili-aeromobilnik-chasti-vdv-usilili-vertoletami>

During the “Kavkaz 2020” exercise, airmobile units conducted successful heliborne assaults. Which paratroop regiments will become airmobile regiments is currently being determined. These units will radically increase Russian forces defensive and offensive capabilities. Experts determined that airmobile insertions are effective during maneuver where there is no solid front line.

Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu noted after the “Kavkas 2020” exercises that the joint efforts of the independent air assault brigade and Army Aviation subunits significantly increased the probability of the destruction of enemy forces. During the maneuvers, a reinforced battalion of the 31st Air Assault Brigade was airlifted by several dozen Mi-8 and Mi-26 helicopters. In addition to the soldiers, Army Aviation airlifted light motor vehicles, two batteries of D-30 towed howitzers and pallets of artillery ammunition. Two dozen Mi-28N and Ka-52 attack helicopters covered the landing and assisted the airmobile troopers in breaking enemy resistance and disrupting the advance of their reserve. The attack helicopters escorted the transport helicopters to the landing site. Other exercise participants took advantage of the confused enemy situation to surround and defeat the main enemy force.

A portion of the airborne troops disembarked from the helicopters above the ground using the new parachute-less system. They departed the aircraft in full gear at an altitude of 20-25 meters along ropes, thanks to special rappelling devices. So, one can rapidly disembark soldiers even on terrain, which has not been adapted for a helicopter landing. The aircraft delivered motor vehicles-dune buggies with machineguns and anti-tank missiles, along with their crews for raids in the enemy rear.

Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy stated “This system was already tested in Soviet times, when the air assault brigades were created, and whose composition included helicopters. They are designed to accomplish the missions of enveloping or evading the enemy at the tactical and operational level, fording water obstacles, seizing important areas and lines in the depth of the enemy defense, and conducting an engagement on rugged terrain. These formations can participate in maneuver combat when there is no solid front line. The employment of air assault subunits was supposed to ensure rapid penetration into the enemy combat formations and to defeat him in detail. Those missions will be assigned to the contemporary air-mobile formations. The main problem is the helicopters. Approximately 160 combat and transport helicopters are need for one such brigade. Therefore, we will have to form new units in order to saturate the troops with Army Aviation.”

*Previously, the airborne forces and their armored vehicles were optimized for a paratroop from Il-76 military transport aircraft. The reappearance of airmobile units will require changes. *Izvestiya* previously reported that the first Airborne Army Aviation Brigade should be formed in the next few years. They are equipping it not only with aircraft but also with helicopters. They will begin to cover the disembarkation of the assault forces and provide fire support of subunits on the battlefield. The new unit will be operationally subordinate directly to the VDV commander and be constantly at the “Winged Infantry’s” disposal.*

Modernized Mi-26T2V super-heavy helicopters are already arriving in the troop’s location. They are capable of transporting up to 82 airborne troops or outsized cargo - including armed motor vehicles and ATVs - for them at any time of day. The delivery of even heavier equipment based upon the “Tigr” armored motor vehicle was also worked out.

The Ministry of Defense has also ordered the first lot of 15 of the latest Mi-38 helicopters for Army Aviation. Based upon their performance specifications, they occupy the intermediate position between the gigantic Mi-26s and the medium Mi-8 transport helicopters. The new aircraft is capable of transporting up to 40 soldiers. They can transport up to five tons of cargo, guns, and vehicles in the internal cabin or on sling loads.

A family of light enhanced cross-country motor vehicles, which were developed for transport on helicopters, was displayed at the “Army-2020” Exhibition. Both mobile 120-millimeter mortars and the powerful “Kornet” anti-tank missile systems can be mounted on these vehicles. Armed ATVs for the new air assault formations have frequently been shown at parades. A machinegun can be mounted on the two-seat vehicle or it can be used to deliver anti-tank missiles or portable air defense missile systems.

In 2018, VDV Commander Andrey Serdyukov announced that airborne was creating a new type of formation. This was the experimental Ulyanovsk 31st Air-Assault Brigade... A battalion of the subunit was tested during the “Vostok-2018” Strategic Exercises, which was the largest-scale exercise in Russia’s contemporary history. Approximately 1,500 airborne troops and their weapons disembarked from helicopters at the “Tsentr-2019” Exercises the following year. This required 124 helicopter flights. They also transported Special Forces teams from Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan together with Russian military personnel. “Kavkaz -2020” was the final “graduation examination” for the upgraded airborne subunits.

The MOD also plans to add additional air-mobile capabilities to conventional motorized rifle forces. The Ministry of Defense stated that this experiment is being conducted in all Southern Military District motorized rifle units.



Continued: Airmobile Brigades Getting Helicopter Augmentation

“A new element of an operational formation was demonstrated in practice - the so-called mobile echelon. In contrast to the traditional elements (the first echelon, second, and so forth), for which they defined a front and direction of movement at the outset, the mobile echelon can operate in a broad radius based upon the command authorities’ decision.”

Source: “Спустились с небес: подведены итоги экспериментальных воздушных учений (They Brought Them Down to Earth: Results of the Experimental Air Exercise),” *Izvestia*, 29 October 2020. <https://iz.ru/1079781/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/spustilis-s-nebes-podvedeny-itogi-eksperimentalnykh-vozdushnykh-ucheni>

The Russian Aerospace Forces Command Authorities summed up the results of the experimental exercises. The maneuvers simultaneously occurring in Karelia, Voronezh, Tver, and Kursk Oblasts, and also at ranges in the Astrakhan area. For the first time, more than 100 combat aircraft were operating based upon a single concept at a distance of 1,000 kilometers from each other. The latest automated communications systems as well as the “Military Internet”, called the “Secure Data Transmission Segment”, were involved for the command and control of dissimilar air forces in real time. Over the course of the day, the aviation grouping repelled a massive enemy strike, intercepted its targets, and simultaneously destroyed ground-based facilities and air defense systems in real time.

Although the exercises concluded at the end of September, the analysis of results took several weeks. Military Department sources state that the experience, which was obtained at the Aerospace Forces large-scale exercises, was successful. Thanks to the new command and control systems, the Aerospace forces will be able to cover entire regions with an impenetrable shield....

The aircraft of Western Military District’s 105th Guards Composite Aviation Division were the experimental maneuvers’ main participants. MiG-31BM, Su-30SM, Su-34, and Su-35 aircraft are assigned to the Division’s regiments.

The aviation grouping repelled a massive notional enemy strike and intercepted its targets, including hypersonic missiles, and simultaneously destroyed ground targets and air defense systems....

The preparation for the exercises took several days. The main phase took less than a day. Su-34 bombers destroyed ground targets and missile launchers at night. In Karelia, MiG-31BM high-altitude fighter aircraft and Su-35S fighter aircraft participated in aerial engagements with the notional enemy - in particular, the supersonic aircraft refined their capability to intercept hypersonic targets at high altitude.

Aerial engagements simultaneously unfolded over Ashuluk Range, Astrakhan Oblast. There, a group of Su-30SM fighter aircraft conducted a strike against ground-based air defense systems and then destroyed airborne targets using “air-to-air” missiles....

During the operations at Ashuluk Range, the Su-30SM fighter aircraft supported the ground forces participating in the “Kavkaz-2020” Strategic Exercise. According to the scenario, they repelled a massive air strike and suppressed the fire of a number of ground targets....

General Staff Chief Valeriy Gerasimov praised the troops’ proficiency. In his words, during the course of the play of the main phase, a new element of an operational formation was demonstrated in practice - the so-called mobile echelon. In contrast to the traditional elements (the first echelon, second, and so forth), for which they defined a front and direction of movement at the outset, the mobile echelon can operate in a broad radius based upon the command authorities’ decision. For example, to rapidly create a defensive line on a dangerous axis or to detain the withdrawing enemy. Airmobile subunits, which move in helicopters, constitute its foundation.

In the main phase, they also demonstrated the work of the reconnaissance-fire complex and four main methods of destroying “Jihad-Mobiles” [machine guns and antitank weapons mounted on pickup trucks].



Hovercraft continue to support Russian Naval Infantry

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* covered the landing of two companies and 10 BTR-82 personnel carriers of Naval Infantry in the Baltic. The Naval Infantry was transported on two “small landing hovercraft” called Zubr [Bison]. These “small” hovercraft have been around since 1988 and are the world’s largest military hovercraft. They are not small in the hovercraft world, but are small as far as amphibious landing ships are concerned. The Greek and Chinese navies also have these hovercraft and there have been articles about Russia restarting the project, but there are constraints on the military budget, so the Russian navy will probably continue with just their two craft for some time yet. The Russian navy wants to upgrade its over-the-horizon amphibious landing capability. Most of the Russian Naval Infantry has the BTR-82A amphibious personnel carriers, but these lack the combat power needed when the infantry hits a contested shore. The Russian Ministry Of Defense is determining whether to upgrade its Naval Infantry with the seaworthy BMP-3F to provide that combat power (see “Potential Equipping of Russian Naval Infantry with the BMP-3F,” *OE Watch*, November 2020). In the meantime, the Zubr will provide a rapid way of closing from the horizon to the shore. The hovercraft are reportedly capable of carrying 555 tons or three main battle tanks or eight personnel carriers. Evidently, neither hovercraft was loaded to full capacity for this exercise. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“There is no helmsman on the bridge: the ship’s commander... steers the MDKVP with the aid of an aircraft-like hand wheel. In contrast to a conventional ship, where one can sense the slightest change in speed, here only the lag time indicates that the Yevgeniy Kocheshkov is traveling at 36 knots, which is unthinkable for a modern ship.”

Source: За иллюминатором облака водяной пыли, вылетающей из-под днища (“Flying over the Waves”),” *Krasnaya zvezda*, 18 November 2020. <http://redstar.ru/polyot-nad-volnami/>

The Yevgeniy Kocheshkov and Mordoviya are rushing to the shore at a speed that is unthinkable for a ship. Each of these MDKVP [small landing hovercrafts] carries five BTR-82A armored personnel carriers -- an amphibious assault company of the naval infantry formation -- in its lower holds. Scheduled exercises have been held in the Baltic Fleet on the landing of equipment on an unimproved coast.

... The world’s largest ships of this type were created in the USSR-designated as small landing hovercraft (MDKVP) of Project 12322 Zubr [Bison]. Both of the still functioning ships of this project are serving in the Baltic Fleet.

The ship turns about by the shoreline and begins to speed up: the assault force is already aboard the craft, and the armored personnel carriers are secured in the hold with sturdy chains. The ship’s missions include firing at surface and airborne targets using AK-630 artillery mounts, rehearsing damage control, and practicing radiation, chemical and biological defense at sea. But the main mission set for the crews is to land an amphibious assault force on an unimproved coast. These ships were created precisely for this purpose...

Putting out to sea on a hovercraft resembles a flight aboard an aircraft: instead of the up and down or sideways motion of the waves, the deck shakes like the cabin of an airliner that has entered turbulence. In principle, that is precisely how it works -- the engines (which, in fact, are aviation engines) create an air cushion “zone of turbulence” under the bottom of the ship that lifts the MDKVP above the surface of the water. The altitude of the “flight” can reach up to 40 centimeters [15.7 inches].

There is no helmsman on the bridge: the ship’s commander, Captain 3rd Rank Sergey Konov, steers the MDKVP with the aid of an aircraft-like hand wheel. In contrast to a conventional ship, where one can sense the slightest change in speed, here only the lag time indicates that the Yevgeniy Kocheshkov is traveling at 36 knots, which is unthinkable for a modern ship.

... “The ship was tasked to land an assault force on the coast. The task was accomplished as prescribed, both in place and in time, and the amphibious force has been landed. The weather today favored our efforts, but in principle, the ships of this project are capable of operating in a WMO Sea State Code 5 storm. We can deliver an amphibious force to any point of the Baltic Sea on one refueling cycle with a maximum speed of 55 knots. The peculiarity of today’s exercises is that we had to work together with the MDKVP Mordoviya, coordinating our movement in such a way so as to approach the shore and land our amphibious forces simultaneously.”



Terminator-2 Tank Support Combat Vehicles Vigorously Field Tested

OE Watch Commentary: According to the military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the 90th Guards Tank Division is field testing the Terminator-2 Tank Support combat vehicle. The system has been under consideration and development for decades. Mechanized infantry, self-propelled artillery, and armored forces are supposedly mutually supporting. Artillery provides destruction to the front and flanks as infantry fighting vehicles and dismounted infantry protect tanks from enemy antitank systems and enemy infantry. Simultaneously, tanks protect the infantry fighting vehicles and dismounted infantry from enemy tanks and strong points. In practice, infantry fighting vehicles and carriers have problems keeping up with fast-moving tanks, their armor protection is too thin to survive at the point of the attack and battle drills between tanks and mechanized infantry frequently break down due to the lack of sufficient team training prior to combat. Artillery fire may be on or off target, or too early or too late. The bottom line is that there is often too great a gap between the tanks and the mechanized infantry as the artillery lifts and shifts fire. The tanks are then vulnerable to enemy anti-tank guided missiles. As the article points out, the BMPT tank support vehicle, is designed to integrate within tank formations to protect the tanks from enemy anti-tank weapons and survive the occasional short round of supporting artillery fire. There have been several variations of this system during its development and it was previously mounted on a T-72A tank chassis. This version is mounted on a T-90 tank chassis. Crew size has varied from three to five—a function of being able to man the automatic grenade launchers simultaneously with the other systems. (For more information, see Lester Grau and Chuck Bartles “A New System Preserves Armor Dominance of the Future Battlefield: The BMPT Terminator-2,” *Armor*, April-June 2015 at <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fms0/m/fms0-monographs/195073>.)

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“The BMPT is designed to fight within tank subunits to detect and destroy any targets that pose a threat to the tanks.”

Source: “Yuriy Belousov, “Броню порвёт за наши танки (Will shred armor for our tanks),” *Krasnaya zvezda*, 2 December 2020. <http://redstar.ru/bronyu-porvyot-za-nashi-tanki>

The 90th Guards Vitebsk-Novograd Twice Red Banner Tank Division of the Central Military District has received new armaments for experimental employment including the Terminator-2 tank support combat Vehicle (BMPT). The Terminator-2 BMPT is, without exaggeration, a unique... combat vehicle unequalled in the armies of other nations in terms of its structural armor, all-around protection, improved systems for searching for and detecting targets, combined with the combat power of its multiple armaments and increased ammunition load. The engineers of the Urals Transport Machine-Building Design Bureau came up with the idea and development of the BMPT.

Colonel Andrey Sigarev, deputy commander of the Southern Urals tank formation for armaments, noted the following, with obvious satisfaction. “The Terminator-2 BMPT is equipped with an automated multiple armament system consisting of two 30-mm automatic cannons, a 7.62-mm PKTM-type [upgraded tank-mounted Kalashnikov machine gun] coaxial machine gun, two 30-mm AG-17D automatic grenade launchers, and two Ataka-T guided antitank supersonic missile launchers. The fire command and control system of the combat vehicle’s main armament makes it possible to recognize small targets on the battlefield at far distances, during the day, at night, and in adverse weather conditions. The presence of three operators in the BMPT facilitates the rapid detection and simultaneous destruction of several different targets within a 360-degree sector view. The onboard automatic armament has nearly twice the combat potential of modern BMP-type [infantry fighting vehicle] armored vehicles.”

The BMPT is designed to fight within tank subunits to detect and destroy any targets that pose a threat to the tanks. At the same time, despite its generalized technical designation, it is no longer correct to correlate the BMPT with the lineup of infantry fighting vehicles. The Terminator uses the T-90A tank chassis. Despite its seemingly massive dimensions and its hefty store of “payload,” this tank support combat vehicle proved to be highly mobile and maneuverable. The iron “heart” of the Terminator-2 is a 1,000 horsepower supercharger diesel engine. This impressive technical parameter makes it possible for the BMPT to carry out combat support within tank and motorized rifle subunits alike.

Tank company senior driver-mechanic Contract Service Corporal Igor Karpov stated that “The vehicle flies around the field.” He is one of the first Terminator operators in the South Urals division... “I have been driving tanks for years, yet I am impressed by the technical capabilities of the Terminator’s under-chassis. If I am offered the opportunity to continue my service in a BMPT subunit after this phase of experimental trials, I will agree without hesitation.”

The initial crews of the tank support combat vehicles ...are already formed. The composition is not the usual tank crew. In addition to the standard crew of vehicle commander, driver-mechanic, and gunner-operator, the Terminator crew has two automatic grenade launcher gunners. According to Colonel Yevgeniy Kovylin, deputy commander of the tank division, the best specialists of the Terminator crews will become an instructor group to train future new-generation BMPT crews. “It is, however, too early to talk about this,” Colonel Kovylin noted. “The crewmen of today’s newly formed crews still have a lot to learn and master.”

During this winter training period, the BMPT crews will undergo a mandatory specialization retraining phase at the BMPT manufacturing plant. Only after this, the crews for these unique combat vehicles will participate in scheduled battalion, regiment, and division combat training drills and exercises.

Prior to actual combat employment, the Terminator-2 BMPT has to be accepted for production. According to its basic concept, the BMPT moves within a tank subunits to, detect and destroy any targets that pose a threat to tanks. The developer of the combat vehicle guarantees that the Terminator will take out everything on the attack axis with ease: enemy grenade launchers, lightly armored vehicles, personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles, and tanks. The wide traverse and elevation of the automatic cannon enables them to hit targets on the upper floors of buildings and engage low-flying reconnaissance and combat aircraft. These field tests should confirm this.



Turkish Perspectives on the UAE-Greece Defense Agreement

OE Watch Commentary: In late November, the UAE and Greece signed a defense cooperation agreement that strengthens intelligence sharing and allows each country's military to be stationed in the other's territory in the event of an immediate threat, as well as intelligence sharing. The accompanying passages from Turkish sources analyze what this means for Turkey in light of its tensions with both countries.

The first article from *Ahval News*, an independent Turkish online news portal, states that the agreement has “strategic ramifications for Turkey” considering both countries’ opposition to Turkish foreign policy in many theaters. The author notes that “[t]he military aspect of the partnership is particularly noteworthy” because both countries pledged to militarily support one another “if their territorial integrity comes under threat.”

The tensions between Greece and Turkey go back decades. However, in recent years, the tensions have escalated due to natural gas exploration off the coast of Cyprus and Turkey’s “attempted drilling in disputed waters in the Aegean Sea.” The UAE has been in a regional cold war with Turkey since 2017. The article quotes an independent Turkish research group as saying the Greece-UAE deal “may pave the way for some important arms sales and purchase contracts next year” because Greece intends to “upgrade its military arsenal, particularly its warships and older fighter jets” and hopes the UAE will sponsor some of these upgrades. The Turkish group “forecast[s] that the UAE will transfer its entire, and very modernized, deadly Mirage 2000-9 fleet to Greece.”

The second article from pro-government *Hürriyet* quotes a Greek newspaper saying that while the defense agreement between Greece and the UAE does not explicitly state that it was signed to thwart Turkish threats, considering tensions between Turkey and these countries, the objective becomes obvious. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“Greece and the United Arab Emirates have signed a defense agreement that could have strategic ramifications for Turkey given these countries’ mutual opposition to its foreign policy.”



Map of Aegean Sea.

Source: Atilim Gunes Baydin via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AegeanSea_map_modified.png, Attribution: CC-BY-SA-3.0-migrated



Continued: Turkish Perspectives on the UAE-Greece Defense Agreement

Source: Paul Iddon, “How significant is the Greece-UAE defence agreement?,” *Ahval News*, 28 November 2020. <https://ahvalnews.com/turkish-foreign-policy/how-significant-greece-uae-defence-agreement>

Greece and the United Arab Emirates have signed a defense agreement that could have strategic ramifications for Turkey given these countries’ mutual opposition to its foreign policy.

...The military aspect of the partnership is particularly noteworthy since it compels each country to come to the aid of the other if their territorial integrity comes under threat.

Greece strongly opposes Turkey’s drilling for natural gas inside Cyprus’ exclusive economic zone (EEZ), its establishment of an enormous EEZ with Libya and its attempted drilling in disputed waters in the Aegean Sea. The UAE is locked in a region-wide cold war with Turkey and supports Greece in its territorial disputes.

...

“The cooperation with the UAE has flourished in the last year, especially because the UAE has criticised the Turkish-Libyan MoU (memorandum of understanding) on maritime zones,”...

...

While Tzogopoulos believes it is positive that Greece’s foreign policy is multidimensional, he stressed that this cannot solve Greece’s ongoing maritime disputes with Turkey. Consequently, he believes that Greece should undertake the diplomatic initiative of beginning dialogue with the aim of delimiting the continental shelf.

“Without a solution to this problem, tensions will be continuously on the rise in the eastern Mediterranean,”...

Analysts at the Ankara-based BlueMelange, an independent research group of Turkish Defense News, believe this latest pact is “much more complex” than the Israel-Greece-Cyprus tripartite defense and security agreement reached in September.

“According to our analysis, this deal may pave the way for some important arms sales and purchase contracts next year,” they told Ahval.

Greece is presently seeking to upgrade its military arsenal, particularly its warships and older fighter jets. BlueMelange anticipates the UAE sponsoring some of these upgrades.

...

“This win-win alliance is only part of a huge anti-Turkish pact, unfortunately...”

Source: Yorgo Kirbaki, “Yunanistan ve BAE’den askeri işbirliği (Military cooperation between Greece and UAE),” *Hürriyet*, 23 November 2020. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/yunanistan-ve-baeden-askeri-isbirligi-41669272>

During the visit of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) last week, a defense cooperation agreement was signed, which includes the clause that if territorial sovereignty of either of the two countries is threatened, the other should provide assistance...

...

Kathimerini wrote “although it was not pointed out that it was against a third country, the agreement was signed with Turkey in mind. This agreement is the most important success of Mitsotakis’ visit to the UAE.” The newspaper also noted that the agreement allows the military forces of one country to be deployed to the territory of another and to exchange intelligence when deemed necessary.



Turkey Develops Mobile Early Warning Air Defense System: KALKA

OE Watch Commentary: The Turkish defense industry continues to deliver new products to the Turkish military. Most recently, a mobile early warning air defense system named KALKA was added to the Turkish Armed Forces' inventory to counter the threat posed by unmanned aerial vehicles. The system was developed by a Turkish company called National War Technologies Defense Systems Inc. While the first article reports on the development and features of this anti-drone system, the second article highlights its prospects for export.

The first article from Turkey's state-run news agency *Anadolu Ajansı* states that the company that developed the KALKA has so far developed nine anti-drone systems for security forces. The company's research and development coordinator Bekir Yalçın states that KALKA is a vehicle-mounted anti-drone system with the ability to conduct frequency tracing. The system's radar can detect and destroy a target from over three miles, thanks to its domestically developed software. This anti-drone system is also designed to be effective against swarming drone attacks. The company conducted the initial tests for the system and received permission for mass production. It will also seek necessary permissions from the Ministry of Defense for export.

The second article states that foreign companies and governments, including a Russian company, have shown interest in importing the system. The article notes that the KALKA manufacturer would probably be able to deliver the system to the Russian company by the end of 2021. However, it is unclear how many of these anti-drone systems would be exported to Russia. The article does not provide the name of the Russian company, but notes that it will likely use the system to protect its facilities. Furthermore, Mr. Yalçın announced that a delegation from Pakistan visited their company, during which they provided a demonstration of the KALKA and its features. The article quotes Yalçın as saying “[o]ur current priority is to introduce its functions, features, and advantages over its counterparts to the customers. I think we have been successful in this regard.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**



Aselsan anti-drone system.

Source: VoidWanderer, ownwork via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aselsan_anti-drone_system,_Kyiv_2018,_19.jpg, Attribution: CC-BY-SA-4.0|Self-published work

“National War Technologies Defense Systems Inc. ... has developed a new indigenous mobile early warning air defense system named KALKA...”



Continued: Turkey Develops Mobile Early Warning Air Defense System: KALKA

Source: Hatice Özdemir Tosun, “Drone ve İHA tehdidine karşı üretilen ‘KALKA’, kolluk kuvvetlerinin hizmetine sunuldu (‘KALKA’ produced against drone and UAV threat was delivered to law enforcement),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 16 October 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/bilim-teknoloji/drone-ve-iha-tehdidine-karsi-uretilen-kalka-kolluk-kuvvetlerinin-hizmetine-sunuldu/2008318>

National War Technologies Defense Systems Inc. ... which produces domestic anti-drone systems for the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in Antalya, has developed a new indigenous mobile early warning air defense system named KALKA...

[The company] has so far developed nine anti-drone systems for the security forces.

Bekir Yalçın, research and development (R&D) coordinator of the company, told Anadolu Agency (AA) that the UAVs and drones are not only used by security forces but could also be used for carrying drugs, bombs or other kinds of prohibited substance with the purpose of creating terror.

...especially during public events like demonstrations or concerts, it can be undesirable to stop those vehicles with armed weapons and the KALKA system can prevent those flights with an early warning system...

...

Yalçın said the system is a vehicle-mounted anti-drone system, while it also has the ability to conduct frequency tracing.

...

The system’s radars, which depend entirely on domestic software, can perceive and prevent a target from up to 5,000 meters... It is also effective against herd drone attacks, Yalçın stated. The initial tests of the system were conducted with the participation and surveillance of related units of the Antalya Provincial Security Directorate...

Source: Hatice Özdemir Tosun, “Yerli ‘mobil dronesavar’ da ilk ihracat Rusya’ya (The first export of domestic mobile anti-drone system to Russia),” *Anadolu Ajansı*, 01 December 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/yerli-mobil-dronesavarda-ilk-ihracat-rusyaya/2061426>

A private company from Russia has requested [to export KALKA]... Production has started...in accordance with the signed agreement. The delivery of the products is estimated to be about a month.

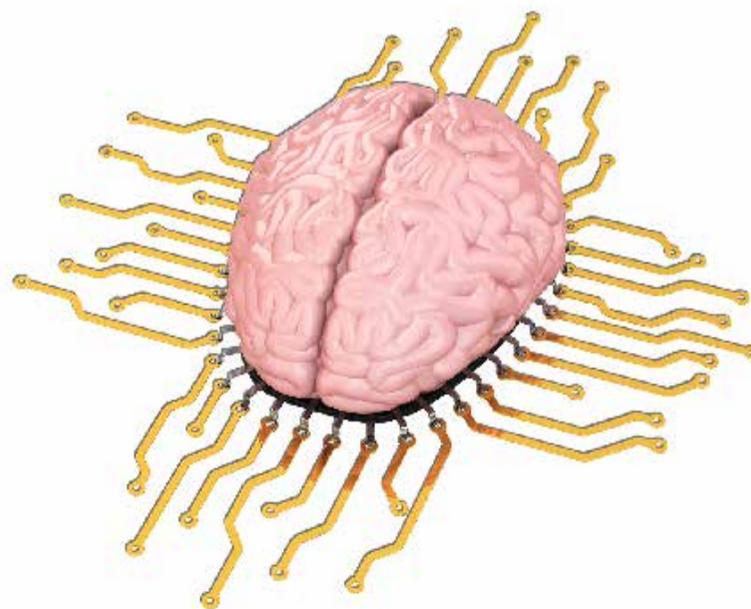
...

...the necessary permits have been obtained for mass production [of KALKA], Yalçın said, so far, there are demands from Russia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Qatar, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates.

THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

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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.





Turkey Eyes Strategic Gateway to Central Asia and China

OE Watch Commentary: On 10 November, Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a Russian-brokered truce to end their armed conflict. The deal calls for the opening of transport connections between mainland Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, an Azeri exclave that borders Turkey. Turkey has welcomed this development because it would enable it to reach Azerbaijan and the other Turkic republics in Central Asia (and ultimately China) without needing to go through Iran. The accompanying article from *Al Monitor*, a news site with analysts from the Middle East, highlights what this new corridor means for Turkey and its impact on regional players.

According to the article, Turkey sees the route connecting Nakhchivan to mainland Azerbaijan as “a strategic corridor” which promises big economic gains and further influence in the region. Additionally, as the article states, Turkey hopes this route will reduce its energy costs by giving it more bargaining power with Iranian gas producers since Turkey will now have alternatives in the region. Iran sees Russia as a partner in this region, and both countries will likely see Turkey’s influence as a threat to their interests. Iran has already opposed the idea since it will reduce its strategic importance for Turkey and Iran’s trade route revenues.

However, the article claims that Turkey’s ambitions in the Caucasus may not be realistic. First, there is no indication that Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are “scrambling for pipelines (that might go through Turkey) to meet some extraordinary energy demand” and similarly there is no increased demand for Turkish goods from Central Asian countries. Second, it is unclear whether Russia will acquiesce to competing Turkish projects in the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Similarly, Iran and China are unlikely to support any, if not block, Turkish plans in Central Asia. Third, “Azerbaijan’s Caspian neighbors” do not seem to be on board with Turkish plans either, as they increasingly rely on Russian pipelines to transport their natural gas. Also, they increasingly turn to China for its “promise of large-scale purchases, diminish[ing] the prospects for conduits running through Turkey.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“Ankara is brimming with enthusiasm about gaining a gateway all the way to China...”



Baku pipelines.

Source: Thomas Blomberg, Own work via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baku_pipelines.svg
 Attribution: CC-BY-SA-3.0[License migration redundant][GFDL][Self-published work]



Continued: Turkey Eyes Strategic Gateway to Central Asia and China

Source: Fehim Tastekin, “How realistic are Turkey’s ambitions over strategic corridor with Azerbaijan,” *AI Monitor*, 4 December 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/turkey-russia-iran-conflicting-interests-nagorno-karabakh.html>

Having agreed to a joint military center with Russia to monitor the cease-fire in Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey is now eagerly awaiting the next step under the deal between its ally Azerbaijan and Armenia — the opening of a transport link that Ankara frames as a “strategic corridor” promising Turkey big economic gains and further influence in the region.

The Nov. 10 deal, brokered by Russia, calls for the opening of transport connections between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, an Azeri exclave that is separated from the mainland by a strip of Armenian land and shares a tiny border with Turkey.

Ankara is brimming with enthusiasm about gaining a gateway all the way to China, even though the provision is rather ambiguous and not everyone in the region seems to share its excitement.

...

Still, an upbeat perspective prevails in Turkey that the country will gain a strategic gateway to the Caspian basin, the Turkic republics in Central Asia and China amid the prospect of new pipelines and railway and road projects in the region...

The main points driving those dreams could be summarized as follows:

- *A gas pipeline through the corridor could reduce Turkey’s energy costs. Turkey pays \$490 per 1,000 cubic meters of Iranian gas, while a conduit via Nakhchivan could reduce the cost to \$335.*
- *Turkmenistan’s gas could also flow to Turkey.*
- *The Nakhchivan corridor could strengthen Turkey’s hand when it negotiates a renewal of its gas contract with Iran in 2026.*
- ...
- *The capacity of the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline, designed to carry Azeri gas to Europe via Turkey, could double to 32 billion cubic meters per year.*

...

Turkey’s dreams, however, are Iran’s worries. For years, Iran has served as an alternative land link between Nakhchivan and Azerbaijan, making profits and gaining influence over Baku. Iran is now wary of losing that leverage.

...

Even this, however, would not close the big gap between Ankara’s overblown strategic ambitions and the realities of the region.

To start with, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are not exactly scrambling for pipelines to meet some extraordinary energy demands. Similarly, Turkish manufacturers are not desperate for transport means to meet some sort of a boom in Central Asian demand for Turkish goods.

Moreover, will Russia acquiesce to rival projects in the Caspian? Russian energy giants such as Gazprom, Transneft and Lukoil are doing business in Azerbaijan. The Russians hold a stake in Azerbaijan’s state-owned energy company SOCAR, which, in turn, holds a stake in the Russian oil refinery Antipinsky...

Furthermore, Azerbaijan’s Caspian neighbors are using Russian conduits for energy supplies to Europe and increasingly turning to China for long-term partnerships. The downtick in Europe’s energy demand, coupled with China’s promise of large-scale purchases, diminishes the prospects for conduits running through Turkey, which include the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the Baku-Erzurum gas pipeline, along with the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline.

...

...hopes of reviving the trans-Caspian subsea pipeline project between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, Saglam said its cost had already proved discouraging, while Turkmenistan’s overall approach is “to have a problem-free partnership with China and not irk Russia.” Furthermore, Turkmenistan is focused on increasing the capacity of its gas pipeline with China, she added.



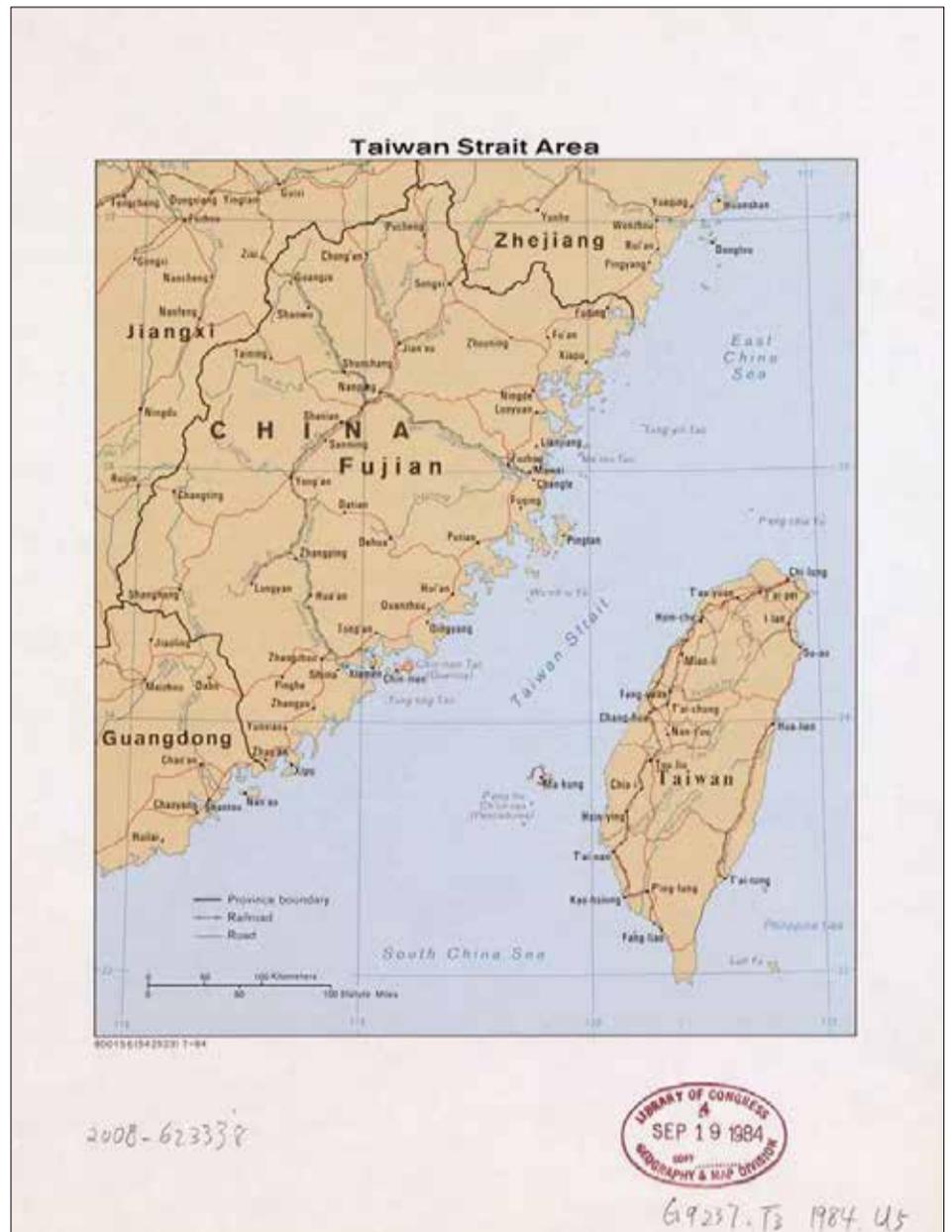
Taiwan Sees “Shift” in China’s Grey Zone Warfare

OE Watch Commentary: On 10 December the Taipei bureau of Singapore-based *Channel NewsAsia* described that China’s battle for Taiwan is currently underway. The article relies on Taiwanese military officials’ statements. In particular, they say that China has “launched a form of ‘grey zone’ warfare. In this irregular type of conflict, which stops short of an actual shooting war, the aim is to subdue the foe through exhaustion.” The article claims over 100 incursions by Chinese military aircraft between mid-September and the date of the article’s publication, according to data from Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense—a significant increase compared to any other similar duration. The article points out that these recent incursions by Chinese military aircraft “complement amphibious landing exercises, naval patrols, cyber-attacks and diplomatic isolation,” in an effort to wear down Taiwanese resolve.

It is all part of the China’s plan to take control of Taiwan as it has tightened its grip on Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Tibet, according to unnamed Taiwanese and Western analysts. The article also references a speech made last year by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who stated that “Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a Chinese province, ‘must be, will be’ unified with China.” Xi did not rule out the use of force. That statement and others by Xi and other senior Chinese government officials, and the increasing numbers of incidents have raised the alarm for Taiwanese military and political officials because for decades talk from Beijing about ruling Taiwan was construed as theoretical. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen commented on the current security environment and alluded to a “shift” from the theoretical to current reality. “The island democracy is under unrelenting pressure from ‘authoritarian forces’, she warned, ‘Taiwan has been at the receiving end of such military threats on a daily basis.’”

In response to the article, the PRC’s Taiwan Affairs Office issued a written statement claiming “Beijing is committed to ‘peaceful reunification’ with Taiwan, a formulation it has used for decades. It added that ‘so-called experts’ remarks quoted...are groundless, purely hearsay, and full of prejudice and show a Cold War mentality’”

The article concludes by quoting senior Taiwanese military officials who suggest that Taiwan is ill-prepared to face down a concentrated effort by the China to seize control of Taiwan. At the same time Taiwan’s defense ministry said “it is stepping up naval and air patrols and improving combat readiness to counter China’s grey-zone tactics.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**



Taiwan Strait Area.

Source: Picryl.com, <https://picryl.com/media/taiwan-strait-area?zoom=true>, Attribution: Public Domain

“The island has been bracing for conflict with China for decades, and in some respects, that battle has now begun... the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), China’s 2-million-strong military, has launched a form of “grey zone” warfare. In this irregular type of conflict, which stops short of an actual shooting war, the aim is to subdue the foe through exhaustion.”



Continued: Taiwan Sees “Shift” in China’s Grey Zone Warfare

Source: “China launches ‘grey-zone’ warfare to subdue Taiwan,” *Channel NewsAsia*, 10 December 2020. https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/taiwan-china-grey-zone-warfare-military-defence-strategy-tactics-13743228?cid=h3_referral_inarticlelinks_24082018_cna

China is turning to an even higher-stakes target: Self-governing Taiwan. The island has been bracing for conflict with China for decades, and in some respects, that battle has now begun.

... the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), China’s 2-million-strong military, has launched a form of “grey zone” warfare. In this irregular type of conflict, which stops short of an actual shooting war, the aim is to subdue the foe through exhaustion.

Beijing is conducting waves of threatening forays from the air while ratcheting up existing pressure tactics to erode Taiwan’s will to resist, say current and former senior Taiwanese and US military officers. The flights, they say, complement amphibious landing exercises, naval patrols, cyber attacks and diplomatic isolation.

The risk of conflict is now at its highest level in decades. PLA aircraft are flying menacingly towards airspace around Taiwan almost daily, sometimes launching multiple sorties on the same day.

Since mid-September, Chinese warplanes have flown more than 100 of these missions, according to a Reuters compilation of flight data drawn from official statements by Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defence. The data shows that in periods when political tension across the Taiwan Strait peaks, China sends more aircraft, including some of its most potent fighters and bombers.

Under President Xi Jinping, China has accelerated the development of forces the PLA would need one day to conquer the island of 23 million - a mission that is the country’s top military priority, according to Chinese and Western analysts.

With Hong Kong and the restive regions of Tibet and Xinjiang under ever-tighter control, Taiwan is the last remaining obstacle to the Communist Party’s monopoly on power. In a major speech early last year, Xi said that Taiwan, which Beijing regards as a Chinese province, “must be, will be” unified with China. He set no deadline but would not rule out the use of force.

There has been a “clear shift” this year in Beijing’s posture, a senior Taiwanese security official responsible for intelligence on China told Reuters. Chinese military and government agencies have switched from decades of “theoretical talk” about taking Taiwan by force to debating and working on plans for possible military action, the official said.

In a speech on Tuesday, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen alluded to the shift. The island democracy is under unrelenting pressure from “authoritarian forces”, she warned, without going into detail. “Taiwan has been at the receiving end of such military threats on a daily basis.”

In a written statement, China’s Taiwan Affairs Office said Beijing is committed to “peaceful reunification” with Taiwan, a formulation it has used for decades. It added that “so-called experts’ remarks quoted in the story by Reuters are groundless, purely hearsay, and full of prejudice and show a Cold War mentality”.

...

As the threat mounts, the Taiwanese military is in poor shape to meet it... With the exception of some elements of Taiwan’s military, including the air force, special forces and parts of the navy, decades of isolation and underfunding by successive governments have left the military hollowed out.

... Taiwanese service members and Western observers say, Taiwan is suffering a serious and worsening decay in the readiness and training of its troops, particularly its army units.

...

Taiwan’s defence ministry rejected the idea that it couldn’t defend itself or that its expensive hardware wouldn’t withstand a Chinese attack. The island’s air defences have been bolstered and its “asymmetrical and mobile combat capacity” has been reinforced, the ministry said in a written response to questions.

...

For Xi, democratic Taiwan is now the last outpost of resistance to his dream of a unified and rejuvenated China that can displace the United States as the major power in the Asia-Pacific region. Taiwan has remained effectively independent since 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek’s defeated Republic of China government retreated to the island after the Chinese Civil War.

Bringing Taiwan under Beijing’s wing would give the PLA a commanding position in Asia. It would entrench the Chinese military in the middle of the so-called first island chain - the string of islands from the Japanese archipelago in the north, down to the Philippines and on to Borneo, which enclose China’s coastal seas.

The PLA Navy could dominate the shipping lanes to North Asia, giving Beijing a powerful lever over Japan and South Korea. And the PLA Navy would have free access to the Western Pacific.



Pakistan Evaluates its Defense Industry

OE Watch Commentary: The government of Pakistan has made an effort in recent years to build up its defense industry in order to produce various weapons and equipment for its armed forces as well as for export. While there have been a couple of examples of systems being adopted by the Pakistani armed forces and exported, notably the JF-17 multirole aircraft, the Pakistani government continues to look for opportunities to expand on this effort. The accompanying excerpted articles provide an update on how this is taking place.

The article from *Quwa*, a news website focusing on defense issues in Pakistan, reports how earlier this year “the Pakistan Ministry of Defence Production (MoDP) published its ‘Two Years Performance Report’ to outline the activities of the country’s various state-owned defence industry organizations.” The article goes on to note that the MoDP has been “working on a number of reforms that would encourage greater oversight of its activities” including an effort to “drive more transfer-of-technology (ToT) arrangements in big-ticket contracts.” The article states the government of Pakistan is at a “crossroad of deciding whether it wants to continue investing in its defence industry, at least in regards to specific state-owned organizations,” which includes the “Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC).” The article also highlights one of the issues between Pakistan’s government and the defense industry, noting how “the armed forces have yet to fully rely on these organizations” as the army “recently ordered the NORINCO VT4 main battle tank (MBT) from China, even though it already has a domestic MBT program in the form of the al-Khalid series.” The Al-Khalid was developed jointly by China and Pakistan.

The article from Karachi-based *Dawn*, a leading English-language newspaper, reports on a recent meeting between the governments of China and Pakistan. In that meeting officials “signed a memorandum of understanding for enhancement of defence cooperation.” The article includes a statement from Pakistan’s president, who said “that ties with Beijing were the ‘cornerstone’ of Pakistan’s foreign policy” as well as a statement from the visiting Chinese defense minister, who “noted the progress made in defence ties between the two ‘all-weather friends’ and expressed the hope that his visit would further strengthen that cooperation.” Ultimately, as the government of Pakistan continues working out what it will do with its defense industry, the role that China plays will be considered. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Since 2000, these organizations started manufacturing some major equipment, but with support from original equipment manufacturers (OEM) in China and Europe.”



“Al-Khalid IDEAS 2012”

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Al-Khalid_IDEAS_2012.jpg, Attribution: CC BY 1.0



Continued: Pakistan Evaluates its Defense Industry

Source: “Potential Shifts in Pakistan’s Defence Industry,” *Quwa*, 15 November 2020. <https://quwa.org/2020/11/15/potential-shifts-in-pakistans-defence-industry-2/>

In July 2020, the Pakistan Ministry of Defence Production (MoDP) published its “Two Years Performance Report” to outline the activities of the country’s various state-owned defence industry organizations...

...the MoDP said it was working on a number of reforms that would encourage greater oversight of its activities, deepen engagement with Pakistan’s private sector businesses and academic institutions, and drive more transfer-of-technology (ToT) arrangements in big-ticket contracts...

The MoDP likely set these goals in response to longer-standing calls for more defence exports and, at least within the Pakistan Navy (PN) and Pakistan Air Force (PAF), support for indigenization efforts. Controlling the cost of defence procurement is a significant contributor to both the offset and indigenization efforts.

However, Pakistan is also at the crossroad of deciding whether it wants to continue investing in its defence industry, at least in regards to specific state-owned organizations.

These organizations – such as (among others) Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF), Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT), Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC), and Karachi Shipyards & Engineering Works KSEW) – form the bulk of the country’s defence industry... Since 2000, these organizations started manufacturing some major equipment, but with support from original equipment manufacturers (OEM) in China and Europe.

Unfortunately, the armed forces have yet to fully rely on these organizations for these requirements. The Pakistan Army (PA), for example, recently ordered the NORINCO VT4 main battle tank (MBT) from China, even though it already has a domestic MBT program in the form of the al-Khalid series...

Source: “Islamabad, Beijing vow to boost defence cooperation,” *Dawn*, 2 December 2020. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1593518>

Pakistan and China on Tuesday vowed to deepen their cooperation for tackling threats to regional peace and stability.

This was the highlight of Chinese Defence Minister Gen Wei Fenghe’s meetings with Pakistan’s civilian leadership during which both sides pointed to the growing threats to regional security from India’s hegemonic designs.

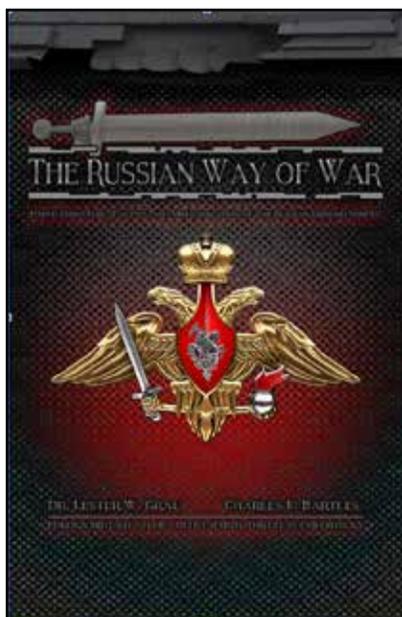
...Military leaders of Pakistan and China had a day earlier signed a memorandum of understanding for enhancement of defence cooperation.

Prime Minister Imran Khan, in his meeting with Gen Wei, recalled India’s “unilateral and illegal actions of August 5, 2019” through which it annexed occupied Kashmir, to emphasise how ruling BJP’s “belligerent actions, discriminatory measures against Indian minorities”, and freedom curbs were threatening regional peace.

...President Dr Arif Alvi told Gen Wei that one of Pakistan’s major considerations for cementing ties with China was to address challenges for regional peace.

He recalled that ties with Beijing were the “cornerstone” of Pakistan’s foreign policy... Dr Alvi said there was a huge scope of defence cooperation that needed to be further expanded for mutual advantage.

The Chinese defence minister, in his conversations in Islamabad, noted the progress made in defence ties between the two “all-weather friends” and expressed the hope that his visit would further strengthen that cooperation...



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES

At any given time, assessments of the Russian Armed Forces vary between the idea of an incompetent and corrupt conscript army manning decrepit Soviet equipment and relying solely on brute force, to the idea of an elite military filled with Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were the “polite people” or “little green men” seen on the streets in Crimea. This book will attempt to split the difference between these radically different ideas by shedding some light on what the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

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Philippines Rewards Soldiers' Bravery in Sea Battle Against Abu Sayyaf

OE Watch Commentary: The Philippines combats Abu Sayyaf both on land in southern Mindanao and also in the seas bordering Malaysia and Indonesia. In one recent confrontation, on 3 November, a Philippine Navy multi-purpose attack craft identified an Abu Sayyaf boat in the Philippines Sea that was suspected of being involved in piracy and kidnappings. After a gunfight, the Philippine naval craft rammed Abu Sayyaf's boat, which resulted in it capsizing and the deaths of the seven Abu Sayyaf members. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) subsequently released footage on YouTube of what it called Operation Perfect Storm.

According to the excerpted article from 17 November in *philstar.com*, which publishes analyses about current affairs in the Philippines, six naval officers involved in the clash are being awarded medals and monetary rewards by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. On Duterte's behalf, army chief Lt. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana flew to Sulu to pin four Gold and two Silver Cross medals on officers and soldiers involved in the operation. The article noted Sobejana wanted to personally commend the recipients of the award and convey a message from Duterte.

According to the article, firearms and other materials were recovered from the Abu Sayyaf boat. The professionalism and precise execution of the operation has also been reflected more broadly in the reduction in Abu Sayyaf's kidnappings and operations off the Philippine coast. The Joint Task Force Sulu (JTF-Sulu) is, therefore, demonstrating its value when it comes to counter-terrorism operations and securing the seas around the Philippines. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The success of ‘Operation Perfect Storm’ prevented Abu Sayyaf from staging attacks and kidnapping activities.”



BRP Jose Rizal RIMPAC 2020.

Source: U.S Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Lily Gebauer, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BRP_Jose_Rizal_RIMPAC_2020.jpg

Attribution: CC x 0

Source: “Soldiers in sea clash with Abu Sayyaf get reward,” *www.philstar.com*, 17 November 2020. <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2020/11/17/2057360/soldiers-sea-clash-abu-sayyaf-get-reward>

Source: “JTF Sulu Operation against ASG Boat - Nov. 3, 2020,” rhk111's Channel, *YouTube*, November 10, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs1CTosi2w0>

The encounter near Sulare Island in Parang town on November 3 resulted in the killing of seven ranking members of the bandit group. Army chief Lt. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana flew to Sulu to personally pin four Gold and two Silver Cross medals to the officers and soldiers at Camp Gen. Teodulfo Bautista in Jolo. Sobejana handed over the P2.5-million cash reward given by Duterte to the 11th ID and Joint Task Force Sulu.

He said the success of “Operation Perfect Storm” prevented Abu Sayyaf from staging attacks and kidnapping activities. Several firearms and war materials were recovered from the scene of the encounter. Sobejana said he went to Sulu to personally congratulate and thank the soldiers for a job well done, as well as to deliver the message of President Duterte.



Competition Heats With Launch of Chinese 6G Test Platform

OE Watch Commentary: According to the following article published in *China Daily*, China took a “huge step forward” when it launched a sixth generation (6G) satellite. The article explains that the research objective behind the launch is to increase the country’s ability to monitor and track forest and crop fires. However, applications and implications of 6G will likely go well beyond that (See for example: “China Sees Itself Widening the Gap with the United States in 6G Technology,” *OE Watch*, July 2020). According to the article, the satellite, known as Star Era-12, is operating on frequency bands that are so high that space is really the only ideal place to test them. This is due to the denser nature of the earth’s atmosphere that can impede the signals, distorting and slowing them down. 6G is still in the conceptual phase and is believed to be 100 times faster with shorter latency than 5G, which is currently still being rolled out globally. The article states that 6G is expected to improve technology in many areas, including transportation, healthcare, and climate change. It inevitably will have a significant impact with China’s military. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“As the world gears up for mainstream 5G adoption, it is important that not only the technology continues to improve, but also our imagination in how faster connections can benefit us.”

Source: Barry He, “China’s 6G Satellite Test Highlights Importance of Staying Connected,” *China Daily*, 23 November 2020, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202011/23/WS5fbb101da31024ad0ba95c23.html>

China’s recent launch into orbit of a 6G satellite is a huge step forward for international communications. With the research objective of increasing the ability to monitor and track forest and crop fires, an issue that has plagued many countries this year, it is hoped that 6G will be making a significant difference to our lives as early as 2030.

The Star Era-12 was launched earlier in the month. The aptly-named satellite is emitting and operating on frequency bands that are so high they need to be tested in space. This is so signals cannot be impeded by the abundant density of molecules in our atmosphere, which can distort and slow down such delicate but potent frequencies...

The future success of our increasingly complex global world that relies upon instantaneous transmission of data means that innovation in 6G is welcome. As the world gears up for mainstream 5G adoption, it is important that not only the technology continues to improve, but also our imagination in how faster connections can benefit us.



2007 AGI STK simulation of communications from Cubesat to Globalstar LEO network.
Source: Crod330, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:FIU_LEO_Satellite_Cubesat_globalstar.jpg, Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0



China: Improving Capability in Replenishment Operations Through Drones

OE Watch Commentary: Seeking ways to ensure success on the future battlefield, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) is turning to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). In particular, the PLAAF sees UAVs as integral to carrying out support operations on the future battlefield. The following article, published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, the official newspaper of the Central Military Commission, describes an exercise that recently took place in the mountainous area of northern Hubei Province. During the exercise, troops from a PLAAF combined arms airborne battalion carried out multiple training operations, including continuous airdrop operations using drones, dispersed replenishment, fast-roping replenishment, and wounded personnel evacuation.

One of the most vital points in warfare, according to the article, is “the last kilometer,” which they defined as the last link in the logistics support chain. According to a leader from the PLAAF Logistics Department's Transportation and Delivery Bureau, victory or defeat can be determined by the efficiency and timeliness of materials replenishment, particularly in that last kilometer.

Along with improving the efficiency of support services, the PLAAF expects unmanned systems to improve situational awareness and reduce the burden on soldiers. The exercises were reportedly a success and demonstrated the PLAAF's growing capability in support services as well as their push toward developing smarter, autonomous systems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“In future battlefield, drone systems will play an active role in improving situational awareness, reducing the burdens on soldiers, and strengthening the troops’ support capabilities and mobility.”

Source: Li Chen and Li Jianwen, “战场“召唤” 多机型精确补给空军运输投送系统组织无人运输机投送实践验证 (Precision ‘Call-in’ Battlefield Replenishment Involving Multiple Types of Drones: Air Force’s Transportation and Delivery System Demonstrates Drone Transporter’s Delivery Capability),” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 2 November 2020. http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/1/2020-11/02/01/2020110201_pdf.pdf

Recently, a drone transport and delivery exercise, which the Air Force’s transportation and delivery system tasked a combined arms airborne battalion to organize, began to unfold in a mountainous area in northern Hubei Province. At an exercise ground, the troops used the “call-in” replenishment method to carry out operational demonstration of multiple operational subjects, such as continuous airdropping operations by drones, dispersed replenishment, fast-roping replenishment, and wounded personnel evacuation.

According to certain sources, this was a constructive attempt that the Air Force undertook to focus on accelerating the construction of intelligent, unmanned equipment support systems, explore a support mode that uses drones during airborne operations, and to improve its ability to carry out sustained airborne operations, as well as precision delivery operations.

“In a complex battlefield environment, the ‘last kilometer’ is the last link in the logistic support chain. During wartime, timely and efficient materials replenishment determines victory or defeat,” said a leader from the Air Force Logistics Department’s Transportation and Delivery Bureau. He explained that with regard to accelerating the integrated development of mechanization, informatization, and intelligentization [of combat operations], drone transporters provide a new-quality approach for resolving the “last-kilometer” issue in airborne operations support. In particular, given the constant improvement of its payload, range, and performance, the drone transporter has a broad prospect in its peacetime and wartime applications.

“In future battlefields, unmanned systems will play an active role in improving situational awareness, reducing the burden on soldiers, and strengthening the troops’ support capability and maneuverability,” Gou Qiang, commander of the second battalion of the Airborne Corps, explained...

Through the actual use of drones, they verified and demonstrated a series of new unmanned support methods such as air-ground-integrated joint replenishment operations and forward materials delivery by multi-drone-type formations.



A Chinese Perspective on Future Urban Unmanned Operations

OE Watch Commentary: As the global trend in urbanization continues to grow, Chinese military thinkers envision urban combat becoming a more common form of military struggle in the future. The first article, published in *Weixin*, on China's social media platform *WeChat*, describes the operational environment within urban settings as fraught with challenges. For example, poor visibility, physical barriers, and limited maneuvering space within cities greatly reduces the effectiveness of traditional reconnaissance efforts. Civilian casualties occur more frequently. Recognizing these and other challenges faced in potential urban operations, two Chinese military theorists recently published an article arguing that the best way to gain the advantage in future urban operations is to integrate unmanned, AI-intelligent weapons systems. The Chinese refer to these systems as “intelligentized.” The second article, published by *Quishi*, a bi-monthly political theory periodical under the Central Party School and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, describes a number of urban scenarios. For example, according to the authors, while engaging the enemy from either outside a city or while inside a city, UAVs or swarms of UAVs might coordinate with aerial infiltration and reconnaissance forces to gain a complete picture of the adversary. While conducting operations to maintain stability within an urban setting, the authors envision man-portable small and micro-sized UAVs conducting infiltration and reconnaissance within enclosed areas and covertly tracking targets of interest.

They also see unmanned platforms as being fully self-sufficient. For example, a self-repair mode would be “autonomously activated” once a certain degree of damage to the equipment is sustained. Or autonomous support platforms might be programmed to seek out candidates to provide “rapid regeneration of equipment on the battlefield.” These and other measures would ensure uninterrupted combat operations.

Based on the concluding paragraph, however, there is still a lot of progress that needs to be made before these types of scenarios can become a reality. For example, China still needs to develop many operational concepts required to succeed in urban operations, such as maneuvering operations in enclosed areas, area-denial operations with UAVs on defensive-duty, operations to control cognition, and decapitation and sabotage operations that use drone swarms. They also still need to develop “a core algorithm model for urban operations.” They need to master the technology of fully integrated, complex communication networks that will connect air, space, and ground. At times networks might be impeded by physical obstacles. Finally, the authors are urging China to speed up the process of integrating the mechanized, informationized, and intelligentized systems, while increasing the proportion of unmanned equipment and the quality of “intelligentization.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Urban operations are called “warfare in hell.” The basic way to resolve this difficult problem is to utilize and integrate unmanned, intelligentized weapons systems throughout the entire process and with all elements...”

Source: Hai Xiaoying, “深度:空地无人装备协同应用现状与趋势 (In Depth: Current Situation and Trends of Coordinated Application of Unmanned Aerial and Ground Equipment),” *Weixin*, 10 January 2019. <https://xw.qq.com/cmsid/20190110B0XKXC/20190110B0XKXC00>

The continuous advancement of urbanization on a global scale will make urban combat a common form of military struggle in the future. From the urban conflicts in the Middle Eastern countries in recent years, it is not difficult to see that in the urban environment with poor visibility and limited maneuvering space, traditional reconnaissance means have obvious “urban ailments”: the widespread application of reinforced concrete occlude and attenuate electromagnetic waves, greatly reducing the effectiveness of traditional reconnaissance equipment; and it is difficult to maximize the effectiveness of the currently common reconnaissance equipment, such as reconnaissance aircraft (mostly fixed-wing aircraft), in the urban environment. At the same time, unintended consequences, such as civilian casualties, occur frequently in actions that focus on eliminating specific targets. Therefore, the rotary-wing UAV capable of vertical takeoff and landing, agile maneuvering, and low-speed flight has great application potential in urban reconnaissance. It will enhance the urban combat capability of ground forces when it collaborates with the UGV, which has a larger ammunition payload capacity, to carry out firepower attack missions.



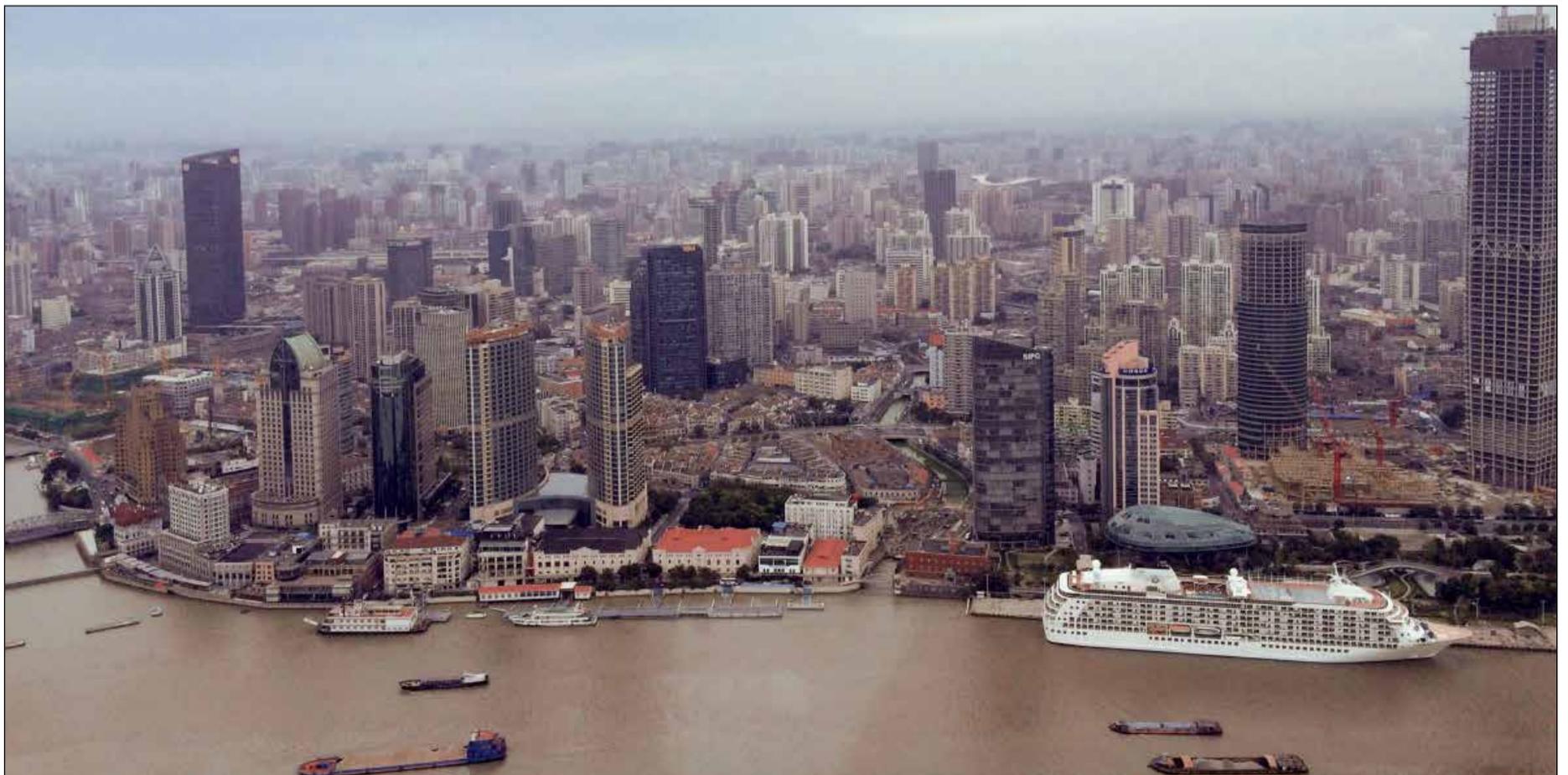
Continued: A Chinese Perspective on Future Urban Unmanned Operations

Source: Chen Wenchao and Wen Xiaopeng, “未来城市无人化作战怎么打 (Conducting Urban Unmanned Operations in the Future),” *Qiushi*, 3 November 2020. http://www.qstheory.cn/qshyjx/2020-11/03/c_1126691646.htm

Urban operations are called “warfare in hell.” The basic way to resolve this difficult problem is to utilize and integrate unmanned, intelligentized weapons systems throughout the entire process and with all elements, and to creatively design plans for urban unmanned operations, thereby minimizing casualties and improving operational efficiency.

Reconnaissance can be continuously carried out with three-dimensional infiltration. [Urban unmanned operations] must be able to differentiate the needs for key intelligence in nearby and distant areas, to infiltrate high-risk urban areas from high and low positions, and to complete the integration and dissemination of information that incorporates both rough and detailed [intelligence]. When engaging the enemy from outside of the city, a swarm of UAVs can coordinate with aerial infiltration and reconnaissance [forces] to generate in real time a three-dimensional hologram of the enemy situation, thereby providing support for making decisions with respect to categorizing missions, deploying forces, and formulating tactics. When assaulting the enemy while inside the city, unmanned reconnaissance platforms can coordinate with infiltration and reconnaissance [forces] to identify the enemy’s forces, weapons, fortifications, and concealed threats, thereby providing a direct basis for organizing forces, coordinating attacks, and conducting defenses with precision. When controlling the stability of an area, man-portable small- and micro-sized UAVs and robots can conduct infiltration and reconnaissance within enclosed spaces, obtaining [information] on building structure, identifying dangerous targets, and carrying out silent and concealed tracking, thereby providing precision guidance for search and mopping-up operations and anti-terrorism and anti-riot operations.

Clearly, to generate unmanned combat capabilities in urban areas, we must develop innovations in operational concepts such as maneuvering operations to breach walls in city blocks, mopping-up operations in enclosed spaces, area-denial operations with unmanned [platforms] on defensive duty, quarantine and blockade operations in urban areas, operations to control cognition, and decapitation and sabotage operations utilizing swarms. We must build a core algorithm model for urban operations, forming mobile clouds, data pools, and rules databases that are digitalized, standardized, and universal. We must master key technologies that are capable of adaptively building networks in the air, in space, and on the ground, sharing communications and linkages beyond visual range, and achieving the integration of reconnaissance, communications, and command, recognizing that such technologies must be able to operate in urban areas where there are more obstacles and in complex network and communications environments. We must accelerate the pace of integrating the “three processes” [mechanization, intelligentization, and informatization] and increase the proportion of unmanned equipment and the quality of intelligentization, forming a range of unmanned equipment that combines [capabilities] at high and low [altitudes], at long and close [ranges], in large and small [scale], with open and closed [designs], and for combat and support [operations].



Skyline of Shanghai 2017.

Source:PXhere, <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/774459>, Attribution: CC0, Public Domain, no attribution needed



Deployment of Russian Anti-Drone System to Syria and Implications for Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: Russia's Sapsan-Convoy, a new multifunctional mobile anti-drone system, was successfully tested during the "Caucasus 2020" military exercises in September. Right after the military exercises, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Russia might deploy the Sapsan-Convoy to Syria. The accompanying article written by a Turkish defense expert and published by *Edam.org*, an independent think tank in Islamabad, claims that this may be a harbinger of a Syrian regime operation on Idlib, which Russia would support. In this scenario, Russia would use the system to shield Syrian regime forces from Turkish drones, which have previously conducted successful strikes against them. As such, the deployment of this system in support of the Syrian regime might limit Turkey's UAV superiority in Syria. Against this backdrop, the expert makes several recommendations for Turkey's decision-makers to consider.

The first recommendation is to take into account the heightened risk of loss for Turkish forces and drones against Syrian regime forces when the Sapsan-Convoy is deployed to Syria. With the protection of this system, regime forces will be able to maneuver troops without being subjected to Turkish drone attacks, in the event of an offensive on Idlib.

Second, this multifunctional system would be able to restrict Turkish UAVs' intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance and target detection activities and possibly shoot them down. Furthermore, it may interfere with Turkish electronic warfare systems active in Syria for intelligence gathering; and carry out counterintelligence activities and cyber-warfare by hacking into them. The author argues that Turkey must have a comprehensive plan to counter cyber-warfare against its electronic warfare systems.

Third, in a likely operation in Syria, the loss of Turkish drones to the Russian Sapan-Convoy would have a significant impact on the Turkish defense industry and the economy. Fourth, the downing of Turkish UAVs in Syria would negatively impact their export prospects and cast doubt on their recent successes in Syria and in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Fifth, Turkey must ensure to incorporate UAVs and electronic warfare into its military exercises to prepare for systems designed to counter them. Sixth, the Turkish defense industry must invest in loitering munitions or kamikaze drones in response to increased electronic warfare systems in neighboring countries. Finally, Turkey should develop alternatives to GPS-based subsystems in smart ammunition and invest in more resistant data links for the safety of smart ammunition and ground control elements. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“It is essential for Turkish security forces to include the enemy’s cyber-electronic warfare and information warfare capabilities... in their war games...”



Vladimir Putin in Khmeimim Air Base in Syria.

Source: kremlin.ru via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_in_Khmeimim_Air_Base_in_Syria_\(2017-12-11\)_05.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_in_Khmeimim_Air_Base_in_Syria_(2017-12-11)_05.jpg), Attribution: CC-BY-4.0



Continued: Deployment of Russian Sapsan-Convoy to Syria and Implications for Turkey

Source: Dr. Can Kasapoğlu, “Rus Sapsan-Convoy Elektronik Harp Sisteminin Suriye’ye Konuşlandırılmasına İlişkin Siyasi-Askeri Değerlendirme (Political-Military Assessment of the Russian Sapsan-Convoy Electronic Warfare System’s Deployment to Syria),” *edam.org.tr*, 16 November 2020. <https://edam.org.tr/rus-sapsan-convoy-elektronik-harp-sisteminin-suriyeye-konuslandirilmasina-iliskin-siyasi-askeri-degerlendirme/>

The Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Sergei Shoigu, made statements that the Sapsan-Convoy mobile electronic warfare & anti-drone system could be deployed to Syria following its performance in the Caucasus 2020 military exercise in September.

*...
The deployment of this electronic warfare system to Syria should be examined closely in the current situation in which the possible Ba’ath regime’s operation on Idlib is underway.*

*...
For the Russian Federation, Syria is a “war laboratory.”... In addition, the Syrian battlefield is home to a serious presence of drones.*

The transfer of Sapsan-Convoy-like systems to the Ba’ath regime may increase the resistance of the Syrian Arab Armed Forces - especially at the level of maneuvering units - against Turkish UAV capabilities. In the case of using the aforementioned systems, for example, if an operation such as the Spring Shield is carried out, the Turkish Armed Forces’ unmanned aerial vehicle losses may be more than expected.

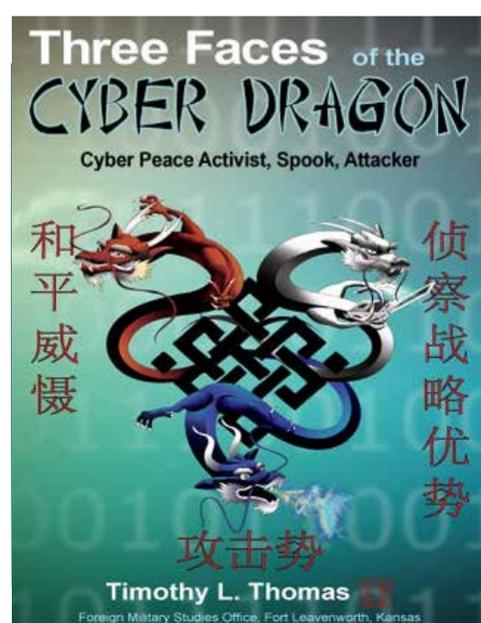
*...
In the event of a possible conflict, the economic aspect of the issue should not be overlooked. In the near future, the Turkish defense industry will switch from tactical and MALE (medium-altitude / long endurance) classes to high-operational & strategic classes with systems such as Akıncı and Aksungur. Naturally, the unit costs of the aforementioned systems are higher than the unmanned aerial vehicles such as Bayraktar TB-2 and ANKA currently in the inventory and losses are more difficult to replace. In addition, the fact that systems such as Akıncı and Aksungur will carry expensive weapons and sensors such as SOM air-to-ground cruise missiles, Sonobuoy and AESA radars is another factor to be considered in the context of defense economy... In a nutshell, the new generation of Turkish UAVs being downed by Syrian/Russian electronic weapons systems will be very costly for the Turkish defense [sector]...*

In addition, top level Turkish UAVs being downed by Russian electronic warfare systems in Syria ...will create a negative impact on Turkey’s defense export potential...

...It is essential for Turkish security forces to include the enemy’s cyber-electronic warfare and information warfare capabilities especially in their war games...

One of the responses that can be given to the increase in electronic warfare capacity in neighboring countries is that the Turkish defense industry must invest in attack armed drone (loitering munition or kamikaze drone) systems with anti-radiation properties and qualities defined as ‘home-on-jam’ (HOJ)...

Developing alternative solutions to GPS-based subsystems in smart ammunition is another important area...



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>



A Deal Between Kurds, Russians, and the Syrian Regime in Ain Issa

OE Watch Commentary: Months of sporadic shelling of Ain Issa by Turkish-backed Syrian armed rebel groups led to an agreement between Russia, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), and the Syrian regime. SDF currently controls Ain Issa, located on the M4 highway that connects northeastern Syria to the western part of the country. Ain Issa is a town in the Tel Abyad District of the Raqqa Governorate in Syria.

According to the first article from *Rudaw*, a Kurdish news outlet broadcasting from Iraq's Kurdish region, the agreement between SDF, Russia, and the Syrian regime establishes three observation posts near Ain Issa to prevent further Turkish attacks on this area. Riyadh El-Xelef, the military council leader for Tal Abyad, states that these posts will be established in the eastern part of Ain Issa, in the western part of Ain Issa, and on the M4 international highway. The article notes that Russian officials asked SDF to allow Syrian regime forces to resume control of Ain Issa to thwart the possible offensive by Turkish forces and Turkish-backed rebel groups from attacking. However, SDF refused the Russian offer.



Map showing Ayn Issa in Syria.

Source: Karte: NordNordWest via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ayn_Issa, Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0 DE

The second article from *Hawar News Agency*, a news site closely monitoring developments in Syria, is an interview with Ziyad Heleb, the commander of SDF in Ain Issa. In the interview, the commander states that his “forces are ready to repel any possible” offensive against the region. The article notes that after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin agreed on a deal in Sochi in October 2019 to end Turkey’s offensive against Kurdish forces in Syria, Russian and Syrian regime forces were stationed in Ain Issa alongside SDF to prevent Turkish attacks. However, the commander states that “unfortunately, the Russian and government forces have not fulfilled their duties against the recent attacks by Turkish [and Turkish-backed Syrian rebels] and did not fire any shot” to protect the region. Kurdish forces hope that the recent agreement and the three new posts will be able to prevent the attacks on this region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“The Commander of the Tal Abyad Military Council, Riyadh al-Khalaf, said that they agreed with the Russians and the Syrian army to establish 3 joint military points in Ain Issa district and on the M4 highway.”



Continued: A Deal Between Kurds, Russians, and the Syrian Regime in Ain Issa

Source: “DSG, stratejik ilçe için Ruslar ve Suriye ordusu ile anlaşdı (SDF agrees on a deal with Russians and Syrian army for strategic district),” *Rudaw*, 10 December 2020. <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/kurdistan/101220201>

The Commander of the Tal Abyad Military Council, Riyadh al-Khalaf, said that they agreed with the Russians and the Syrian army to establish 3 joint military points in Ain Issa district and on the M4 highway.

...

Last week, officers from the Russian and Syrian army had met with the SDF commanders at the Russian base in Ain Issa.

A source from Ain Issa Military Council providing information to the press regarding the content of the meeting, to prevent Turkish threats, Russian officers asked the SDF to hand over control of Ain Issa to Syrian regime forces...

According to the source, the Russian side suggested that the Syrian flag should be raised in Ain Issa, as in Qamishli and Hasakah, and that state institutions should be opened.

Source: “Femandarekî QSD’ê: Hêza me ji her êrişekê re amade ye (SDF commander: Our forces are ready to repel any attack),” *Hawar News Agency*, 13 December 2020. <http://www.hawarnews.com/kr/haber/fermandarek-qsd-hza-me-ji-her-risek-re-amade-ye-h40028.html>

The commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Ain Issa, Ziyad Heleb, said that their forces are ready to repel any possible attack on the area, commenting on the latest developments in Ain Issa...

In an interview with Hawar News Agency (ANHA) the commander Heleb, explained that the Turkish occupation and its paid mercenaries wanted to occupy Ain Issa.

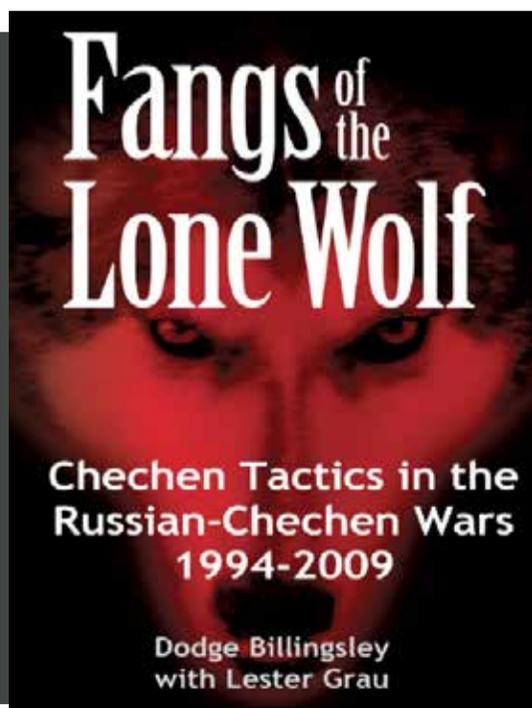
He pointed out that Turkey sought to exploit the vacuum... by targeting the area.

...

According to the Russian and Turkish understanding in the Russian city of Sochi on October 22, 2019, Russian and government forces were stationed in Ain Issa alongside the SDF forces to prevent Turkish attacks... Heleb said, “unfortunately, the Russian and government forces have not fulfilled their duties towards the recent attacks by Turkey, and did not fire any shot, so the Syrian Democratic Forces were the only ones that carried out their duties in the face of the attacks.”

...

The commander in the SDF stated that they have established 3 joint points with the Russian and government forces in Ain Issa, and said that this is not a new agreement, but rather an application of the previous agreement.



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>



Iran: Submarine-to-Surface Missile Launch System Entered Mass Production

OE Watch Commentary: The Iranian navy operates close to 20 submarines, some acquired from North Korea and others manufactured inside Iran from Russian design. The relative shallowness of the Persian Gulf—its maximum depth is just 300 feet and many areas are significantly shallower—may limit the utility of Iranian submarines, especially compared to the small boats which the Revolutionary Guards more frequently use to swarm and harass shipping. Indeed, the Iranian Navy has utilized Jask, a small port outside the Strait of Hormuz, as a submarine base in order to provide them greater access to deeper water.



The Iranian navy is seeking to upgrade its submarines with new, domestically-produced missiles.

Source: Fars News Agency, https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1399/09/15/13990915000745_Test_PhotoN.jpeg

In the excerpted article from the *Fars News Agency*, a hard-line outlet with close ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Majid Maqsoudi, head of

the Iranian Navy's research center, made two announcements. First, he said that Iranian military industries now manufacture the bulk of the spare parts and equipment that Iran needs to maintain its submarine fleet. He did not reveal the parts that compose the rest or where they are drawn from, although Iran likely would seek to acquire these parts from Russia and/or North Korea. Second, he also announced production of a new drone nicknamed "Pelican," which would launch and land vertically from Iranian navy ships.

In addition, General Amir Rastegari, chief of the Marine Industries Organization, announced that Iran has moved forward with its plans, first announced in 2018, to equip Qadir-class submarines with Valfajr torpedos, which can "sink a 1,000-ton vessel in less than ten seconds." He further said that Iran was in talks to export the Qadir and submarine-to-surface missiles to other friendly governments. Hezbollah's *Al-Manar* television channel covered this comment, suggesting the Iranian-backed and U.S.-designated terrorist group's interest in this platform or technology, although it is unclear how the group would acquire submarines unless provided indirectly from Russia through Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

"We are able to produce 90 percent of submarine parts in-house."

Source: "'Samaneh Pertab Mushak Zirsateh beh Sateh Vared Farayand Tawlid Anbaveh Shod (Submarine-to-Surface Missile Launch System Entered Mass Production),' *Fars News Agency*, 5 December 2020. <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/13990915000747>

Mizan News Agency has conducted an interview with Admiral Amir Majid Maghsoudi, head of the Naval Self-Sufficiency Research and Jihad Organization, the key points of which are as follows:

- Domestic production of more than 90 percent of submarine parts

Submarines are complex, and the repair of submarines depends upon the repair and domestic-sourcing of their parts. Fortunately, we are able to produce 90 percent of submarine parts in-house by tapping into specialized companies, the private sector, and universities....

- Submarine-launched missile systems have entered mass-production

Over the years, we have been able to acquire the technology to build submarine-launched missiles to the level of that of just a limited number of countries. The tests of this submarine-to-surface missile launch system which can destroy surface targets has been completed, and today it has entered the executive processes for mass production by the defense industry, which in fact significantly increases the country's defense capacity....



Iran: Gilan Exports Up to Azerbaijan, Russia

OE Watch Commentary: Iran's major trading ports—Bushehr and Bandar Abbas—are littoral to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean town of Chahbahar. Chahbahar is becoming more important both as a trans-shipment port for Afghanistan and perhaps as the latest string-of-pearls port for China. Some Iranian trade also travels across the Caspian Sea via the port of Bandar Anzali in the Gilan province.

In the excerpted article from *Etemad*, a reformist newspaper published in Tehran, Farhad Dalaghpoosh, the head of the Gilan province's trade organization, reports an increase in both the volume and value of goods going through the port. Gilan is mountainous, relatively wet, and agricultural, and most of the trade involves agricultural goods and some industrial products like plastics. While the destinations for the trade are logical: Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan all border the Caspian Sea, Dalaghpoosh failed to mention Armenia. Traditionally, and despite their religious differences, Iran and Armenia were close allies because of both cultural links and trade. In the 45-day Nagorno-Karabakh War, which ended 10 November 2020, however, Iran surprised Armenia by closing its border to trade of fuel and other goods, which Armenia hoped to use in its war effort.

In this context, Dalaghpoosh's omission of Armenia, but mention of Azerbaijan, might suggest that shifting regional trade in Iran may have foreshadowed geopolitical realignment in the Caucasus and that, Azerbaijan, despite its pro-Western, secular reputation, may actually be growing closer to Iran, its former rival. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Dalaghpoosh...announced a 51 percent increase in the province's exports.”



The Port of Bandar Anzali, on the Caspian Sea.

Source: EtemadOnline.ir, <https://static.etemadonline.ir/image/e9bef05d-4dc7-4a71-851f-2ac35d1d74d5.jpeg>

Source: “Saderat dar Ostan-e Gilan 51 dar sad Afzayesh Yaft (Exports in Gilan Province Up By 51 Percent),” *Etemad Online*, 1 December 2020. <https://etemadonline.com/content/449171/>

Farhad Dalaghpoosh, head of the Gilan Industry, Mining and Trade Organization, announced a 51 percent increase in the province's exports over the past eight months compared to the same period last year. The head of Gilan Industry, Mining and Trade Organization added, “During the last eight months, a total of 637,558 tons of goods worth \$394 million were exported from Gilan, which is a 36 percent increase in volume and 51 percent in dollar value compared to the same period last year. He mentioned the main goods exported from the province, including vegetable products, minerals, foodstuffs, textiles and plastic products have been exported to Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Afghanistan and Iraq.... Gilan Customs has always been of great importance due to its strategic and geopolitical position and has always been one of the leading customs posts in presenting new procedures of customs formalities and mechanization.



Iran: Advancement in Radar is the Basis for Deterring against Threats

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article from *Defa News*, the official news site of the Iranian Ministry of Defense, reports on the highlights of a radar symposium at Malek Ashtar University. While University President Aboutaleb Shafqat spoke about the importance of radar technology and Deputy Minister of Defense Ghasem Taghizadeh described radar as a first line of defense and deterrence, the true relevance of the article is to illustrate the close relationship between the Defense Ministry and universities.

During the conference, Taghizadeh praised Malek Ashtar University of Technology not only for its “very important role” in converting the theoretical to military reality, but also for creating a pipeline from the university into the Defense Ministry and its various industrial centers. This is illustrated by his comment that “the average age of our scientists in the field of radar is about 32 years-old.”

Malek Ashtar University of Technology is only one of several military universities. Imam Hussein University in Tehran, for example, coordinates closely with the Ministry of Defense, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the Ministry of Science and Technology. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps also operates Baqiyatallah University of Medical Sciences in Tehran. That the military runs universities not only for graduate but also undergraduate programs suggests that it actively recruits secondary school students, assesses their aptitude, and channels them into specific programs. The mechanism for this is likely the afterschool programs operated by local chapters of the Basij paramilitary.

Beyond immediate references to augmenting the range and utility of Iran’s radar, Taghizadeh spoke about a desire to develop space-based radar arrays, and Shafqat argued that radar is insufficient to identify the broad array of enemy attacks given the role he argues that cyber-attacks and social media play in enemy strategy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The enemy’s battle with the Islamic Republic is multifaceted.”



Malek Ashtar University of Technology, an affiliate of the Ministry of Defense.

Source: Malek Ashtar University of Technology, <http://www.mut.ac.ir/gallery/74.jpg>

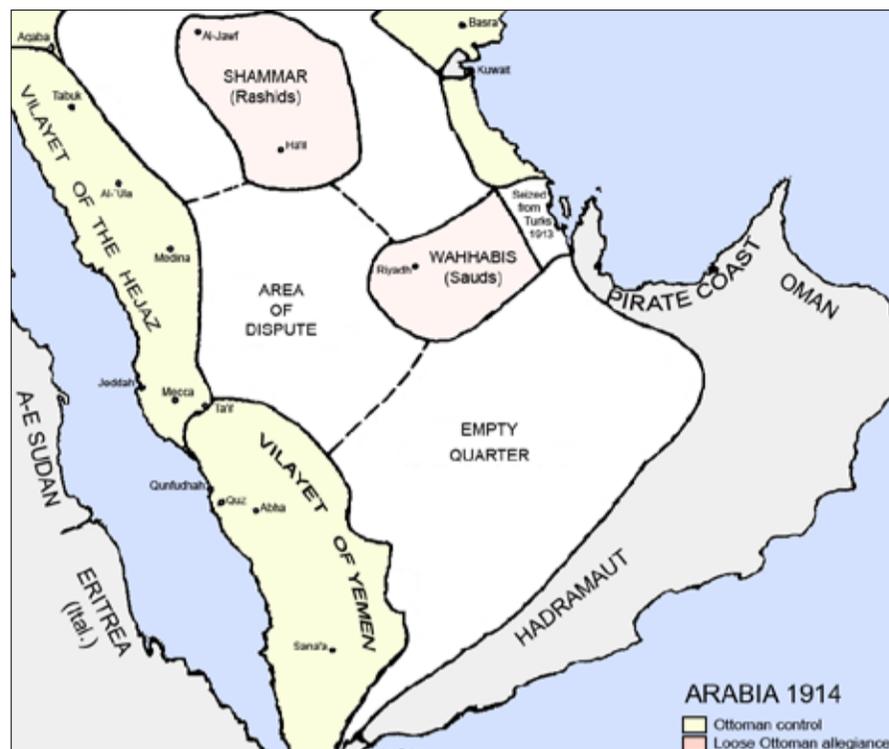
Source: “Ertaqa-ye Ilmi dar Hawzeh-e Radar Bestarsaz Eyjad-e Bazdarandgi dar Barabar Tahidat Ast (Scientific Advancement in the Field of Radar is the Basis for Creating Deterrence against Threats),” *Defa News*, 21 November 2020. <http://www.defanews.ir/news/اردی-مجمع-ای-اقترا-ت-سات-ادی-دهت-ر-بار-بر-دی-گدن-رادز-اب-داج-ی-از-اس-رت-س-ب-ر-ادار-ه-ز-وح>

Aboutaleb Shafqat emphasized the importance of scientific growth in the field of strategic sciences, and said, “Scientific advances in equipment is a bedrock to create deterrence against threats.” According to public relations department of the Ministry of Defense, Dr. Aboutaleb Shafqat, president of Malek Ashtar University of Technology, said at the 7th Conference on Radar and Surveillance Systems, which was held in the conference hall of the university, “What is more important for us is the scientific presence in this conference.” It leads to the acquisition and absorption of scientific findings and the insertion of research in this field. He added, “The radar field is one of the technologies that is very effective in producing security because guarding and monitoring of the country’s air and land borders are done with these systems.” The President of Malek Ashtar University of Technology, emphasizing the importance of upgrading the country in the fields of cognitive, cyber and equipment battles, said, “Today, the enemy’s battle with the Islamic Republic is multifaceted, one of which is the battle for technology....” Emphasizing the importance of the growth of the scientific level in the field of strategic sciences, he said, “Another aspect of the enemies’ battle with the Islamic Republic is the cyber battle and social networks and channels and we must raise the scientific level in all dimensions [to counter this].”



Prospects of a Growing Turkish Role in Yemen as Riyadh Agreement Fails to Take Root

OE Watch Commentary: The November 2019 Riyadh Agreement was intended to reach a political compromise between Yemen's Saudi-backed Internationally Recognized Government (IRG) and the Emirati-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC). However, the agreement never took root. According to an article recently published in the London-based, pro-Emirati *al-Arab* newspaper, the Riyadh Agreement's failure has provided an opening for Turkey to seek greater influence in Yemen. Thus far, Turkish activity has been mostly limited to soft-power measures such as providing humanitarian aid and making statements critical of external intervention and calling for a peaceful solution to the conflict. According to the article, Turkish contacts with Saudi-backed factions in the IRG and Emirati-backed factions in the STC are on the rise, in many cases through "virtual meetings and workshops via the Internet." This outreach includes overtures to IRG factions affiliated with ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh's former political party, the General People's Congress. Turkish influence within the IRG would provide it some leverage over Saudi Arabia, the IRG's main backer. The second accompanying excerpt, published in the prominent Lebanese news network *al-Mayadeen* and written by an official in the Houthi-led government's foreign ministry, offers Turkey an alternative route to strengthening its Yemeni foothold. If Turkey seeks greater influence in Yemen, he suggests, deepening relations with the Houthi-led government is a "pragmatic option" that makes sense given Sana'a and Ankara's shared "revolutionary trend."



Ottoman Presence in Arabian Peninsula (1914).

Source: Underlying lk, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arabia_1914.png, Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

Opening channels of communication with Yemen's various warring factions does not in itself translate to influence on the ground. Yet Turkey has also wielded soft power in ways that may seem marginal compared to the more direct Iranian, Saudi, and Emirati involvement, but are in fact of significance in Yemen and beyond. The third accompanying passage, published last September in the Yemeni news website *Aden Ghad*, notes how Yemeni textbooks provide a standardized, positive narrative of the era of Ottoman occupation over parts of modern-day Yemen. This helps give resonance to Turkish ambitions to lead the Sunni community by providing a more tolerant alternative to Saudi Wahhabism. Turkish President Erdogan's ultimate goal, according to the article, is the "ideological overthrow" of the Saudi king. Turkey's substantial humanitarian assistance in Yemen has also endeared it to the local population, according to the *Aden Ghad* article. Recently though, according to the last two excerpted articles from *al-Araby al-Jadid*, relief workers have come under fire: in early October, a team from the Turkish Red Crescent was detained by Emirati-backed STC forces in Aden, and several days later another Turkish Red Crescent team was fired upon by unknown gunmen. Turkey's opponents, particularly the UAE, accuse it of using relief work as a cover for intelligence gathering. Turkey and its allies accuse the UAE of the same behavior. In November, a UAE Red Crescent team was fired upon in Taiz Province." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“... Ankara's interest in the Yemeni issue has entered a new phase...”

Source: “تركيا تفتح قنوات تواصل مع المؤتمر الشعبي لتوسيع نفوذها في اليمن (Turkey Opens Communication Channels with the General People's Congress to Expand its Influence in Yemen),” *al-Arab*, 21 November 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/ybdu9wdc>

... Turkey has also organized virtual meetings and workshops via the Internet, confirming that Ankara's interest in the Yemeni issue has entered a new phase... Turkish contacts with Yemeni forces included leaders in the General People's Congress Party and the Southern Movement, as well as other active groups usually classified as hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood and the Qatari-Turkish axis... Informed political sources confirm to “Al-Arab” that there is a close correlation between the failure to implement the Riyadh Agreement, more than a year after its signing, and the steady increase in the attacks of some officials in the IRG on the Arab coalition and its role in Yemen as well as Turkish activity, which has gone beyond its intelligence and media form. The sources warned that the pro-Qatari factions in the Yemeni government are committed to provide a pretense to draw Turkey into Yemen... This is evident in Shabwa province, where coalition camps are under siege and assault, while Turkish intelligence officers are active under the cover of humanitarian organizations. The local authority controlling the province is moving towards the acquisition of sovereign files under the jurisdiction of the central state and the government, such as the establishment of ports.



Continued: Prospects of a Growing Turkish Role in Yemen as Riyadh Agreement Fails to Take Root

Source: Mohammed Mohammed al-Sada. (Will Turkey's Experience of Defeat Repeat in Yemen?)” *al-Mayadeen*, 30 November 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/y9xdek8o> ”هل تُكرّر تركيا تجربة الهزيمة في اليمن؟”

Turkey is profiting from the Islah Party, which is classified as a terrorist group by the Saudi and Emirati regimes, although it is a temporary classification that responds to interim reasons for Saudi Arabia. The Saudi regime's relation to Islah is solid. Whatever Islah's relationship with Turkey, it remains secondary to its relationship with its historical incubator, the Saudi regime, which considers the party a main pillar of its influence in Yemen. The successes that may have been achieved from Turkey's point of view in Libya, Qatar or elsewhere, should not be a measure or an incentive for an adventure in Yemen... Becoming closer to Sana'a is a pragmatic option, the quickest way for any Turkish political approach to achieve common interests by contributing to establishing peace in Yemen. Sanaa and the blood of the martyrs will accept nothing less than the fall of American hegemony over Yemen and the region. This revolutionary trend is one of the common denominators with Ankara, and it could be an entry point for an understanding, especially as the region is on the verge of a pivotal stage, the main feature of which is the Israeli enemy's leadership of the axis of normalization and the targeting, by a variety of methods, of states that reject hegemony and [foreign] tutelage, the simplest of which is a Cold War.

Source: (Key Aspects and Strategic Motivations of Turkey in Yemen),” *Aden Ghad*, 4 September 2020. <https://adenalgd.net/news/488072/> ”أهم الجوانب والدوافع الإستراتيجية التركية في اليمن”

It is known that a group of military specialists from Turkey's private Sadat Company has been operating in the country (especially in Shabwa and Taiz) since 2019... experts from the Institute for National Security indicate that Sadat's Turkish International Defense Consulting staff in Yemen are indeed conducting training while also monitoring the operational environment for Ankara... To this day, most textbooks in Yemen present the Ottoman Empire not as an occupying state but rather as a “superpower” that defended the true values of the Islamic world and contributed to the national uprising. Similar views still prevail among Yemeni intellectuals and are fed constantly by the speeches of Turkish officials... As a result, Turkey's constant mention of Yemen in the context of the Middle East agenda became a standard viewpoint in the intellectual milieu, [the idea] that Ankara remained committed to the lofty ideas that dominated Turkish politics during the Ottoman era... Since the war began five years ago, Turkey has sent nearly 100,000 tons of humanitarian aid to Yemen. It has also helped restore important medical facilities. Given that the total volume of humanitarian aid provided by other key actors barely exceeds 30,000 tons, Turkey's reputation in the eyes of the local population has been strengthened manifold... President Erdogan, who claims to be the spiritual leader of the Sunnis, is making good use of the contradictions that have solidified in the Islamic world and gradually paving the way for the “ideological overthrow” of the Saudi king. The main allegations in this case are directed at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation... an additional factor in the conflict is the fact that Saudi Arabia, adhering to strict Wahhabi orientations, continues its campaign against the rest of the sects, which led to the destruction of important monuments of Islamic culture, in turn generating protest sentiments in Islamic countries.

Source: (Armed Attack Targets Turkish Relief Workers in Aden),” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 20 October 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y9pj853j> ”هجوم مسلح يستهدف موظف إغاثة تركيا في عدن”

On Tuesday, the Turkish Red Crescent Authority revealed that an employee of its mission operating in the temporary Yemeni capital, Aden, was subjected to an armed attack carried out by unidentified persons, days after Emirati-backed forces detained the Turkish relief mission for several hours...

Source: (Yemen: Emirati Red Crescent Mission Attacked in Areas Controlled by Abu Dhabi's Proxies),” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 18 November 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yaamoa2a> ”اليمن: بعثة الهلال الإماراتي تتعرض لهجوم في مناطق وكلاء أبوظبي”

A medical mission of the Emirates Red Crescent Authority in Yemen came under armed attack in areas controlled by the Emirati-backed forces of Tariq Saleh in the Mokha district, in the west of the country... the UAE Ministry said that the attack took place in the city of Taiz... The Emirates Red Crescent and the Khalifa Foundation are accused of carrying out intelligence and military activities under the cover of humanitarian work. They are also accused of facilitating the expansion of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council at the expense of the legitimate Yemeni government.



Hezbollah Claims Full Readiness for War with Israel, as Lebanon Faces a Bleak and Uncertain Future

OE Watch Commentary: Last October, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) launched a large-scale drill meant to simulate war with Hezbollah called “Lethal Arrow.” According to the accompanying passage, written by the editor-in-chief of the Lebanese daily *al-Akhbar*, Hezbollah responded by putting all of its units in Lebanon and abroad on alert, purportedly as a warning sign to the IDF. The Lethal Arrow exercises, per the article, took place “under the eyes of the Islamic Resistance.”

According to the article in *al-Akhbar*, whose editorial line is pro-Hezbollah, a new generation of Israeli military leadership believes the IDF can prevail in a conflict with Hezbollah. Led by IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi, this new generation’s thought can be distilled into what the article’s author calls the “Kochavi Triad” – maximum lethality, minimum losses, and shortest possible timeframe. The IDF’s lethality is undisputed and its ability to minimize losses depends primarily on Israeli countermeasures against Hezbollah’s missile and rocket arsenal. Yet when it comes to time – the third principle in the Kochavi Triad – Hezbollah holds that “the enemy will under no circumstances be able to control the element of time.” The IDF believes that it can force a political settlement after days of intense combat, but in “the military mind of the Resistance,” the article’s author explains, Hezbollah alone will decide the duration of combat with Israel. Hezbollah further claims to have a knowledge edge based on its four decades of experience as an Israeli adversary. “If a new situation compels [Israel] to take some steps,” a Hezbollah member quoted in the article says, “we have the ability to foresee what the enemy will do.”

Whether the level of prescience and understanding of the IDF’s thought process claimed by Hezbollah carries over to Lebanon’s turbid domestic environment may ultimately prove to be more important than Hezbollah’s ability to survive open conflict with the IDF. The Lebanese street is on the verge of exploding, according to the second accompanying passage, written by a co-founder of the pro-Hezbollah satellite news station *al-Mayadeen*, on *180Post*. *180Post* is a recently established independent Lebanese news website established in 2019 by several prominent Lebanese journalists. According to the article, Hezbollah’s domestic reputation suffered after it cracked down on peaceful protesters last year, and its response to the looming explosion on the streets will be a pivotal element shaping Lebanon’s uncertain future for years to come. The article’s author, who left *al-Mayadeen* last year over disagreements on its coverage of Lebanon’s protest movement, paints a bleak picture of Lebanon’s future, one in which the political dynasties that have ruled the country for decades are “destined for extinction” but will play their “final, cruelest and most dangerous cards in an attempt to survive.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Memorial to 2006 Lebanon war in upper galilee near Lebanon border.
Source: Avi1111 dr. avishai teicher, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2006_Lebanon-Israel_War_Memorial.JPG,
Attribution: CCA By 3.0

“There is no doubt that the old Lebanon has ended, but it is not yet known exactly what the next Lebanon will look like...”

Source:

Sami Kleib. “The Street will Explode... What Will Hezbollah Do?,” *180Post*, 10 December 2020. <https://180post.com/archives/15125>

الشارع سينفجر.. ماذا سيفعل حزب الله؟

There is no doubt that the old Lebanon has ended, but it is not yet known exactly what the next Lebanon will look like, because no one - at least until now - has proposed an integrated project to rescue what was left of the homeland first and then to relaunch it based on new rules...

First: What will Hezbollah do? Is it enough for it to fortify areas under its control in terms of security, economics, finance and society? Or for it to move away from power? Or does it accept a regional international deal? Or prepare for a war that may come sooner or later? Does it respond to the next mobilization of the streets regardless of what is said against it? If the street explodes due to hunger, this will not spare anyone, and the street will be an arena for countries and parties with conflicting interests to penetrate Lebanon. The party has won militarily more than once, but what is its political project for the country? Does it really have a project for all the Lebanese?

Second: What will Hezbollah’s opponents do? Are they going to do what they have refrained from in the past years, that is, to confront it on the ground? Do they have the ability to do so? What if they face it and lose? Will Lebanon be turned upside down? What is their project to attract all Lebanese, including those in Hezbollah’s environment?

Third: What actions will the popular movement and political currents that are rising up or will do so take? Can they present a unified salvation project that would attract a large portion of the Lebanese population and impose a new balance? Or do they continue to be dispersed, contradictory and wasted?

There is no doubt that the destiny is bleak, the possibilities are all complicated, and the political dynasty that is destined for extinction will play its final, cruelest and most dangerous cards in an attempt to survive.



Continued: Hezbollah Claims Full Readiness for War with Israel, as Lebanon Faces a Bleak and Uncertain Future

Source: إبراهيم الأمين. "Toward War... Just as at War. The Resistance Following the 'Lethal Arrow' Maneuvers: Our Dictionary Does not Include the Term Days of Combat," *al-Akhbar*, 30 November 2020. <https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/297042> إلى الحرب... كما في الحرب | المقاومة بعد مناورة «السهم الفتاك»: قاموسنا ليس فيه أيام قتالية

Between October 25 and 30, the Islamic Resistance [Hezbollah] mobilized all its units in its various areas of presence, inside and outside Lebanon. A huge number of resistance fighters, from the regular or mobilization forces, joined their pre-determined action points. The monitoring units intensified their work, and the combat units were deployed where they could play a central role, while the strategic units positioned themselves to be in a state of direct operational service whenever orders were issued... All of this happened in silence, making noise only for those concerned with it and some who began to understand, through a gesture or a passing movement, that there was an ongoing emergency... [the "Lethal Arrow"] maneuvers took place under the eyes of the Islamic Resistance, which was not far from knowing the enemy's intentions beforehand. The Islamic Resistance in Lebanon's advantage over the rest of Israel's enemies lies in its maturity, the fruit of the accumulation of experience and the work of four decades that made Hezbollah understand the enemy very deeply...

Kochavi has already spoken, on more than one occasion in the past two years, about his theory, which can be called "the Kochavi Triad." It includes the following three dimensions:

- *Maximum lethality, i.e. physical and human destruction of the other side.*
- *Minimum losses among the occupation forces and on their home front.*
- *Shortest possible time to complete the mission...*

The resistance asserts, without hesitation, that the enemy will under no circumstances be able to control the element of time. It will also be almost impossible for the enemy to control the magnitude of the resistance's responses and, by extension the losses it will experience on the front... One of the [Hezbollah] jihadist leaders pointed to a "new and important issue," saying: "Today we notice a generational change in the enemy's leadership. There are now senior officers who show a great deal of motivation. They may think that they will succeed where their predecessors failed. But we know that some of their wise people warn them against showing off and going to war. However, a miscalculation may occur, and then they will face what they do not expect... [Israelis] don't know everything we think, and there are so many things that they don't know anything about. The day-to-day of the ongoing conflict let us understand what the enemy knows about us. Most importantly, we know the enemy well. We know everything about its army and forces, we know more how it thinks, and we are very good at anticipating its actions. We have accurate assessments about any decisions the enemy will make, and we even have estimates about what decisions it hasn't made yet. If a new situation compels it to take some steps, we have the ability to foresee what the enemy will do. Somewhere, regardless of the means we use, we know more about them than they know about us."

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>



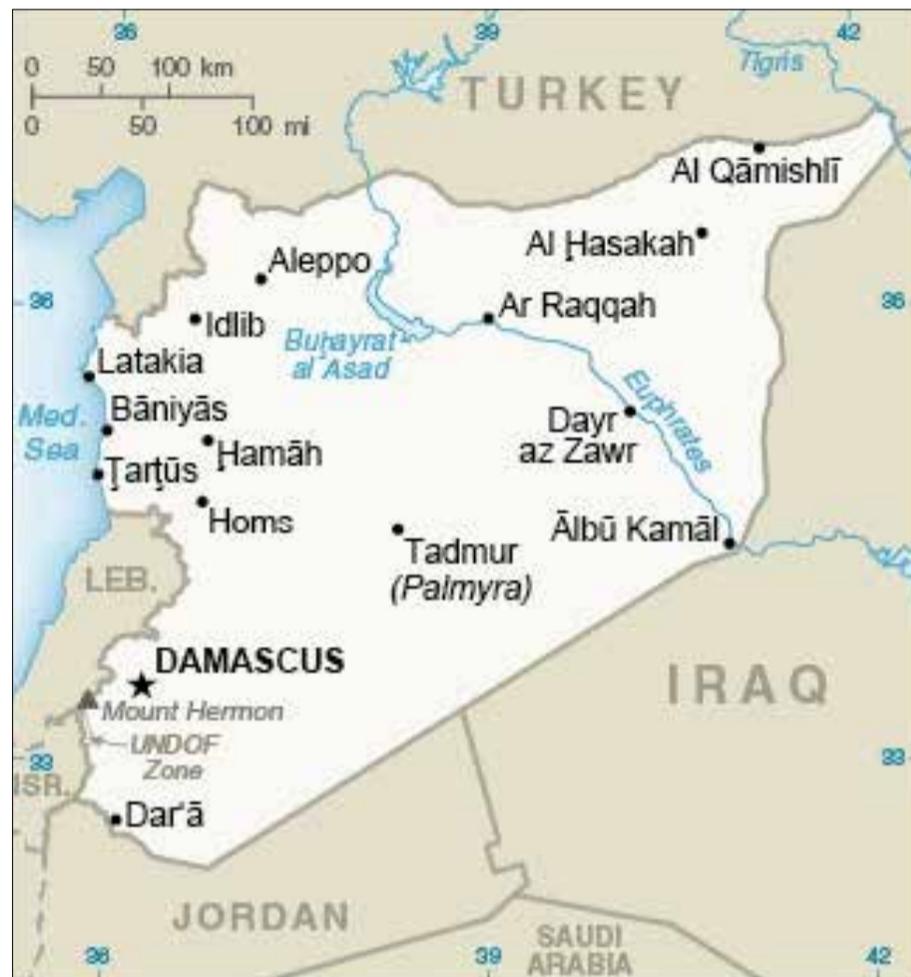


Syria Becoming Center of Illicit Drug Production and Export to Europe and Arabian Peninsula

OE Watch Commentary: People at the highest levels of the Syrian government appear to be increasingly involved in the drug trade, most notably the production and export of Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) locally known as Captagon (a trademarked name under which a synthetic stimulant called Fenethylamine was sold). Captagon is often characterized as a factor that fueled the Syrian conflict, given its effects when taken by combatants: fearlessness, euphoria, increased alertness, suppression of pain, appetite and sleep, etc. The first accompanying excerpt, initially reported by the opposition news website *SY 24* and translated by *The Syrian Observer*, recounts how two men were recently caught by Syrian authorities smuggling Captagon. As the article explains, “after the arrival of the two men to Damascus, an unidentified person got in touch with the Director of the President’s Office, Maj. Gen. Ghassan Bilal. As a result, the two men were released after a period that did not exceed five hours, in exchange for a sum of money of 400,000 dollars.” According to the article, the pills had been manufactured in Lebanon and smuggled into Syria by Hezbollah operatives. It adds that contraband along this trade route is “transported by military vehicles from western Qalamoun to the Badia in coordination with regime officers,” and from there makes its way to the Arabian Peninsula via the desert borders with Jordan and Iraq.

For years, eastern Syria and Iraq have been key transit routes for Captagon manufactured in Lebanon and western Syria. As noted in the second article, from the pan-Arab daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, Iraq is no longer merely a “transit or corridor country” and “eastern Syria, which is controlled by various armed groups, has become a drug production and manufacturing area.” The article describes all main domestic forces operating in eastern Syria – the Syrian government and loyalist fighters, Iranian-backed militias, and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – as being involved in the trade. The third accompanying article, from the Syrian digital *Step News Agency*, reports on a recent seizure in eastern Syria made by forces linked to the Syrian military’s 4th Division, which is controlled by the president’s brother Maher al-Assad and is believed to be deeply involved in drug trafficking. The pills, according to the article, belonged to a man “who trades drugs of all kinds in partnership with the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces loyal to Iran.”

Syrian Captagon exports are no longer limited to nearby Arab countries. Since last summer, seizures of Captagon and other illicit substances coming from Syria into Europe’s ports have increased substantially. In July, Italian authorities discovered 14 tons of Captagon pills hidden in a shipment of industrial goods. Although Italian authorities linked the pills to ISIS, most analysts and commentators believe they originated from government-controlled areas. Since then, large shipments of Captagon have also been confiscated by authorities in Greece and Romania. The final excerpt, also from the *Step News Agency*, explains how the Syrian port of Latakia “has turned into a center for exporting contraband to Western countries, for the benefit of the Assad family and their partners.” The article adds that ships departing from Latakia are “flooding ports of countries across the world with all kinds of drugs.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Map of Syria.

Source: CIA Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/cia-maps-publications/map-downloads/Syria_Transportation.jpg/image.jpg, Public Domain

“... The port of Latakia is flooding ports of countries across the world with all kinds of drugs...”



Continued: Syria Becoming Center of Illicit Drug Production and Export to Europe and Arabian Peninsula

Source: “Figures Close to Assad Involved in Drug Trafficking for Lebanese Hezbollah,” *The Syrian Observer*, 11 November 2020. <https://syrianobserver.com/EN/news/61857/figures-close-to-assad-involved-in-drug-trafficking-for-lebanese-hezbollah.html>

The sources added that after the arrival of the two men to Damascus, an unidentified person got in touch with the Director of the President’s Office, Maj. Gen. Ghassan Bilal. As a result, the two men were released after a period that did not exceed five hours, in exchange for a sum of money of 400,000 dollars. The sources mentioned details about the source of the drugs, which came from the Lebanese Hezbollah militia to dealers in Syria, so that they could be smuggled through the Badia (Desert) region into Jordan or Iraq. The shipment came from Lebanon via Hezbollah, entering Syrian lands through illegal border crossings, reaching Syrian dealers who work with Hezbollah. Drugs are transported by military vehicles from western Qalamoun to the Badia in coordination with regime officers. SY-24 sources indicated that the drugs are also exchanged for crystal meth, which comes from Iran. Kuwait is the Gulf country that consumes this substance most. Iraqi drug traffickers are the ones who exchange meth for captagon and hashish.

Source: “Drugs: Another Challenge on the Syria-Iraq Border,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 15 October 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y5t5rylx> المخدرات تحدُّ آخر على الحدود العراقية مع سورية

According to an Iraqi official in the Iraqi Border Guard Command in the second region deployed on the western Iraqi border with Syria, drug smuggling on the border is controlled by parties linked to important armed factions from both Syria and Iraq. The official, who preferred to remain anonymous, added to Al-Araby Al-Jadid that “previous smuggling attempts used Iraq as a transit or corridor country. Now, however, there are narcotic pills and hashish finding their way from Syria to Iraq. This means that eastern Syria, which is controlled by various armed groups, has become a drug production and manufacturing area.” The Iraqi official accused Iranian-backed armed factions of being behind the drug trade on the Syrian and Iraqi sides, as “it has become a source of financial income for them”...

On the activity of drug smugglers on the border with Syria, the Iraqi security expert, retired Brigadier General Ali Mansi Al-Qaisi, said it “is characterized by disorder, with many parties involved. It is continuing to grow.” Al-Qaisi added: “Iraqi forces are making progress, but the most important challenge is the presence of parties benefiting from this trade, most notably armed factions supported by Iran and Syrian regime forces across the border with Iraq, which are ravaged by corruption. Officers there receive money to allow such activities, as does the SDF. On the Iraqi side there is more control, but there remain actors involved in facilitating drug-related activities.” Al-Qaisi considered that the two-way drug trade between Syria and Iraq confirms the existence of a variety of smuggling networks, and that “a cheap drug industry has emerged in eastern Syria, sponsored by armed groups who are taking advantage of the vacuum there.”

Source: “Struggle between the Fourth Division and the Popular Mobilization Forces over the drug trade between Syria and Iraq,” *Step News Agency*, 1 October 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y6q4zhsl> صراع بين الفرقة الرابعة والحشد الشعبي على تجارة المخدرات بين سوريا والعراق

Today, Syrian regime forces from the Fourth Division confiscated a huge shipment of Captagon pills on their way to Iraq, in the countryside of Deir Ezzor... Our correspondent quoted informed sources as saying that the pills belong to Qusay al-Saif, who trades drugs of all kinds in partnership with the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces loyal to Iran. Our correspondent added that shipments of narcotic pills arrive from Lebanon or Lebanese Hezbollah’s manufacturing plants in the western countryside of Homs and enter Albu Kamal. Some are distributed internally and others enter Iraqi territory through unofficial smuggling outlets affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces. With these operations, the Fourth Division aims to share in the trade with other parties by imposing taxes on the passage of shipments, as it did when placing this one in an office affiliated with it inside the border crossing, to impose receipts and royalties on all smuggling activities.

Source: “From the heart of al-Qardaha, Assad’s birthplace... a loyalist journalist exposes by name those involved in the drug trade in the port of Latakia,” *Step News Agency*, 11 September 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y4bjmvfz> من قلب القرداحة مسقط رأس الأسد... إعلامية موالية تفضح بالأسماء تجارة المخدرات مرفأ اللاذقية

Yesterday, a pro-Syrian media outlet wrote a post on her Facebook page discussing the drug trade from the port of Latakia, which has turned into a center for exporting contraband to Western countries, for the benefit of the Assad family and their partners...

The loyalist media figure, Fatima Ali Suleiman, who hails from Qardaha, the heartland of the Syrian regime, said: “The port of Latakia is flooding ports of countries across the world with all kinds of drugs, an issue that is on the headlines of European newspapers.”



Yemen's Salafi Militias: Effective Ideological Forces with Destabilizing Potential

OE Watch Commentary: One of the most confusing aspects of Yemen's tangled conflict is the role of Salafi militias. In contrast to Salafi-Jihadist groups such as AQAP, Yemen's Salafis do not operate under a single umbrella. They are also less doctrinaire and more pragmatic in their alliances than are their jihadist counterparts. Perhaps the key distinction between Salafis and Salafi-Jihadists has been the latter's propensity to use violence for political ends, a distinction that has been blurred by the arming of Yemen's Salafi groups. The accompanying article, published last October in the prominent daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, is a useful analytical primer on Yemen's Salafi militias. The author focuses primarily on Taiz (Ta'izz) Province, a key location which includes Yemen's third largest city and a swath of Red Sea coastline along Bab el Mandeb, a vital global trade chokepoint. The author recounts how the Salafi Abu al-Abbas group, which for some years was the dominant force in Taiz's old city, was pushed into a losing battle with militias linked to the Islah Party. It eventually fractured and what remained of it was redeployed to fight the Houthis on the coast. The demise of the Abu Abbas brigade, per the article's author, is a cautionary tale for how Salafi militias are being used and exploited by external actors.

Noteworthy among Yemen's Salafi militias are the "Giants Brigades" (Alwiyyat al-Amalqa), a loose coalition bringing together a handful of militias from former South Yemen, some led or dominated by Salafis. The Giants Brigades are also deployed to Taiz's coastal areas, making them one of the few southern forces fighting in the north (although to be fair, they are mostly from southern regions adjacent to the former border and are consequently not fighting far from home). As noted in the accompanying excerpt from an overview published in 2019 by the Yemeni news website *al-Mawqea*, the Giants Brigades act as semi-independent "regional shops" from different areas of former southern Yemen (al-Dali', Subaiha [western Lahij], Aden and Lahij). These regional identifications, the article's author notes, has prevented them from becoming a more significant actor in Yemen's conflict. This could change, though, especially if they become a fulcrum in intra-Southern disputes between the Southern Transitional Council (STC) and the Hadi government. As both articles note, although the Giant Brigades are collaborating with and under the command of UAE-backed forces in coastal Taiz, many of them are loyal to the Hadi government rather than to the Emirati-backed STC.

The potential for cross-breeding between Salafi militias and their jihadist counterparts is real, and their regional backers appear to be aware of this threat, according to the first excerpt: "Even though Saudi and the UAE have used the Salafis as a brutal ideological fighting force against the Houthis and in battles against local forces opposed to them, their official position toward Salafi fighting forces, including those allied to them, does not diverge from that of their American ally in terms of Islamic groups in general and the issue of counter-terrorism in Yemen." This balancing act, empowering and disempowering Salafi fighting groups, simply adds to the already significant unpredictability represented by them. As the author of the first excerpted article concludes: "Although it is too early to say anything for sure about their future, in light of the continuing war and the need for ideological fighters, they remain a marginal fighting force, an anchor in the war machinery that may turn into a brutal force that threatens everyone, both its allies and adversaries. Integrating its fighters into Yemeni society will be a major problem in the future." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Yemen Administrative Map.

Source: CIA Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/cia-maps-publications/map-downloads/yemen-admin.jpg/image.jpg>, Public Domain

“... The rise and fragmentation of militant Salafi groups in Yemen is a narrative that aligns with the complexities of a futile war with no end in sight...”



Continued: Yemen's Salafi Militias: Effective Ideological Forces with Destabilizing Potential

Source: Bushra al-Maqtari. "All these Salafist groups fighting in Yemen," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 18 October 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y3pbb2bp> كل هذه الجماعات السلفية المقاتلة في اليمن

Despite the different situations and local circumstances of Salafi fighting groups in liberated areas, the influence of foreign states has been decisive in their fragmentation, by escalating their conflict with rival political forces. The end of the Abu Abbas group in Taiz represents a living example of the consequences of the regional role. It was the most influential Salafi fighting group on the Taiz city front, but after six years of war it transformed into a marginal, ineffective force operating outside of its social environment and controlled by political forces in a transitional alliance...

Moreover, the Salafi group in the city of Taiz was stripped of its military power as it turned into the spearhead of the UAE's conflict with the Islah Party, the cost of which was high on the group and its future. Islah, which possessed political and military strengths including media and social mobilization to stigmatize the group as an Emirati tool in Taiz and, from there, politically criminalizing and liquidating it. The result was the expulsion of Salafi group leaders from its historical position in the city center... The transfer of the Abu Abbas group to the Red Sea coast and their fighting in a new environment, including settling the fighters and their families, was the final blow to the most important Salafi fighting groups in Yemen...

...Southern Salafism, represented by a broad sector of the Giants Brigades, is the main segment of the southern resistance that fought against the Houthis and liberated the city. The Giants Brigades initially arose from within the local community, and not due to Emirati support. Their leaders' reluctance to engage in politics made them, to some degree, neutral in the battle for political representation between the STC and the Hadi government. On the other hand, the STC sees the Giants Brigades as a force threatening their political influence in South Yemen, as it is a parallel military force. Third, most Giants Brigades are loyal to President Hadi, even if implicitly, making the STC feel a sense of danger from the influence of Salafi fighters in the south, not to mention their religious doctrine, which is in contrast to the territorial ideology of STC fighters. Fourth, the struggle between the two forces for Emirati and Saudi backing, even though the STC is the UAE's favored domestic proxy, it still supports to a large extent the Giants Brigades. The situation seems different with Saudi Arabia, which while enabling the STC politically finds in other southern forces, including the Salafi Giant Brigades, another tool to achieve its goals, while the STC sees the Giant Brigades as a force that Saudi Arabia may use against it in any future conflict... The Salafi fighting groups operate in a changing war environment, even if it does not support their survival. While they are keen to stay alive by taking refuge with local forces or reduce tensions with forces opposing them by arranging their relationships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE and defending their interests, their being criminalized remains the biggest threat to their future. Even though Saudi and the UAE have used the Salafis as a brutal ideological fighting force against the Houthis and in battles against local forces opposed to them, their official position toward Salafi fighting forces, including those allied to them, does not diverge from that of their American ally in terms of Islamic groups in general and the issue of counter-terrorism in Yemen. This is due to the proximity between Islamic forces and the ease for them to turn into radical forces. This is also due to stigmatizing by domestic political forces of the Salafi fighting groups as religious forces, which makes it hard to control them and leads them to be seen with suspicion. Even though they are currently being used, this stance could change and they could be targeted politically if their interests come into conflict or their military services could be dismissed. The rise and fragmentation of militant Salafi groups in Yemen is a narrative that aligns with the complexities of a futile war with no end in sight. Although it is too early to say anything for sure about their future, in light of the continuing war and the need for ideological fighters, they remain a marginal fighting force, an anchor in the war machinery that may turn into a brutal force that threatens everyone, both its allies and adversaries. Integrating its fighters into Yemeni society will be a major problem in the future.

Source: "Who are the Giants ... and are they the UAE's last card to resolve its battle in southern Yemen?" *al-Mawqea Post*, 8 October 2019. <https://almawqea.net/reports/44483> من هم العمالققة.. وهل هم ورقة الإمارات الأخيرة لحسم معركتها جنوب اليمن؟

The military analyst noted that the Giant Brigades are simply a group of what he described as "regional shops." There is no single brigade among them that combines fighters from al-Dali', Subaiha (western Lahij), Aden and Lahij, as all the brigades lack geographical mixing and this - according to the military expert - is the most important factor of their weakness... But the military expert confirmed at the same time that some Giants Brigades will not fight against the legitimacy government, as some of them are loyal to President Hadi, even if they are ostensibly commanded by the UAE representative.



Mercenary Recruitment and PMC Growth in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: The recruitment of Syrians to fight in Libya and, more recently, Nagorno-Karabakh, has led to a growing number of commentaries in Arabic-language media reflecting on the phenomenon of “Syrian mercenaries.” The term, as explained in the accompanying article from the Syrian opposition news website *Enab Baladi*, was first used when fighters from Turkish-controlled areas were sent to fight in Libya. Its use in the media, the article argues, has “contributed to the formation of a stereotype within the Arab public that a large group of Syrians are ‘mercenaries’... In fact, the number of fighters who were transferred to Libya does not, at best expectations, exceed a few thousand.” While the contribution of Syrian mercenaries to foreign conflicts may be marginal, the recruitment of Syrians to fight in other countries is causing domestic consternation. The opposition Syrian Islamic Council, for instance, recently issued a statement prohibiting fighting outside of Syria, which it characterized as a “major sin” and “grave offense.” Similar statements have also been made by political and spiritual leaders in the Alawite and Druze communities.



Two destroyed tanks in front of a mosque in Azaz, Syria (2012).
Source: Christian Triebert, CC BY 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Azaz,_Syria.jpg

The accompanying excerpt from an opinion published in *al-Araby al-Jadid*, a pan-Arab media source sympathetic to the Syrian opposition, explains how “Syria stands on the brink of death and starvation, with millions of homeless people, orphans and widows.” In contrast to other countries that have recovered from civil wars, the article’s author claims, there are no mechanisms in place for the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life in Syria, since “there is no infrastructure, no rehabilitation, no community reconciliation, and no political solution, so you manage your own affairs as best you can.” As a result, the author continues, fighter recruitment has turned into “a complete system of employment, a market in which there is supply and demand.”

In areas under Syrian government control, Russian PMCs such as the Wagner Group are reportedly recruiting through a variety of Syrian intermediaries (See: “Oil, Fighters and Diplomats: Increasing Flows Between Libya and Syria,” *OE Watch*, April 2020). The accompanying excerpt from the online news website *Arabi 21* claims that some of the Syrian PMCs created in government-controlled areas since 2017 are recruiting on behalf of Wagner. The article mentions the “Sanad Protection and Security Services Company,” which it claims is controlled by Russia and per the article used as a vehicle for “recruiting mercenaries in Syria to fight abroad.” The latest rumor on Syrian mercenaries is found in the final accompanying excerpt, from the opposition *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, which claims that “unknown parties” acting “on behalf of Russian companies” are “suspiciously active in Damascus, Homs, Tartous and Latakia,” recruiting men to “work as facility guards in Venezuela” in exchange for a \$4000/month salary and a residency permit. If true, such an offer would undoubtedly be appealing to many men in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“... In Syria, there is no infrastructure, no rehabilitation, no community reconciliation, and no political solution, so you manage your own affairs as best you can...”

Source: “Mercenarism... A Phenomenon Distorting the Image of Syrians,” *Enab Baladi*, 11 October 2020. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/421855> (English version: <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2020/10/mercenarism-tarnishes-syrians-image/>)

According to Mustafa, Syrian fighters go to fight in other countries for many reasons, the most important of which is “pressing subsistence needs.” For about ten years, these fighters have been earning their income through fighting or “pillage” and thefts. They no longer have the possibility to secure any material gain from this war. Whether enrolled with the Syrian regime or the Syrian opposition, the fighters have not learned a profession to enable them to work and earn a living. If they leave fighting with the militias they have joined, they will become unemployed. They will not be able to work because the financial matters need a political solution to create job opportunities for these young people on both sides...

The term “Syrian mercenaries” began to widely circulate for the first time at the beginning of this year, after news of the transfer of fighters from the “Syrian National Army” (SNA) to Libya to fight alongside the Libyan “Accord” Government, which is supported by Turkey, against the retired Major General Khalifa Haftar. The circulation of this term through the media contributed to the formation of a stereotype within the Arab public that a large group of Syrians are “mercenaries,” according to what Enab Baladi monitored from the accounts of Arab activists on “Twitter.” In fact, the number of fighters who were transferred to Libya does not, at best expectations, exceed a few thousand. Following the outbreak of confrontations between Azerbaijan and Armenia at the end of last September, the term “Syrian mercenaries” has quickly re-emerged in the media. The media raced to announce the news, with some exaggeratedly focusing on the size of the news item and amplifying it, according to Enab Baladi, through its coverage of several media reports...



Continued: Mercenary Recruitment and PMC Growth in Syria

Source: المجلس الإسلامي السوري يُحرم قتال السوريين للارتزاق.. من الموبقات والكبائر
 “Syrian Islamic Council Forbids Syrians from Fighting as Mercenaries... Major Sins and Grave Offenses,” *Snack Syrian*, 4 October 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y2rbhxp6>

The Syrian Islamic Council considered the participation of Syrian fighters in the ongoing conflict in other countries such as Libya and Azerbaijan as “major sins and grave offenses.” It prohibited fighting outside Syria, according to a statement by the Council... It is worth noting that the Turkey-based Syrian Islamic Council is one of the most important religious bodies for the Syrian opposition.

Source: سوريون وخيار الارتزاق
 Ghazi Dahman. “Syrians and the Option to be a Mercenary,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 23 October 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yyv44otr>

... Syria stands on the brink of death and starvation, with millions of homeless people, orphans and widows, facing the challenge of survival in the face of a tireless killing machine and a world who has turned its back on the Syrian tragedy... In all the countries that have witnessed internal conflicts and wars, Colombia, Honduras, Cambodia, etc., the issue of finding solutions and alternatives for the participants represents the most complex issue, as their rehabilitation for civilian life, inclusion in economic activities, and provision of job opportunities cost huge sums, given that the bulk of resources and aid are directed to infrastructure reforms. In Syria, there is no infrastructure, no rehabilitation, no community reconciliation, and no political solution, so you manage your own affairs as best you can. Perhaps the problem in this case is the transformation of the mercenary process into a complete system of employment, a market in which there is supply and demand, with the flourishing of geopolitical projects and regional wars, the presence of huge numbers of unemployed professional fighters, and the formation of networks to use these people and push them into wars and conflicts, from warlords to those with influence to state institutions and political and economic interests. All this makes it difficult to break this infernal mercenary cycle, amidst a state of frustration and a blocked horizon.

Source: عربي 21 ترصد أبرز 4 شركات أمنية محلية للتجنيد بسوريا
 “Arabi 21 tracks the for main local security companies used for recruitment in Syria,” *Arabi 21*, 18 October 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y5vhbmw2>

Recently, there has been talk of local security companies recruiting Syrians to fight for the Bashar al-Assad regime and the international forces supporting it, such as the “Wagner” Group... the phenomenon of recruitment in Syria is not new, but rather it began with local security companies affiliated with Iran and Russia that recruited locally before they started sending recruits outside Syria... The year 2017 is significant for local security companies in Syria, as most of them were established and opened that year... [Sanad Protection and Security Services Company] company is run under Russian supervision, especially from the well-known Wagner Group, which is suspected of recruiting mercenaries in Syria to fight abroad.

Source: جهات مجهولة تتحدث باسم شركات روسية لتجنيد سوريين في فنزويلا
 “Unidentified parties speaking on behalf of Russian companies to recruit Syrians in Venezuela,” *Syrian Observatory for Human Rights*, 8 November 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yy5ejlhb>

The day before yesterday, Syrian journalist Tariq Ajeeb revealed on his Facebook page that “unknown parties who do not openly announce themselves, but deal with Syrian agents and people speaking on behalf of Russian companies, are suspiciously active in Damascus, Homs, Tartous and Latakia (and perhaps other governorates).” Their goal is to recruit men to work as facility guards in Venezuela, with a monthly salary of 4000 dollars and residency permit.



Potential for Increased Chinese Influence in Algeria Amidst Recognition of Moroccan Claims on the Western Sahara

OE Watch Commentary: The Morocco-Israel peace deal and the U.S.'s official recognition of Moroccan claims on the Western Sahara appear to have heightened threat perceptions in Algeria. As described in the first accompanying excerpt from the pro-Qatari *al-Araby al-Jadid*, a recent editorial in the monthly Algerian military publication *Army* stated that Algeria has a duty to be “ready for confrontation” in light of recent actions by unnamed “regional parties.” A likely key unnamed regional party is the UAE, given that it preceded Morocco in normalizing with Israel, opened a consulate in the Sahrawi capital Laayoune, and has been highly active in both Libya and the West African Sahel (see: “Mauritania and the UAE’s Expanding Influence in the West African Sahel,” *OE Watch*, March 2020). The article adds that the Algerian military has recently broadcast reports showing some of its advanced military equipment, most notably Iskander ballistic missile systems. The Algerian military’s willingness to display its modern weaponry, according to the excerpt, has caused some concern among Algerian political and civil elites, who fear that it is bringing unwanted Western attention. The sudden regional geopolitical shifts also come at a time of domestic political fragility in Algeria, as the demands for substantial reforms made by a popular protest movement that began in 2019 remain largely unmet, the overthrow of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika notwithstanding.



Algiers, Algeria.

Source: Gruban / Patrick Gruban from Munich, Germany, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Algiers_Algeria.jpg
Attribution: CC BY-SA 2.0

Increased foreign involvement in North Africa may lead Algeria to expand its blossoming relationship with China. Algeria’s location as a gateway to both Europe and West Africa makes it a useful entrepot on China’s Belt and Road Initiative. As noted in the accompanying article from *al-Jazeera*, the two countries have in recent years established a robust industrial economic relationship, the centerpiece of which is a deep-water port in El Hamdania, west of the capital Algiers. Once completed, the new port will likely cut into the market share of Morocco’s Tangier Med port while perhaps also creating additional discomfort in Paris, which according to the article seeks to remain Algeria’s principal strategic partner. Algeria and China are also engaged in mining and other industrial joint projects, including phosphate production, one of Morocco’s main export industries, and uranium extraction. Algeria has also become the third largest buyer of Chinese weaponry. As the *al-Jazeera* article details, it has recently obtained a slew of modern Chinese equipment, including C-802 anti-ship missiles, SR-5 Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, self-propelled LZ45 155 mm howitzers and HJ-12 anti-tank missile systems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“... the deteriorating regional situation along our border... concerns us and requires us to be ready for confrontation...”

Source: الجيش الجزائري: بعض الأطراف تهدد أمن المنطقة قرب الحدود و“علينا الاستعداد للمواجهة (Algerian Army: Some Parties Threaten Regional Security Near the Border and ‘We Must be Ready for Confrontation’),” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 7 December 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/yalfh3ac>

In its monthly editorial published today, the Algerian magazine “Army” stated that “the deteriorating regional situation along our border and the fact that some parties have threatened the security of the region, albeit indirectly, concerns us and requires us to be ready for confrontation. In fact, this is our duty as our country has regional obligations”

... This warning from the military, directed toward unnamed regional parties, was accompanied by the Army’s Media and Propaganda Authority broadcasting a series of video reports and notable displays of its military weaponry. The most recent showed the “Iskander” ballistic missile system... Some time ago, Algerian political and civil elites expressed their concern over the disclosure of the army’s arsenal, raising fears that the army leadership’s intention to further demonstrate its military capabilities as a means of deterrence had drawn Western attention, explained by increasing media attention and reports focused on the army’s weaponry and budgets.



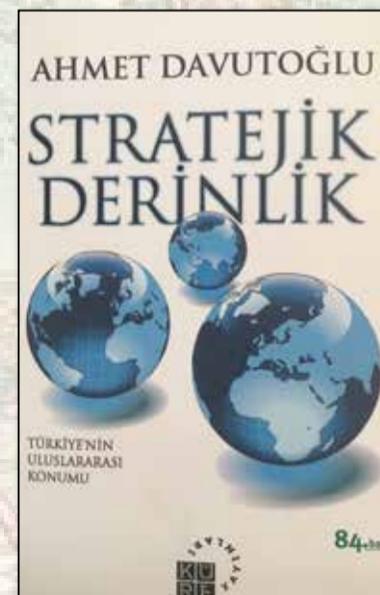
Continued: Potential for Increased Chinese Influence in Algeria Amidst Recognition of Moroccan Claims on the Western Sahara

Source: الوجود الصيني في الجزائر.. هل تدخل بكين أفريقيا من بوابة الكبار؟
(Chinese Presence in Algeria... Will Beijing Enter Africa Through the Adult Entryway?)” *al-Jazeera*, 12 November 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y9e64nma>

Algeria, the largest oil producer in North Africa and one of the largest oil producers on the continent, has been a very important strategic partner for China for more than half a century. The partnership has made Algeria's accession to some of China's agreements on the vast Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) easy... Algeria is now the third largest buyer of Chinese weapons in the world. It was the first African country to import Chinese anti-ship C-802 / CSS-N-8 missile systems, as well as SR-5 multi-rocket launchers that can launch guided missiles, and self-propelled LZ45 155 mm howitzers (delivered in 2014) used in tactical exercises. In the latest military cooperation, Beijing provided Algeria with HJ-12 advanced third generation anti-tank missile systems, making it the first African country to obtain this system... the Western hegemonic system and its requirements are pushing Algeria and the North African countries towards establishing economic, political and military partnerships with other powers who set less stringent conditions, such as China and Russia... Even though Algeria now appears to be considering diversifying its weapons sources, a key obstacle Beijing faces in Algeria is its conflict with Paris, which seeks to maintain a firm foothold there and constantly denounces Chinese moves that have taken away its old colonial privilege first and the privileges of strategic partnership second... Algeria is a real gateway to West Africa, with which it has vast southern borders, and which can be a launching pad for China to invade African markets... The [Hamdania Port] agreement allows Beijing to in the near future lay its hands on what will be considered Algeria's largest port. Since infrastructure projects, ports and shipping routes are a key component of the Belt and Road Initiative, the new China-Algeria five-year cooperation plan (2019-2023) already offers many opportunities and advantages for China... China will also increase investment in natural resources such as minerals, specifically uranium, for which there is a Chinese-Algerian cooperation agreement regarding exploration and exploitation. In return for the Chinese gain, Algerians should define a long-term strategy, possibly spanning two decades, to be able to take advantage of the opportunities of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, in a way that is as equal as possible to China's benefit.

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>



Counterterrorism in Africa Requires New Approaches

OE Watch Commentary: From January to August 2020 there were 18% more terrorist attacks in Africa compared to the same time period in 2019. This increase occurred despite the deployment of numerous counterterrorism operations, including the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram, the African Union (AU) Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and others. The excerpted accompanying article from the non-profit South African *Institute for Security Studies* states the threat is even expanding into areas that previously had no such attacks, such as Mozambique and the West African coastal nations.

The ability of these terrorist groups to carry out increasingly large and complex operations is in no small measure because of improved finances. Transnational crimes, including piracy and mercenary activities, as well as trafficking people and an array of goods, have provided a flow of funds enabling extremists to periodically launch and sustain military-type offensives. Another factor in the extremists' favor, as the article notes, is that many of the nations these groups operate in are already unstable, often with poor governance and weak militaries.



Soldiers such as these Burundi peacekeepers could form a counterterrorism unit in the African Standby Force.

Source: Rick Scavetta, USARAF/FlickrR, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/usarmyafrica/4325510666/>, Attribution: CC BY 2.0

Against this backdrop of growing violence, the article expresses the need for Africa to reexamine its counterterrorism strategies. One proposal made at the February 2020 AU summit getting renewed attention is that its Peace and Security Council consider forming a special counterterrorism unit in the African Standby Force (ASF). It was discussed again in October, but the participants were uncertain that an ASF counterterrorism unit was the best way forward, though some supporters noted if implemented it could improve upon the continent's often ad hoc approach to combating terrorism.

Opposition to forming a counterterrorism unit under the ASF includes concerns that it would be redundant with the multidimensional capabilities the ASF is supposed to have itself. Additionally, some nations worry about a counterterrorism unit composed of contingents outside their regional bloc being deployed in what they consider their neighborhood.

Whether or not the ASF should have a counterterrorism unit is still being debated, and indeed a task force to evaluate it further has been formed. As the article explains, if the AU Peace and Security Council does endorse the proposed unit it could face another hurdle. For doctrinal reasons the UN might not consider deploying a counterterrorism unit in peace support operations that it funds, such as AMISOM. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“As the terror threat grows and spreads, could a special unit in the African Standby Force help?”

Source: Shewit Woldemichael, “Counter-terrorism in Africa must adapt to new realities,” *Institute for Security Studies* (South Africa), 4 November 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/counter-terrorism-in-africa-must-adapt-to-new-realities>

As the terror threat grows and spreads, could a special unit in the African Standby Force help?

A taskforce comprising all stakeholders including the PSC Military Staff Committee, regional mechanisms and AU security cooperation agencies has been formed. It will evaluate the technical, structural, doctrinal and financial implications of the proposed unit and submit proposals to the PSC in the next six months. The AU's Specialized Technical Committee on Defense, Safety and Security will also provide input.

Africa's response to terrorism could also expand from its current heavy military focus to include non-violent preventive measures aimed at the underlying conditions driving radicalisation and violence.

The AU's definition and mandate of PSOs differ from those of the UN. While the UN Security Council increasingly depends on the AU for deployments in response to terrorism in Africa, the global body continues to insist that UN-mandated PSOs cannot take part in military responses to terrorism.



Eritrea's Possible Role in Ethiopia's TPLF Conflict

OE Watch Commentary: Mesfin Hagos was Eritrea's Minister of Defense in the 1990s and continues to be an expert on Eritrean military affairs. As he asserts in the excerpted accompanying article published online in *African Arguments*, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy did not tell the whole story regarding Eritrea's role in the recent conflict between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). That role, according to Hagos, was indeed significant, and the absence of its description by Abiy helped Eritrea's intervention remain above scrutiny and censure from the international community.

Abiy did tell parliamentarians that Ethiopian soldiers who survived an attack by the TPLF on 3 November withdrew into Eritrea where they recuperated and regrouped. However, Hagos claims that his research—which he asserts is based on sources in the Eritrean Ministry of Defense, Eritrean opposition intelligence sources in both Sudan and Ethiopia, and others—shows Abiy failed to mention some key points. For instance, he left out that prior to the main conflict, elite Ethiopian troops had trickled into Eritrea where they were hidden from view on an ad hoc base. These troops were to form the hammer while the Ethiopian Northern Command would be the anvil, with the TPLF supposed to be caught between them. The plan went awry when the TPLF preempted the operation, forcing Abiy to launch a different offensive on 4 November.

Abiy is also accused of not disclosing that as part of the new offensive, several thousand more Ethiopian troops were airlifted into Eritrea. He supposedly also failed to mention that Eritrean troops were involved in direct combat with the TPLF along the Eritrean-Ethiopian border. Additionally, as the article discusses, when the regrouped Ethiopian soldiers in Eritrea launched several offensives against the TPLF, the Eritrean military, despite having shrunk considerably over the past two decades, allegedly provided logistics, intelligence, and firepower from heavy weapons to cover advancing Ethiopian troops.

Eritrean president Isaias Afwerki's quiet but purportedly significant assistance to Ethiopia, and Abiy not completely describing Eritrea's involvement, reflects the relationship between the two since Eritrea and Ethiopia made peace in 2019, ending the 20 years war between the countries. Meanwhile, the international community has commended Afwerki's uncharacteristic silence in the conflict as TPLF rockets rained down on Eritrean cities. That praise, according to the article, is either from the international community being oblivious to what happened or actually approving of Afwerki's actions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Ethiopian soldier.

Source: Specialist Eric Clement, USN/Wikimedia, Afrimil-ethiopiainsoldier - Ethiopian National Defense Force - Wikipedia
Attribution: Public Domain

“The unlikely bond between the dashing new Prime Minister and the aging President is a marriage of convenience that centered around the singular goal of liquidating the TPLF.”

Source: Mesfin Hagos, “Eritrea’s Role in Ethiopia’s Conflict and the Fate of Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia,” *African Arguments*, 4 December 2020. <https://africanarguments.org/2020/12/04/eritreas-role-in-ethiopias-conflict-and-the-fate-of-eritrean-refugees-in-ethiopia/>

The Prime Minister also hid from the world the Eritrean military’s direct involvement in combat along the entire border that Eritrea shares with Tigray regional state as well as inside Tigray. The following information is pieced together from three different sources: first, reliable sources inside the Eritrean Ministry of Defense; second, Eritrean opposition intelligence sources in Sudan and Ethiopia; and finally, anecdotal pieces communicated from friends and relatives, including some academic researchers.

President Isaias ruthlessly held on to power and kept Eritrea on a war footing, frustrating any prospect of recovery or normalcy. With every year that went by, his significance diminished and his legacy tarnished. He blamed the TPLF for all this and did everything in his power to make them pay for it. He saw his own vindication in TPLF’s demise and every case of TPLF domestic repression and external belligerence was an opportunity for him until Abiy came to power and outdid Isaias in that task. The unlikely bond between the dashing new Prime Minister and the aging President is a marriage of convenience that centered around the singular goal of liquidating the TPLF. I will spare the details of what followed and led to November 4, but the writing was on the wall: a conflict was inevitable.

A clear, timely and unambiguous message must be conveyed to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed about the dire consequences of not living up to its legal responsibility towards the refugees and asylum seekers. This cannot be achieved in isolation of the quest for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. And peaceful resolution of the Ethiopian conflict is unlikely to happen so long as President Isaias Afwerki is determined to wreck vengeance on the TPLF, and as long as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed entertains him to do so and actively entertains his regional ambitions.



Africa: Rising Debt Stifles Ability to Pay

OE Watch Commentary: Many African countries were struggling with debt even before COVID-19 struck. Continent wide, a total of \$547 billion is owed to multilateral banks, private lenders, and other countries. With the pandemic and the ensuing recession it caused, according to the excerpted accompanying article from the media content provider *AllAfrica*, that amount continues to rapidly climb. The unsurprising result is that African countries are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their loan payments let alone the medical costs to combat the pandemic.

This mounting economic squeeze on the ability to pay for such items as health care and the debt, according to the International Monetary Fund, can be traced to several factors. These include the necessity to borrow more money, which not only adds to the already crushing debt burden, but because of the adverse economic conditions in so many countries, can only be obtained at very high interest rates. Additionally, many African currencies have depreciated against major international currencies, making loan repayments more expensive.

According to the article, the continent's debt burden is stifling the very growth needed for economies to expand and thus be able to pay off this debt. This happens not just because of a lack of investment capital for businesses, but also because health care systems do not have enough funds to maintain the health of people in order for them to be productive at work. Some African countries spend up to five times more on debt repayment than they allocate to their health budgets.

Several suggestions were put forth by the article's author to help alleviate the crushing debt burden, including suspending all repayments until the end of 2021; encouraging African nations to borrow more prudently, with a greater emphasis on factors such as transparency and the ability of the loan to be productive; and combating corruption in African nations so that more money goes to where it is needed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Africa's is increasingly unable to pay China for projects such as this Kenyan railroad.
Source: Macabe5387/Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mombasa%E2%80%93Nairobi_Standard_Gauge_Railway#/media/File:Nairobi_Terminus_-_platform.jpg. Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

“So far, Covid-19 lockdowns have triggered the first continent-wide recession in 25 years, costing Africa an estimated U.S. \$115 billion in lost output and pushing up to 40 million additional people into extreme poverty, according to the World Bank.”

Source: Amadou Mahtar Ba, “Africa Desperate for Debt Relief to Recover From Covid-19,” *AllAfrica*, 2 December 2020. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202012020989.html>

So far, Covid-19 lockdowns have triggered the first continent-wide recession in 25 years, costing Africa an estimated U.S. \$115 billion in lost output and pushing up to 40 million additional people into extreme poverty, according to the World Bank.

Over the next year alone, the continent is expected to fork out almost \$55 billion to service public debt. If these debt repayments could be put on hold, governments could divert the funds to meet rising health care demands and support vulnerable businesses and communities.

The response to Africa's plight by creditors has so far been lukewarm. G20 countries have responded to the crisis with a temporary suspension of \$5 billion in debt service payments, which is about 40 percent of what Africa was spending on the health sector before the pandemic. Aside from bilateral lenders, multilateral institutions and private financiers – including international bonds and commercial banks – are non-committal about delaying some \$24 billion that is due to be repaid by African countries over the next year.



Uganda's Bloody Election

OE Watch Commentary: Nearly all of the candidates trying to unseat Yoweri Museveni from his 25 years as Uganda's President have been arrested, blocked from rally venues, removed from radio and TV stations, and/or seen their supporters forcibly dispersed with tear gas. As the accompanying article from the *East African*, a Kenyan media website, notes, that with 50 people shot at protests in recent months, this is Uganda's bloodiest election ever. The situation has become so bad that presidential candidate Bobi Wine's National Unity Party tweeted "This is war, not presidential campaigns."

Wine, a popular Ugandan entertainer whose real name is Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, following numerous incidents of violence against his supporters, temporarily suspended his campaign and demanded the Electoral Commission Chairman launch an intervention. However, the Electoral Commission's COVID-19 guidelines, or more specifically how they've been enforced, have also been the source of some of the protestors' frustration. For example, according to the article, law enforcement agencies have used tear gas and live ammunition to ban large rallies when they are for opposition candidates. When the campaigns are for Museveni, law enforcement has not been nearly so vigorous. Thus, opposition candidates and their supporters are claiming the COVID-19 guidelines are being used against them.

The violence, according to Dr. Miria Matembe, the chairperson of the Citizen's Coalition for Electoral Democracy, is casting doubt on the January elections. She also expressed concerns that Security Minister Gen. Elly Tumwine's comment regarding police having a right to shoot protestors could lead to even more violence.

Bobi Wine has returned to campaigning. However, his attire now includes a bulletproof vest and helmet, similar to what many journalists also sport on the campaign trail. A government spokesperson described this garb as giving the country a bad image, and said they shouldn't be dressed as if in a war zone. The article's final sentence points out that the opposition would disagree. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Ugandan presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, stage name Bobi Wine.

Source: Mbowasport/Wikimedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Kyagulanyi_Ssentamu#/media/File:Nalukoola_talks_with_Bobi_Wine_\(cropped\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Kyagulanyi_Ssentamu#/media/File:Nalukoola_talks_with_Bobi_Wine_(cropped).jpg), Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

“Election isn't a war and campaign meetings shouldn't be war zones.”

Source: Jonathan Kamoga, “Violence, deaths continue ahead of Uganda elections,” *The East African*, 6 December 2020. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/violence-deaths-continue-ahead-of-uganda-elections-3219396>

Last Monday, following weeks of deadly encounters between its supporters and Ugandan security agencies, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu's National Unity Platform tweeted: “This is war, not presidential campaigns.”

At the next campaign stop police fired tear gas and live bullets to disperse his supporters. The injured this time included one of the police guards officially allocated to the candidate, shot in the face with a rubber bullet.

Opposition parties point out that there was no effort to enforce the rules during the ruling NRM party primaries in October. They argue the rules are meant to handicap, not protect them.

Several military and police vehicles follow main opposition candidates, firing tear gas and live bullets to disperse supporters standing by the roadside to wave at them.

“This dress code is certainly giving our country a bad image,” government spokesperson Ofwono Opondo said, reacting to a picture of journalists on the campaign trail dressed for a conflict zone assignment. “Election isn't a war and campaign meetings shouldn't be war zones.” The opposition camps would beg to disagree.



Chinese Investments Are Economically Transforming Africa

OE Watch Commentary: After reviewing 100 research studies, the authors of the excerpted accompanying article from the think tank *The South African Institute of International Affairs* have reached a conclusion regarding Chinese investment in Africa. They have ascertained that at both the micro and macro levels, while there may be some problems, overall Chinese money is transforming Africa in positive ways.

At the microeconomic level, Chinese businesses have created thousands of jobs on the continent, with many of them filled by African workers. Those African employees, through training programs, improve their skills. Additionally, even African-owned firms enhance their capabilities by interacting with Chinese companies. This often occurs through buyer-supplier relationships where the Chinese help the Africans develop their expertise in improving product quality.

From a macroeconomic perspective, Chinese investment has helped diversify African economies. For example, Chinese construction and manufacturing firms not only promote development of these sectors, but also influence upstream and downstream sectors, such as the service and raw materials sectors, as well.

The article does note some problems with the China-Africa economic relationship, including the fact that Africans are mostly relegated to the lower ranks of jobs in Chinese companies. There are very few Africans in managerial positions. Also, Chinese and African firms tend to form partnerships, which tend not to be nearly as beneficial to the African companies as longer-term joint ventures. Finally, the article says that infrastructure construction is extremely costly and could become a burden, but it does not emphasize the concerns many have that Africa is becoming far too indebted to China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Through investments, such as financing the Bui Dam in Ghana, China is helping to economically transform Africa.

Source: Wtshymanski/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bui_Dam_Nov_2013.JPG, Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

“Our findings show that Chinese investment does contribute a great deal to economic transformation across African countries.”

Source: Linda Calabrese and Xiaoyang Yang, “How Chinese investment is contributing to economic transformation across Africa,” *The South African Institute of International Affairs*, 8 December 2020. <https://saiia.org.za/research/how-chinese-investment-is-contributing-to-economic-transformation-across-africa/>

The focus is usually on China’s strategic interests, responses by the United States and Europe, or the social and environmental issues of Chinese investment. However, these discussions do not often explore the most important questions: does engagement with China support African countries’ economic development? Does it contribute to generating jobs and to forming more diversified and resilient economic structures? Based on our work, the answers to these questions are ‘ Yes.

In our report on Africa ’s economic transformation: the role of Chinese investment, we review a hundred research studies spanning over a decade, synthesising an enormous body of evidence to understand if and how China-Africa economic engagement benefits African countries, promotes productivity and contributes to changing the structures of African economies. Our findings show that Chinese investment does contribute a great deal to economic transformation across African countries.

Moreover, by contributing to developing infrastructure, Chinese companies help remove bottlenecks that prevent investment from taking place.



COVID-19 Diplomacy: China's Medical Assistance to South Africa

OE Watch Commentary: The People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) recently strengthened their strategic partnership when the PLA provided SANDF with medical gear to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic. As the excerpted accompanying article from a South African military-industrial trade publication, *DefenceWeb*, notes, this donation on 27 November handed over 500 thermometers, 400 protective suits, and 30,000 face masks. South Africa's Chief of Staff of the Joint Operations Division, Rear Admiral Bravo Mhlana, accepted the supplies on behalf of his country's military and reiterated the excellent relationship that exists between the two nations.

China previously donated personal protective equipment (PPE) to SANDF on at least two other occasions. The first consignment was delivered on 26 March 2020. The second consignment, consisting only of face masks, was delivered on 3 August.

Chinese assistance to SANDF goes beyond supplying PPE. With its extensive experience combating the virus, China has shared its medical expertise in areas such as infection control, critical care, and epidemiology with the South African military. According to the article, there was even a teleconference between the two countries on 8 May in which China promoted the capability of SANDF to prevent and control the viral disease.

That military medical teleconference has additional special meaning. It was the first one between China and an African nation, thus demonstrating, as the article explains, the special friendship and increasing strategic partnership between the two militaries. Additionally, China has been providing medical assistance to other African nations, in what could be described as a form of COVID-19 diplomacy, furthering relationships with those countries as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Soldiers from the South African National Defence Force.

Source: SPC Taryn Hagerman/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_African_soldiers_board_a_C-130_Hercules_aircraft_for_a_practice_jump_at_Air_Force_Base_Bloemspruit_in_Bloemfontein_South_Africa_July_23_2013_in_preparation_for_exercise_Shared_Accord_2013_130723-A-FP002-005.jpg
Attribution: Public Domain

“China has donated more medical and personal protective equipment (PPE) to the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to help it fight the coronavirus pandemic, with the latest donation comprising thermometers, face masks and full protective gear.”

Source: “China donates more medical equipment to the SANDF,” *DefenceWeb (South Africa)*, 2 December 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/china-donates-more-medical-equipment-to-the-sandf/>

China has donated more medical and personal protective equipment (PPE) to the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to help it fight the coronavirus pandemic, with the latest donation comprising thermometers, face masks and full protective gear.

Due to the extensive experience in the combating the 2019 coronavirus outbreak and treatment of those afflicted with the virus, the People's Liberation Army (PLA, the armed forces of the People's Republic of China) has increased bilateral cooperation between the countries.

China has assisted the SANDF with coronavirus relief aid before, and on 3 August delivered a consignment of face masks from China, which were to be utilised by members of the SA National Defence Force and the National Department of Health (NDOH) who had been deployed to assist in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.



Senegal Military Exercises Signal Counter-Terrorism Preparedness

OE Watch Commentary: The department of Goudiry in Senegal is near the country's border with Mali, which has faced a growing insurgency from jihadist factions loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda. As a result, the excerpted French language article from 30 November in *lequotidien.sn*, which is a widely read Senegalese daily newspaper, discussed Senegal's recent military exercises to prevent jihadists from infiltrating Senegal. According to the article, the Senegalese military exercises were called "Falémé 2020" and were held from 20-26 November. Falémé refers to a West African river that runs through Senegal.

The article notes the size of the military exercises were unprecedented, including 608 gendarmes, 2,505 soldiers, 260 police officers, 67 firefighters, 574 vehicles, 80 armored vehicles, 4 aircraft, and 14 motorcycles. Further, the article stated Senegal's military understands that it needs to readjust its tactical posture and improve its military strategy to deal with the multifaceted threats that are destabilizing the West African region. According to the Chief of the General Staff of the Armies, Birame Diop, the exercises allow the military to test soldiers' preparedness and the interoperability of multiple army commands and weapons systems to rectify any weaknesses. Moreover, according to Diop, it is important for soldiers to become familiar with the terrain in the border region in case they are engaged in future operations there. The soldiers also get a chance to meet the people who live in the border region and reassure them of the military's commitment to keep their home villages secure.



Senegal soldiers - parachute jump.

Source: Journalist 1st Class Jeremy L. Wood, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Senegal_soldiers_-_parachute_jump.jpg, Attribution: CC x 2.0

In the conclusion, the article notes General Jean Baptiste Tine considered the military exercises a success. While Senegal has largely been spared jihadist attacks over the past several years, the country's military appears to be on guard for the potential of an attack. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The objective is to better train and better prepare elements of the defense and security forces for possible terrorist attacks.”

Source: “Manœuvres militaires de grande envergure: Boundou, Qg de l’Armée (Large-scale military exercises: Boundou, Army HQ),” www.lequotidien.sn, 30 November 2020. <https://www.lequotidien.sn/goudiry-manoeuvres-militaires-de-grande-envergure-boundou-qg-de-larmee/>

We had to employ significant efforts to organize the “Falémé 2020” military exercises. For a week, the defense and security forces set up headquarters in Goudiry department and organized military exercises to deal with possible attacks. On site, there were 608 gendarmes, 2,505 soldiers, 260 police officers, 67 firefighters, 6 national parks officers and 6 water and forest officers, 574 vehicles, 80 armored vehicles, 4 aircraft and 14 motorcycles, which served as the background to these unprecedented exercises. On the surface, the army is trying to readjust its tactical posture and reshape and strengthen its military strategy to deal with the multifaceted threats that are destabilizing the sub-region. “The objective is to better train and better prepare elements of the defense and security forces for possible terrorist attacks or any other attack of any kind. For some time now, the region has been facing complex and very acute security challenges, the management of which requires anticipation,” asserted General Birame Diop, Chief of the General Staff of the Armies.

The exercises make it possible to test the units’ intervention capacities and rectify them if necessary. General Birame Diop explains “these operations allow the men to familiarize themselves with the terrain so that in the event of an attack, they have no major difficulties operating on the terrain. It is also an opportunity to reassure the population.” The demonstrations in front of us are reassuring in more ways than one,” said Jean Baptiste Tine.



DRC: SADC Agrees to Reconfigure UN Force Intervention Brigade

OE Watch Commentary: Under pressure from the United Nations, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has agreed to reconfigure the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). The FIB is a unit within the UN Organization and Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) that is authorized to take offensive action against armed groups. Operating in eastern DRC since 2013, the FIB is composed entirely of troops from SADC countries. The accompanying article from the *Institute for Security Studies*, a South African security affairs think tank, provides insight into the reasons behind the FIB's reconfiguration as well as prospects for the future of its mission.

The FIB, the article explains, was originally tasked with defeating the M23 rebels “threatening to take control of eastern DRC.” Once the FIB accomplished that objective, its focus shifted to pursuing other armed groups. At present, the article says, the FIB is focused on countering the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the primary force “terrorizing civilians” in eastern DRC. The ADF is alleged to have ties to the Islamic State.

The FIB has proved unable to eliminate the ADF. In contrast to the M23 rebels, the article argues, the ADF is more mobile, operates over a wider section of territory, and lacks “unified command and control.” Further, the ADF is “deeply embedded” in local communities and conducts reprisals against civilians when pursued. According to the article, the FIB is not equipped to deal with this sort of group. The FIB is also expensive, costing a “significant portion” of MONUSCO's annual \$1.2 billion budget. With the UN's peacekeeping budget shrinking each year, there is a push for “smaller missions” with “lower footprints” and potentially greater interaction with “regional and national tools.”

On 27 November, the SADC accepted a UN proposal to “realign the current FIB troops' strength.” Until then, the SADC had resisted UN pressure to “cut down on” the FIB, include non-SADC troops, or to reorient its mission. According to a SADC communique cited in the article, the purpose of the reconfiguration is to “create headroom for Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs)” and to “generate two QRFs” with troops from SADC countries. The article assesses the purpose of the reconfiguration is to improve the “mobility and flexibility” of the FIB, making it “agile” enough to better protect civilians. This is part of a larger MONUSCO effort to achieve “protection through projection” as the UN eyes a phased withdrawal from the “quieter” of the six DRC provinces in which it currently operates.

The exact nature of the upcoming reconfiguration and the future of the FIB's mandate remain unclear, the article explains. SADC officials indicated that only the “rump” of the FIB would be composed of non-SADC soldiers, making the agreement to reconfigure appear “something of a compromise.” The article envisions two possibilities for the future of the FIB's mandate. The FIB could retain its offensive mandate or may no longer be permitted to “initiate military action against armed rebels,” and instead be tasked to focus more on responding quickly to attacks on civilians. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hartung)**

“...After seven years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) is about to lose its all-Southern African Development Community (SADC) character. It's also about to become quicker in protecting civilians against rebels....”



Elements of the Force Intervention Brigade of MONUSCO give a demonstration.
Source: MONUSCO Photos/Wikimedia, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=32469244>, Attribution: CC 2.0



Continued: DRC: SADC Agrees to Reconfigure UN Force Intervention Brigade

Source: Peter Fabricius, “Reinventing the Force Intervention Brigade,” *Institute for Security Studies*, 04 December 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/reinventing-the-force-intervention-brigade>

After seven years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) is about to lose its all-Southern African Development Community (SADC) character. It’s also about to become quicker in protecting civilians against rebels.

Composed entirely of SADC troops from South Africa, Tanzania and Malawi, it accomplished its first mission – to defeat the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels who were threatening to take control of eastern DRC – in 2013, with panache.

After that, it was supposed to go after the many other rebel groups in the area. These include the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and more recently the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF)

But the FIB has not managed to neutralise these other forces. Compared to the M23 which was a conventional armed group, the ADF is mobile, operates across a wide expanse and lacks unified command and control. The FIB is not equipped to tackle these kinds of armed groups, which raises questions about its mission in the first place.

The UN has been trying to change the FIB for some time, not least because it is expensive, costing a good part of MONUSCO’s annual US\$1.2 billion budget. ISS Senior Researcher Gustavo de Carvalho says, ‘There has been a lot of pressure for reducing the size of FIB and MONUSCO in general. The UN’s appetite for big missions with large overheads is quite limited at this stage.

‘Many feel that the future of peacekeeping will be composed of smaller missions, lower footprint, and potentially more interactive with regional and national tools. With the peacekeeping budget falling every year, the first place to look for cuts are missions that have been on the ground for long, like MONUSCO.’

Until recently, SADC had been strongly resisting UN pressure to cut down on the FIB, include non-SADC elements and reorient its mission. This stance, however, was becoming untenable, not least because it seemed SADC was insisting on the FIB remaining in effect a regional force under a UN mandate and budget.

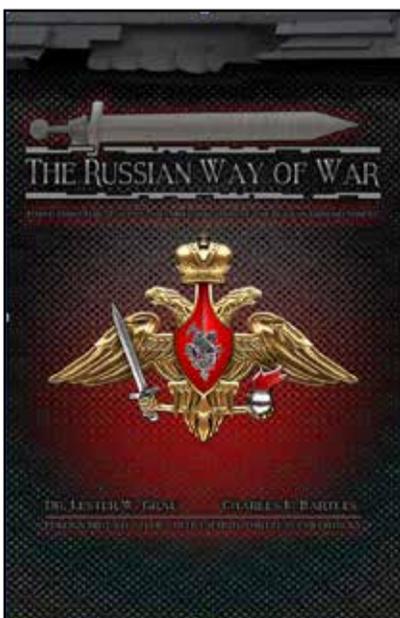
At an extraordinary summit of its security organ in Gaborone on 27 November, SADC ‘accepted the proposal by the United Nations to realign the current [FIB] troops’ strength to create the headroom for the Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs), and generate two QRFs from the SADC Troops Contributing Countries.’

A SADC defence official told Daily Maverick that ‘FIB remains on the ground but reconfigured with the introduction of the Quick Reaction Forces Concept (with specific equipment, faster and greater mobility capabilities) to respond to the type of warfare in the theatre of operations.’

In these provinces though, ‘protection through projection’ would be key to MONUSCO’s efforts to provide physical protection. ‘As troop levels are reduced progressively, the mobility and flexibility of the remaining forces will need to be enhanced to ensure effective coverage,’ Guterres added. It seems this is what the reconfiguration of the FIB is aimed at.

In these provinces though, ‘protection through projection’ would be key to MONUSCO’s efforts to provide physical protection. ‘As troop levels are reduced progressively, the mobility and flexibility of the remaining forces will need to be enhanced to ensure effective coverage,’ Guterres added. It seems this is what the reconfiguration of the FIB is aimed at.

This could mean FIB and QRFs will continue with the same offensive mandate, only more agilely. Or it could mean the QRFs at least will acquire a different mandate, not to initiate military action against armed rebels like the ADF, but to respond quickly when they attack civilians.



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES

At any given time, assessments of the Russian Armed Forces vary between the idea of an incompetent and corrupt conscript army manning decrepit Soviet equipment and relying solely on brute force, to the idea of an elite military filled with Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were the “polite people” or “little green men” seen on the streets in Crimea. This book will attempt to split the difference between these radically different ideas by shedding some light on what the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

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South African Officer Completes Pakistani ‘Commando’ Course

OE Watch Commentary: A South African infantry officer completed an “advanced commando course” in Pakistan in early December 2020. The training program is the most recent in a series of moves by the two countries to strengthen security ties. The first accompanying article from *DefenceWeb*, a South African security affairs news portal, provides an overview of the training course and contextualizes it within broader South Africa-Pakistan defense ties. The second article, from the same source but published in 2019, provides a more in-depth background on the recent history of security cooperation between the two countries.

The course, according to the first article, included instruction in mountain, snow, and desert warfare; parachute training; “watermanship”; and improvised explosive devices. The training course was conducted in Urdu, the official national language of Pakistan. With no interpreters present, participants “assist[ed] each other in understanding lectures, practical training, and other course components.” The South African officer found the course “strenuous and informative,” but noted the South African uniform and boots were unsuitable for the terrain and weather conditions.

South Africa and Pakistan, the first article explains, enjoy close defense ties. In March 2017, the two countries signed a “government-to-government defense cooperation agreement.” This agreement, according to the second accompanying article, included cooperation in research and development, information and technology sharing, and “co-production/joint ventures.”

Since then, both articles say, there have been numerous visits by high-level South African and Pakistani defense officials to one another’s military facilities and weapons factories. South Africa and Pakistan have also exchanged military students between their respective staff colleges.

Pakistan purchased ammunition from Rheinmetall Denel Munition, an arms company operating in Germany and South Africa, and is looking to acquire more, the second article explains. According to both articles, Pakistan has also expressed interest in other South African military products, including the Umkhonto surface-to-air missile and the T5-52 155 mm self-propelled howitzer.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hartung)**



A truck mounted Umkhonto Ground-based Launcher System.

Source: Flash 285/Wikimedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Umkhonto_gbads1.jpg, Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

“A South African junior infantry officer has the distinction of being the first to attend – and complete – an officer advanced commando course in Pakistan.”



Continued: South African Officer Completes Pakistani 'Commando' Course

Source: "Junior Infantry Officer Is First South African to Complete Pakistani Course," *DefenceWeb*, 10 December 2020. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/junior-infantry-officer-is-first-south-african-to-complete-pakistani-course/>

A South African junior infantry officer has the distinction of being the first to attend – and complete – an officer advanced commando course in Pakistan.

Modules those on the course underwent and were successful in included improvised explosive devices (IEDs); anti-terrorist training and mountain craft; advanced navigation; minor tactics and survival; watermanship; mountain and snow warfare; parachute training; desert warfare and a combined exercise.

The course was presented in Urdu with no interpreters which saw those on course assisting each other in understanding lectures, practical training and other course components.

Providing feedback to the Infantry School Command Council, Matsho said the course was both strenuous and informative and he acquired new skills.

On arrival in Pakistan one of Matsho's first observations regarded the South African uniform and boots as being unsuitable for terrain, weather and training.

South Africa and Pakistan enjoy close defence ties, having signed a government-to-government defence co-operation agreement which includes industrial co-operation in March 2017.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed by defence minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula in Pakistan on the first official visit by a South African Minister of Defence and Military Veterans in democratic South Africa. She was preceded by General Solly Shoke, Chief of the South African National Defence Force, who visited various Pakistani military headquarters and facilities.

South African delegations visited Pakistan on numerous occasions and Pakistani delegations have come to South Africa – Pakistani naval vessels also visited

The Pakistani military sent students to the Army College in South Africa while Pakistan accepted South African officers for staff college training.

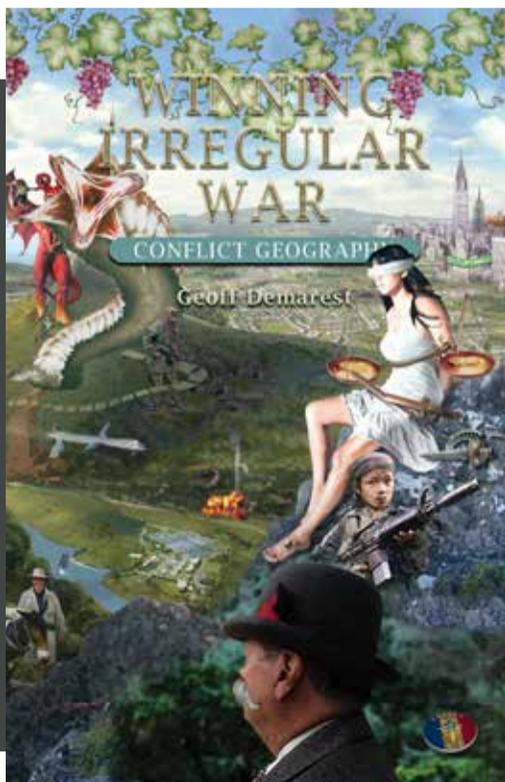
Source: "Pakistan Air Force Chief Visits South Africa," *DefenceWeb*, 28 October 2019. <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/aerospace/aerospace-aerospace/pakistan-air-force-chief-visits-south-africa/>

Co-operation in research and development, technology transfer and co-production/joint ventures for both the public and private sectors were included in the memorandum of understanding.

Pakistan has expressed interest in South African military equipment. In 2016, the Pakistan Navy requested more information on the Denel Dynamics Umkhonto surface-to-air missile (SAM) and that same year Denel demonstrated its T5-52 self-propelled howitzer to the Pakistani military.

Pakistan has procured ammunition from Rheinmetall Denel Munition and is looking to acquire more.

In March last year, General Solly Shoke, Chief of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), visited Air Headquarters, Naval Headquarters and the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) in Pakistan. Shoke also visited Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) on 24 March.



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

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

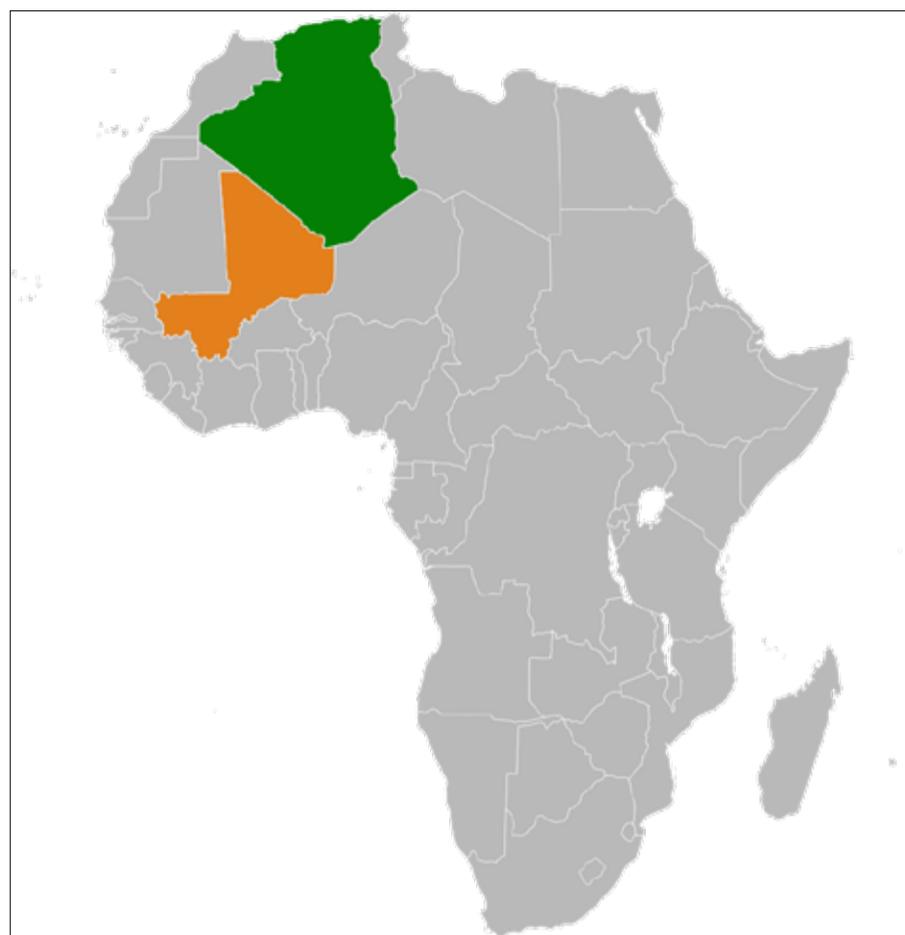


Algeria Against Mali's Exchange of Jihadists for Prisoners

OE Watch Commentary: On 18 November, *observalgerie.com*, which considers itself the essential source of information on Algeria and the broader Maghreb region, published the excerpted French language article. It examined how Algeria opposed Mali's release of nearly 200 jihadists from prison in a hostage deal. In exchange for Mali's release of the jihadists, al-Qaeda's Malian affiliate released from captivity a prominent Malian politician, an elder French female aid worker, and one Italian priest and one Italian tourist.

The article noted that Algeria believes these deals are counter-productive because they allow money and other benefits to be provided to jihadist groups and contravene UN resolutions that criminalize the payment of ransoms to outlawed groups. The article further emphasizes that Algeria's frustration with the hostage deal is particularly acute because Algerian jihadists were among those released from Malian custody. Two of those Algerians, El Hocine Ould Amar Ould Maghnia and Mustapha Derrar, were subsequently arrested in Algerian border towns. These two cases indicate that after Algeria succeeded in expelling al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) almost completely from Algerian territory, now there may be Algerian jihadists returning to the country. Algeria's Ministry of National Defense (MDN), which apprehended these two Algerian jihadists at the border, has accordingly condemned the hostage release. The article noted the MDN was forced to elevate its counter-terrorism awareness as a result of the hostage deal.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)



Algeria Mali Locator.

Source: PlanespotterA320, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Algeria_Mali_Locator.png, Attribution: CC x 2.0

“These unacceptable practices are contrary to the resolutions of the United Nations criminalizing the payment of ransoms to terrorist groups, and hamper efforts to fight terrorism and deplete sources of funding.”

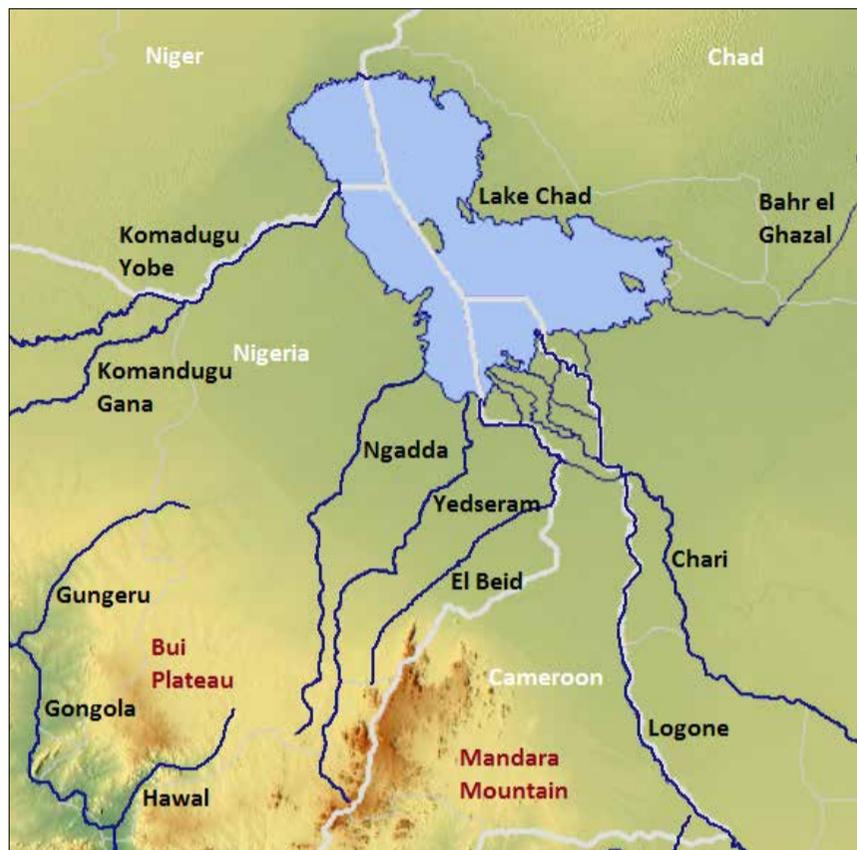
Source: “Arrestation d’un autre terroriste libéré au Mali (Arrest of Another Terrorist Liberated in Mali),” *observalgerie.com*, 18 November 2020. <https://www.observalgerie.com/algerie-arrestation-dun-autre-terroriste-libere-au-mali/2020/>

Another terrorist recently released in Mali was arrested in Algeria, said the Algerian Ministry of National Defense (MDN). El Hocine Ould Amar Ould Maghnia was arrested in Tamanrasset. The MDN underscores that this terrorist “is among those who benefited from the agreement which led, after negotiations led by foreign parties, to the release by the Malian authorities of more than 200 terrorists last October in addition to the payment of a large ransom for the benefit of terrorist groups, in exchange for the release of three hostages. For the MDN, this arrest “reveals, on another level, these dubious practices, contrary to UN resolutions that criminalize the payment of ransoms to terrorist groups.”

A second jihadist arrested was the second jihadist freed in Mali and arrested in Algeria within days. In October, the man named Mustapha Derrar, who joined the armed groups in 2012, was released by the French army before being apprehended in Tlemcen. These unacceptable practices are contrary to the resolutions of the United Nations criminalizing the payment of ransoms to terrorist groups, and hamper efforts to fight terrorism and deplete sources of funding,” denounced the Algerian MDN in a statement made public on October 28.



Boko Haram's Aquatic Attacks in Lake Chad



Lake Chad OSM.

Source: Hans Braxmeier, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lake_Chad_OSM.png, Attribution: CC x 2.0

OE Watch Commentary: Jihadist groups around the world have become known for their flashy propaganda videos and often spectacular attacks that result in significant numbers of casualties. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also conquered territory in Iraq and Syria, which led to its controlling lands in the heart of the Middle East. However, the excerpted French-language article from 26 November published by *Radio France Internationale*, which covers political affairs in France and Francophone countries, discussed ISIS' Nigerian affiliate's latest attacks. The affiliate, which calls itself Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), but is commonly known as "Boko Haram," is now conducting operations that are essentially naval in nature.

According to the article, an explosion killed several Chadian soldiers who were riding on a motorized patrol canoe in Lake Chad. The article mentions the type of marshland in which boat was maneuvering, including papyrus reeds along the lake's shorelines. This allowed ISWAP to place and hide an improvised explosive device (IED) in that area that detonated once the canoe passed by it. The article noted that the Chadian army evacuated 16 injured soldiers for medical treatment and attributed the attack, which killed four soldiers, to Boko Haram. The Chadian army also noted that this was the first time the jihadists had ever employed the tactic of concealing an explosive device in water and adapting its tactical capabilities to an aquatic environment.

The article concludes by recognizing that ISIS has transferred tactics from Syria and Iraq to ISWAP on the shores of Lake Chad. However, this particular attack must have been primarily homegrown. Although ISIS could have conveyed knowledge about crafting IEDs to ISWAP, the type of terrain on Lake Chad is unlike that of Syria and Iraq. Therefore, local knowledge and surveillance aided ISWAP in carrying out the attack against Chadian soldiers. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“It is indeed the first time that the Islamists have planted a bomb in an aquatic environment.”

Source: “Tchad: des jihadistes attaquent pour la première fois une pirogue (Chad: jihadists attack a canoe for the first time),” *rfi.fr*, 26 November 2020. <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20201125-tchad-des-jihadistes-attaquent-pour-la-premi%C3%A8re-fois-une-pirogue>

Ngouboua sector on the northern shores of Lake Chad, when it was destroyed by an explosion caused by a homemade bomb. The army deplores four dead in its ranks and 16 seriously injured who were evacuated by helicopter to the capital for treatment.

Authorities attribute the blast to Boko Haram and say the method, an explosive device concealed in water, is new. It is indeed the first time that the Islamists have planted a bomb in an aquatic environment.

In recent years, former ISIS fighters from Syria have taught combat skills and mentored the fighters of this branch of Boko Haram based on the northern shore of Lake Chad.



Switzerland Adopts “Military Peace Promotion” in Africa



ICRC president Peter Maurer in Syria.

Source: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from Switzerland, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ICRC_president_Peter_Maurer_in_Syria_\(7930973296\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ICRC_president_Peter_Maurer_in_Syria_(7930973296).jpg), Attribution: CC x 2.0

OE Watch Commentary: Switzerland is internationally renowned for its role in mediation, hosting headquarters of international humanitarian organizations, and its non-militaristic approach to foreign policy. However, the 26 November French-language article for *tchadinfos.com*, which presents news from Chad, discussed a new Swiss approach to foreign affairs in Africa. According to the article, Switzerland decided to renew its commitment to and prioritize promoting military peace in Africa at a 25 November meeting of the Swiss Federal Council. This is the country’s highest executive authority.

The article notes the Swiss Federal Council is embarking on a “military peace promotion” initiative in Africa. Although this concept is not spelled out in detail in the article, it involves reconnaissance missions, including using drones and other unspecific advanced technologies. The reason for using these tactics, alongside conventional mediation and hostage negotiation efforts, is the changing international situation. The Swiss, for example, often deal with hostile non-state actors, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria and Chad, and may benefit from using drones to locate and monitor hostages held by parties with whom the Swiss are negotiating.

The decision to adopt the new policy was taken after consultation with Swiss Federal Department of Defense experts. Moreover, to implement the policy, the article notes the Swiss will need to recruit new specialists who will have to plan military careers related to the military peace promotion policy. Lastly, the article indicates this policy is still in its early phases and one of next steps will be planning its first implementation in Africa and the military means and capabilities that will be required for that mission. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The conditions of Switzerland’s commitments require adaptation to the demands for military peace promotion work.”

Source: “l’Afrique sera au centre des engagements de la Suisse dans la promotion de la paix à l’avenir (Africa will be at the center of Switzerland’s commitments to promote peace in the future).” *tchadinfos.com*, 26 November 2020. <https://tchadinfos.com/politique/international-lafrique-sera-au-centre-des-engagements-de-la-suisse-dans-la-promotion-de-la-paix-a-lavenir/>

Switzerland intends to put Africa at the center of its commitments for the future. It wants to reorient and strengthen its military peace promotion initiatives. This is what emerged from the meeting of the Swiss Federal Council held today, November 25. Indeed, it will be a matter of giving “even more attention to contributing high value to commitments of military peace promotion” through the Federal Department of Defense (DDPS). This will be done by emphasizing reconnaissance missions using advanced technologies and drones.

This decision appeared in a report drawn up by experts from DDPS, who outlined Switzerland’s commitment to military peace promotion. Apart from the geographical plans for interventions and the military means and capabilities proposed, their report recommends recruiting enough specialists who will plan their specified military careers. According to DDPS experts, the international situation has changed dramatically for several years. Thus, the conditions of Switzerland’s commitments require adaptation to the demands for military peace promotion work.



Venezuela and Iran Expand Military Ties

OE Watch Commentary: Venezuela's de facto President Nicolás Maduro said recently that buying missiles from Iran would be "a good idea." This follows six months of growing Iran-Venezuela activity, including oil shipping, gold trading, and military-to-military ties. The first article, from the *PanAm Post*, explains that Iran has likely sent members of its Quds Force, a paramilitary unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, to Venezuela on recent flights. The author speculates that the main purpose for the presence of the Quds Force in Venezuela would be to deter outside intervention and shore up Maduro's efforts to remain in power. The Quds Force would add to the presence of Russia and Cuba in Venezuela, the author notes. The second source, from *LaTercera*, speculates that Iran has also sent weapons, either with the Quds Force or on resumed flights of sanctioned airline Mahan Air. This potentially includes technology to help Venezuela produce weapons, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Both articles illustrate Iran's burgeoning arms sales following the expiration of a UN arms embargo on Iran. **End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)**



President Rouhani in meeting with Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Rouhani_in_meeting_with_Venezuelan_President_Nicol%C3%A1s_Maduro_02.jpg
Attribution: Wikimedia Commons

“In addition to military officials from Tehran, who support Maduro, the alliance involves the shipment of arms and the deployment of ‘paramilitary operations’ in the country under the control of Chavismo.”

Source: “EEUU: Maduro importa terroristas iraníes para proteger su régimen (US: Maduro imports Iranian terrorists to protect regime),” *PanAm Post*, 3 December 2020. <https://panampost.com/gabriela-moreno/2020/12/03/eeuu-maduro-importa-terroristas-iranies-para-proteger-su-regimen/>

“Cuban and Russian intelligence is no longer sufficient to protect dictator Nicolás Maduro, who added the most subversive side of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard, the Quds Force, to the security of his regime... In addition to military officials from Tehran, who support Maduro, the alliance involves the shipment of arms and the deployment of ‘paramilitary operations’ in the country under the control of Chavismo. This section of the Iranian military unit adds to the thousands of Cubans in the service of Maduro and these, together with the Russians, are responsible for keeping Maduro’s army sufficiently prepared.”

Source: “Combatientes y armas iraníes refuerzan al gobierno de Maduro (Iranian fighters and weapons strengthen Maduro’s government),” *LaTercera*, 4 December 2020. <https://www.latercera.com/mundo/noticia/combatientes-y-armas-iranies-refuerzan-al-gobierno-de-maduro/PS6RP6TJQBHMTEQVLHXHIDE4BI/>

The United States...has made considerable effort to try to distinguish between humanitarian cargo and shipments that go against international sanctions aimed at undermining Maduro’s grip on power...Iran and Venezuela have long shared diplomatic ties, but the Trump administration’s economic sanctions against the two countries prompted them to strengthen relations.



Latin America's Cartels Embrace Social Media to Sell Drugs and Narco Culture

OE Watch Commentary: During the COVID-19 pandemic, cartels have firmed up their presence on social media platforms. Even though the cartel's use of social media runs the risk of capture, groups throughout Latin America are posting to social media sites like TikTok and Facebook with increasing frequency. *El Tiempo* notes that throughout the hemisphere, these accounts are some of the most followed and the posts are some of the most consumed pieces on social media. Some of the videos, the author notes, were accompanied with the name "Mexico check," creating the appearance that narco culture was part of the essence of being Mexican. An article from *Diario Valor* states that Mexican law enforcement has tried to remove much of this content because it is illegal, but social media algorithms continue to suggest "narco videos" for users' feeds. According to the article, social media sites such as TikTok and Facebook have replaced the darknet as a leading platform for selling illicit drugs. After connecting on TikTok or Facebook, sellers and buyers link up on encrypted messaging applications such as Telegram, Signal, or WhatsApp. Both articles demonstrate how social media has the potential to "normalize" cartel lifestyle and attract younger recruits to join criminal groups throughout Latin America.

End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)



TikTok.

Source: Solen Feyiss via Wikimedia Commons, <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e6/TikTok.jpg>, CC BY-SA 2.0, Public Domain

“With Mexico poised to break murder records again this year, organized crime experts say that Cartel TikTok is just the latest propaganda campaign designed to mask the bloodbath and use the promise of infinite wealth to attract essential young recruits.”

Source: “TikTok, Plataforma para el ‘Narcomarketing’ (TikTok, Platform for Narco-marketing),” *Diario Valor*, 2 December 2020. <https://diariovalor.com/tiktok-plataforma-para-el-narcomarketing-t202012021059.html>

Despite law enforcement's best efforts to delete narco content, it is swarming social media networks as cartels become more adept at using various platforms.

With Mexico poised to break murder records again this year, organized crime experts say that Cartel TikTok is just the latest propaganda campaign designed to mask the bloodbath and use the promise of infinite wealth to attract essential young recruits...The algorithm began offering them a flood of clips that appeared to come from drug trafficking groups in Mexico... At first the videos were crude and violent: images of beheadings and torture...designed to instill fear in rival gangs and show the cruelty faced by government forces, but as digital platforms evolved, the cartels spread more sophisticated content.

Source: “Los descarados videos de narcos mexicanos que se viralizan en TikTok (The Shameless videos of Mexican narcos that go viral on TikTok),” *El Tiempo*, 4 December 2020. <https://www.eltiempo.com/cultura/gente/videos-de-narcos-y-carteles-mexicanos-mostrando-lujos-en-tiktok-552630>

Cartels are using savvy social media posts to promote the dangerous idea of cultural essentialism, i.e., that being a narco is tantamount to being Mexican, for recruitment purposes.

Some of the videos have been uploaded under the name ‘Mexico check,’ a kind of challenge in which social media users show certain images that seek to prove their ‘Mexicanness,’ a concept that for the authors of the videos is related to the posters...When inquiring about TikTok's policies to control this type of content, many of which incite violence, spokespersons assured that they were ‘committed to working with law enforcement to combat organized criminal activity.’ For this reason, the spokespersons added, they eliminate the contents and accounts that ‘promote illegal activity.’ However, TikTok's algorithm continues to recommend some of the ‘narcovideos’ in the ‘feed’...of the users because it has detected that some are potentially viral.



Four-Years of Colombia's Power-Sharing Agreement

OE Watch Commentary: Four years ago this November, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia achieved a power-sharing agreement with the administration of Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos. After signing the accord in September 2016, President Santos pushed the agreement over the finish line in spite of a national plebiscite that had rejected the accords. The results after four years have hardly won universal approval, as the first reference, an opinion from Senator Maria Fernanda Cabal attests. She is a well-known anti-Communist and partisan of former President Alvaro Uribe, and her expression of dismay regarding the results of the accords is not atypical. The second accompanying reference, by another widely published anti-Communist writer, covers a related topic, an effect the accords have had on the border region between Colombia and Venezuela. That area has been all but lost to smuggling-related lawlessness, and according to the author, is currently the greatest threat to regional security. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the greatest blow to democracy in Colombian memory...”



Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos signs power-sharing agreement with the FARC, September 2016.

Source: [https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jefa_de_Estado_participa_en_ceremonia_de_la_Firma_de_la_Paz_entre_el_Gobierno_de_Colombia_y_las_FARC_E.P._\(29953487045\).jpg](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jefa_de_Estado_participa_en_ceremonia_de_la_Firma_de_la_Paz_entre_el_Gobierno_de_Colombia_y_las_FARC_E.P._(29953487045).jpg), Attribution: CA 2.0 Generic

Source: María Fernanda Cabal, “El aniversario del conejo (Anniversary of the Rabbit Trick),” *María Fernanda Cabal*, 2 December 2020. <http://mariafernandacabal.com/el-aniversario-del-conejo/>

Last week another anniversary passed of the greatest blow to democracy in Colombian memory: Juan Manuel Santos, in his megalomania, signed the Peace Accord with the FARC in Bogota's Colón Theater. The then executive-- thanks to Odebrecht money -- in one of his so many dirty plays, ridiculed the results of the plebiscite that we had won two months earlier... To not acknowledge the will of the people who said “NO” to the implementation of a document full of lies was the first step toward arriving at a scene dominated by terrorist pretensions, drug traffickers and child killers who today enjoy total impunity and parade around in the Congress of the Republic claiming the “truth”... Indisputably, the outcome has been completely negative for the country... This coming 31 December, the period of time for the FARC to complete its part of the agreement ends; we already know that it will not happen...

Source: John Marulanda, “El sumidero fronterizo colombo-venezolano (The Colombo-Venezuelan border sewer),” *La Linterna Azul*, 9 December 2020. <http://www.lalinternaazul.info/2020/12/10/vigia-el-sumidero-fronterizo/>

The Colombo-Venezuelan border area is sewer beyond the effective control of any authority, abandoned to its own dynamic, with an activated tick-tock that will likely carry us to the worst headache in Colombo-Venezuelan history... What is happening currently in the border areas of Armenia-Azerbaijan, India-China and Siria-Irak pale in comparison to what is developing in the Colombo-Venezuelan... There is no power -- civil, military or police -- that exercises true border authority. The illegal traffic[ing] of persons, weapons, food, cattle, gasoline, sex, and of Christmas toys, is everyday... Out of all this pestilence comes a great part of the resources that sustain the regime in Miraflores [Caracas] and the money that is strengthening the international cartels of the FARC and the ELN, defended by the Communist congressional caucus in Bogota... It is the most critical and imminent threat to regional security and every day draws a comparative in Latin America to the conflict in Syria.



Colombian Military Doctrine Change

OE Watch Commentary: An unusually public retirement/resignation of an Army Colonel in Colombia demonstrates the relationship between politics and military doctrine. Colonel Pedro Rojas is retiring from active service. He evidently made a public display of the event, making open accusations of incompetence against the senior leadership of the army. As the first reference from a legacy large-circulation newspaper reports, Colonel Rojas has been the head of the Colombian Army's Center for Doctrine since 2011, not long after Manuel Santos assumed the presidency. His name is associated closely with the term *Damasco* (Damascus), which to some has become synonymous with what has been the army's official military doctrine. Damascus reflected President Santos's move to accommodate and come to a power-sharing agreement with the FARC. The Army was to stop referring to the FARC as the enemy, and offensive operations were greatly proscribed. Signed in 2016, many Colombians feel the agreement between the FARC and the government has borne bitter fruit.

The second accompanying article by a generally pro-military established pundit, exemplifies that attitude toward the agreement and goes a long way to explaining why Damascus, or at least the name, is being erased just as its main military intellectual proponent leaves the service. The current Commander of the Colombian Army, General Eduardo Enrique Zapateiro Altamiranda, in obedience to policy changes brought in by President Iván Duque, is apparently guiding army doctrine back away from what Colonel Rojas thought Damascus meant. According to the second reference, from now on, the army's military doctrine is to be called Military Doctrine of the Army, and not referred to as Damascus. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**



Major General Eduardo Enrique Zapateiro Altamiranda,
Commander of the National Army of Colombia.
Source: Carlos Arturo Acosta, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MG_Eduardo_Zapateiro_Altamiranda.png, Attribution: CCA 4.0 International

“...the doctrine would cease to be called Damascus and would again be called Military Doctrine of the Army...”

Source: “Olga Patricia Rendón M., “La tormenta que se desató en el Ejército por Damasco (The storm that Damascus unleashed in the Army),” *El Colombiano*, 3 December 2020. <https://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/la-tormenta-que-se-desato-en-el-ejercito-por-damasco-NN14192258>

Colonel Rojas explained to El Colombiano that the Damascus Doctrine began to form in 2011, when tactical conditions in the Army had to change, given that it no longer faced only the armed confrontation but also problems such as drug trafficking and the illegal exploitation of mineral deposits... In fact, he added, it is as if General Zapateiro wanted to erase Damascus with a stroke of the pen, given that in various Army chat rooms images are going around of a worker taking the Damascus sign down from a café at the Center for Military Doctrine. El Colombiano checked this version of things with senior Army officials, who confirmed that, from now on, the doctrine would cease to be called Damascus and would again be called Military Doctrine of the Army.

“...As in Venezuela, military Doctrine completed the political objectives of the moment...”

Source: John Marulanda, “Política y doctrina militar (Politics and Military Doctrine),” *Periódico Debate*, 3 December 2020. <http://www.periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/28248-politica-y-doctrina-militar>

...a policy of the current Venezuelan state contemplates, among other principles, that “the citizen who does not vote, does not eat.” The military doctrine, as a consequence, is designing Plans for electoral-alimentary security. And that is not a bad joke, it is how socialism works...

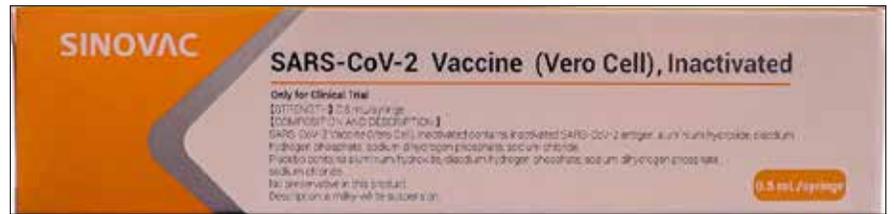
In Colombia the Damascus doctrine is a partial but direct product of the politics of the Santos administration and its shameful surrender to the leftist geopolitical interests of Cuba, Venezuela and the FARC. Military officers bought the idea of a postconflict. They had reason to believe it, since they appeared to have beaten the FARC narco-terrorists. Stop the bombing, end the offensive that had the delinquents on their death bed, to give a little oxygen in order to “not suffocate peace.” The Cuban military truce, with the men in uniform put into a reflective doctrinal trance in order to, more than anything, was to erase the concept of “internal enemy” and prefigure complicated settings to facilitate the politicization of drug trafficking. As in Venezuela, military Doctrine completed the political objectives of the moment. The results are now visible...

The country is now the world's number one producer of cocaine; illicit cultivation does not cease; the border regions with Panama, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela are being controlled by narco-terrorists: the narco-cartels of the ELN, EPL, FARC -- with congressmen included -- and the pureblood narcotics traffickers grow unstoppable...



China's Vaccine Diplomacy in Latin America

OE Watch Commentary: In the early days of the pandemic, there was much talk of China's COVID-19 diplomacy, which entailed sending personal protective gear and sharing information with various countries. More recently, with the development of several vaccines of its own (currently in efficacy trials), it appears that China has shifted to vaccine diplomacy and business. The accompanying passages from Latin American and Chinese sources discuss how Chinese vaccine makers have secured advance purchase agreements from Brazil and Mexico (as well as Chile, Peru, and others) by conducting efficacy trials there.



Sinovac COVID-19 vaccine.

Source: Governo do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State Government) via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:SINO VAC_COVID-19_vaccine.jpg, Attribution: CC BY 2.0

The first passage is from *Agencia Brazil*, Brazil's national public news agency run by the government. It reports that the São Paulo state government forged a partnership with Chinese vaccine maker Sinovac via the Butantan Institute, a major vaccine manufacturer in São Paulo. Based on the partnership, in July, Brazil agreed to host phase three of the efficacy trials of Sinovac's CoronaVac vaccine. In addition, according to the passage, on 9 December, the Butantan Institute started manufacturing CoronaVac, in partnership with the Chinese company. Eventually, Sinovac may transfer its technology to the institute such that Brazil could augment the supply by making the vaccine itself.

The passage notes that if the vaccine proves to be efficient, the government of São Paulo will request approval for widespread use in Brazil. According to the passage, the São Paulo state government has already received 120,000 ready-to-use doses and a million doses to be packaged by the Butantan Institute. Under a deal signed in late September, the local government committed \$90 million to Sinovac for 46 million doses of CoronaVac, 6 million of which will come ready-to-use. The second passage, from China's *Global Times*, a Chinese newspaper run the Chinese Communist Party, discusses a similar process with Mexico. In this case, Chinese pharmaceutical company CanSinoBIO has initiated the third phase of the clinical trial for its COVID-19 vaccine it developed in Mexico and received an advance purchase order "to supply 35 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the Mexicans."

China's vaccine diplomacy in Latin America appears to be part of a broader trend. A similar effort is underway in the Middle East as well, where Turkey, the UAE, Jordan, Egypt and Bahrain have been working with Chinese vaccine makers on efficacy trials and advance purchase agreements. With these efforts, China is looking to profit by supplying the much-needed vaccine, while also eyeing hegemonic influence in the bioeconomy and biotechnology fields within the next decade. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“In October, CanSinoBIO ... signed an advance purchase agreement with Mexico’s government to supply 35 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the Mexicans...”

Source: “Brazilian Institute to Start Production of Vaccine CoronaVac,” *Agencia Brazil*, 11 December 2020. <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:hnRmu43r5eYJ:https://agenciabrasil.etc.com.br/en/saude/noticia/2020-12/brazilian-institute-start-production-vaccine-coronavac+&cd=17&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

The Butantan Institute, a Brazilian biological research center, has started manufacturing CoronaVac, a vaccine against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), still in its testing phase. Production will be conducted in partnership with Chinese pharmaceutical company Sinovac. According to São Paulo state Governor João Doria, production kicked off December 9.

The São Paulo state government has forged a partnership with Chinese pharmaceutical company CoronaVac by means of the Butantan Institute. The agreement has started brought over doses of the vaccine. The deal also includes transfer of technology to Butantan.

Phase 1 and 2 studies on the vaccine, conducted in China, have demonstrated it is safe, i.e. it caused no severe collateral effects. Tests carried out with volunteers in Brazil confirmed its safety.

If the vaccine is indeed proved to be efficient, the state government of São Paulo will request approval for registration at the country's national sanitary regulator Anvisa, which should then allow its use in Brazilian territory.

The São Paulo state government has received from Sinovac 120 thousand ready-for-use doses and a million doses to be packaged by the Butantan Institute. Under the terms signed late in September with Sinovac, Butantan will receive 46 million doses of CoronaVac, 6 million of which are to come already prepared for use.

Source: “China’s CanSino launches Phase III clinical trial of COVID-19 vaccine in Mexico, 1st group gets vaccinated,” *Global Times*, 7 November 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1206031.shtml>

CanSinoBIO, the Chinese pharmaceutical company, told the Global Times on Saturday that it has initiated the Phase III clinical trial for a recombinant COVID-19 vaccine (Ad5-nCoV) it developed in Mexico.

The study was approved by the Mexican authority in October. The trial aims to recruit a total number of 15,000 subjects to further demonstrate the efficacy of the candidate.

In October, CanSinoBIO also signed an advance purchase agreement with Mexico’s government to supply 35 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the Mexicans in need.



China and Argentina Advance Cooperation on Rail Infrastructure

OE Watch Commentary: According to Chinese state-run *China.org.cn*, China and Argentina are advancing their bilateral cooperation by agreeing on new investments in rail infrastructure. As the accompanying passage reports, on 11 December, China and Argentina signed four agreements on the “rehabilitation and reactivation of the main freight railways that connect the northwest, west, and south of Argentina.” As the passage points out, the agreements are worth a total of \$4.65 billion and follow previous projects already underway in Argentina. The two countries had agreed to upgrade their relationship to a “comprehensive partnership” in 2014. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“China and Argentina have decided to take a further step in bilateral cooperation after agreeing on new investment in rail infrastructure...”



Tren a las nubes (Train to the clouds) in Salta, Argentina, 2008.

Source: Nicolás Mendoza via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Train_to_the_clouds_in_Salta_-_ARGENTINA_-_006.jpg, Attribution: CC BY 2.0

Source: “With new railway agreements, China helps Argentina strengthen connectivity,” *China.org.cn*, 14 December 2020. http://t.m.china.org.cn/convert/c_LyoardZZ.html

China and Argentina have decided to take a further step in bilateral cooperation after agreeing on new investment in rail infrastructure, which is key to Argentina’s goal of achieving long-term economic growth and development.

The two countries signed ... four new agreements on the rehabilitation and reactivation of the main freight railways that connect the northwest, west, and south of Argentina, where agricultural products are plentiful, with the eastern port region, as well as on the incorporation of new electric units to replace the older diesel machines.

The agreements, with a total value of 4.695 billion U.S. dollars, were signed by the Argentine government and Chinese companies, including China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC), China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC), CRRC Corporation Limited and Yutong.... Many of them have projects already underway in Argentina since the two countries agreed to upgrade their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2014.



Brazil Passes New Data Protection Law

OE Watch Commentary: Until recently Brazil was one of the few major economies in the world that lacked specific and comprehensive legislation on data protection and privacy. This changed in September when Brazil's new data protection law went into force. The accompanying passage from *Business News Americas* (a daily online source of business news on Latin America) discusses the opportunities and challenges the new law presents for Brazil.

The law is called the “general framework law on the protection of personal data” (Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados Pessoais or LGPD). As the passage notes, the LGPD creates opportunities for “business and data exchange for private and public companies, and could pave the way for Brazil to join multilateral agencies,” such as the OECD, which require certain legal frameworks to be in place among potential members. The article points out countries like Chile (a member of the OECD since 2010), Colombia (in the process of joining), Argentina and Peru (both have requested membership), have already met the requirement of having a federal data protection law. With the new law, Brazil joins a list of approximately 100 countries that have adequate data protection laws to attract international companies and businesses that require this. Brazil's new law was apparently inspired by Europe's governing laws on the matter, known as General Data Protection Regulation.

In terms of challenges, the article notes that the composition and staffing of the new data protection agency (ANDP) is still undefined and needs to be clarified. The ANDP will be responsible for overseeing the law, which calls for the self-determination of personal data (the notion that the holder of information has control over it). The ANDP will also supervise the appropriate application of the law's provisions and decide penalties in case of non-compliance. It will also have the role of orientating society on the new standards and mediating possible conflicts between companies and clients.

Data governance and data protection laws are becoming increasingly important. As the amount of personal information shared on online, such as on social media platforms, increases exponentially, the way data is collected, stored and shared matters for geopolitical competition. Access to data is important for national security, economic growth, global e-commerce, and innovation (see: “The Geopolitics of Data Governance,” OE Watch, December 2020). **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



EU General Data Protection Regulation (which inspired Brazil's new data protection law).

Source: TheDigitalArtist via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EU_gdpr.jpg
Attribution: CC0 (Public Domain)

“Not having a [data protection] authority is very bad for the market.”

“For the country's ambitions to be part of multilateral organizations such as the OECD, for example, which require certain legal frameworks to be in place among potential members, having the LGPD is a must.”



Continued: Brazil Passes New Data Protection Law

Source: “New data protection law creates challenges and opportunities for Brazil,” *Business News Americas*, 28 September 2020. <https://www.bnamericas.com/en/features/new-data-protection-law-creates-challenges-and-opportunities-for-brazil>

Brazil’s new general framework law on the protection of personal data, or LGPD, creates new opportunities for business and data exchange for private and public companies, and could pave the way for Brazil to join multilateral agencies, but the failure to put the overseeing agency into action could undermine these positives.

The law went into force on September 18, after originally being passed by congress in 2018, but several important issues still remain to be defined, particularly the composition and staffing of the new data protection agency, ANPD.

The ANPD will be responsible for overseeing the law, which bolsters the concept of self-determination of personal data (the notion that the holder of information has control over it), supervising appropriate application of its provisions and defining possible penalties in case of non-compliance. It will also have the role of orientating society on the new standards and mediating in possible conflicts between companies and clients.

Without a centralized agency in place to ensure compliance, experts and analysts highlight the risk of legal uncertainty, as different bodies – such as the public prosecutor’s office, the consumer secretariat of the justice ministry or consumer protection entities – could begin to apply the legislation according to their own interpretations and based on different criteria.

“Not having an authority is very bad for the market. When there’s an authority concentrating oversight, companies don’t need to submit to the decentralized oversight of other agencies. If we consider all the Procons [consumer protection agencies], there are around 1,000 of them spread across the country’s states that could assume this supervisory role while the ANPD has not been established,” Samara Schuch, partner director at KPMG and expert on the topic, told BNamericas.

Furthermore, there are about 40 laws in Brazil that directly or indirectly address the data protection issue and which could also be invoked, confusing matters, since the ANPD is not yet in operation.

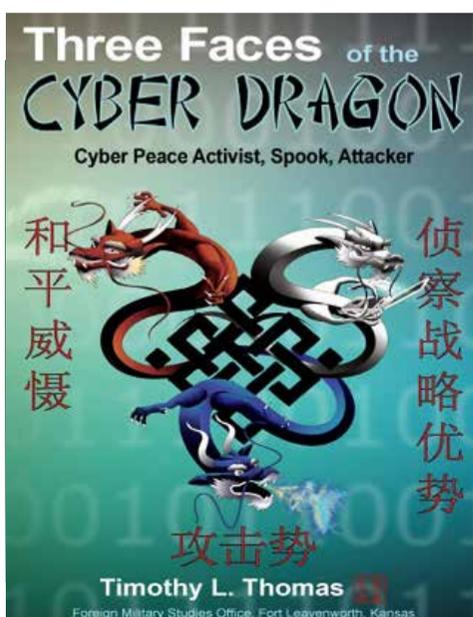
INTERNATIONAL MARKET

On the other hand, Brazil now joins a select club. For the country’s ambitions to be part of multilateral organizations such as the OECD, for example, which require certain legal frameworks to be in place among potential members, having the LGPD is a must.

The country was one of the few major economies in the world that did not yet have specific and comprehensive legislation on data protection and privacy. It should be noted that the LGPD was openly inspired by the GDPR legislation in Europe.

In South America, countries like Chile (a member of the OECD since 2010), Colombia (in the process of joining), Argentina and Peru (both have requested membership) have already met the requirement of having a federal data protection law.

Sergio Maia, Brazil manager of regulatory affairs at satellite firm Hughes, notes that the enactment of the LGPD puts Brazil on a list of more than 100 countries that may be considered to have adequate protection of privacy and use of data.



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>