

Foreign Military Studies Office

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Descriptions of Russian Military Modernization in 2021

OE Watch Commentary: At the end of the year, the Russian mass media often runs stories about the military modernization accomplishments of the past year and plans for the future year. The following articles from Russian media are in line with this theme. They describe different aspects of military modernization planned for 2021 and beyond. The accompanying excerpted article from the government-run *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* describes the modernization of Russia's nuclear triad (Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN), ballistic missile submarines, and long-range aviation. According to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, the percentage of the nuclear triad's modern equipment will increase from 86 to 88 percent. (In Russian military parlance, the term 'modern' typically means equipment procured after the collapse of the Soviet Union.) The accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, features an interview of Russian Federation Deputy Defense Minister, Colonel General Aleksey Krivoruchko. General Krivoruchko explains the growing role of UAVs in the Russian Armed Forces and how Russia is now planning to test its first large strike UAVs in 2021. The accompanying excerpted article from *RIA Novosti Online*, another state-owned domestic news outlet, outlines some of Russia's more ambitious, long-term modernization efforts. These efforts include the advanced long-range interception aviation system (PAK DP) [перспективный авиационный комплекс дальнего перехвата ПАК ДП] aimed to replace the MiG-31 high-speed intercept aircraft and the advanced long-range aviation system (PAK DA) [перспективный авиационный комплекс дальней авиации (ПАК ДА)], which is designed to replace the Tu-95, Tu-160, and Tu-22M3 strategic bombers. More details regarding these aspects of Russian military modernization are in the excerpts below and help paint some of the picture of Russia's intent in competition. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Russian Federation Deputy Defense Minister,
Colonel General Aleksey Krivoruchko, Russian
Ministry of Defense.

Source: <https://structure.mil.ru/download/images/upload/2019/Krivoruchko-2-2.jpg>, Attribution: CC BY 4.0

“The rapid rate at which Russia’s army is rearming to new and advanced combat hardware must be maintained in 2021 and in the future. The country’s President has identified this as a key goal and it applies first and foremost to renewing our nuclear triad, where modern weaponry currently accounts for 86 percent of the total. This enables it to guarantee Russia’s security. The plan is to raise that number to 88.3 percent by 12 months from now...”

Source: Yuriy Gavrilov, “Оружие особого назначения (Special-Purpose Weapons),” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online* (government-run news outlet), 28 December 2020. <https://rg.ru/2020/12/28/kak-budet-razvivatsia-v-2021-godu-rossijskaia-iadernaia-triada.html>

The rapid rate at which Russia’s army is rearming to new and advanced combat hardware must be maintained in 2021 and in the future. The country’s President has identified this as a key goal and it applies first and foremost to renewing our nuclear triad, where modern weaponry currently accounts for 86 percent of the total. This enables it to guarantee Russia’s security. The plan is to raise that number to 88.3 percent by 12 months from now...

Thirteen launchers with Yars and Avangard ICBMs will commence combat alert duty with the Strategic Missile Troops. Construction of the infrastructure for these systems will be completed at the missile divisions in Kozel’sk, Yasnyy, Uzhur, Novosibirsk, and Yoshkar-Ola. And a special training ground will be fitted out near the settlement of Severo-Yeniseyskiy in Krasnoyarskiy Krai for flight tests of the brand-new Sarmat missile system. This heavy ICBM is known to be the replacement for the world’s most powerful strategic missile, the RS-20V Voevoda, which the West dubbed the “Satan” back in Soviet times. The Strategic Missile Troops commander, Sergey Karakayev, recently said that work is in hand to prepare the Uzhur division as the lead regiment to rearm to the Sarmat. This strategic system is expected to be delivered for combat alert duty in 2022.

No less ambitious seem the plans to develop Russia’s Pacific aviation and strategic submarine fleet. Here are just two facts supplied by Sergey Shoygu. The first is that the modernized Tu-160 aircraft will begin state tests next year. This is our principal carrier of air-launched nuclear weapons, which is why the military have repeatedly spoken of the need to modernize all the “White Swans” in service with Russia’s Aerospace Forces... The extent to which this has been delivered in the modernized Tu-160 is for the fliers to judge. But what is crystal clear is that they will receive an absolutely new missile platform, in terms of flight performance and effectiveness in combat. As regards the aircraft’s weaponry, it is already able to take part in achieving strategic goals. For example, the Kh-101 cruise missile in its nonnuclear variant proved its exceptional accuracy and firepower in Syria.

The second fact is that in 2021 the Navy will receive two Borey-A class nuclear submarines—the Knyaz Oleg and Generalissimus Suvorov, with Bulava ballistic missiles... They are quieter, more maneuverable, with enhanced capabilities for remaining at depth, and have more modern weapon control systems. Apart from six 533-mm torpedo tubes, these boats are armed with missile torpedoes and an anti-aircraft missile system. But their main strike weapon is the Bulava, of which each boat carries 16. This three-stage solid-fuel missile carries six individually homing warheads, and it can hit the target with a likely deviation of just 120-350 meters from a range of 10,000 kilometers. Considering that this naval missile carries a nuclear warhead, that is not much at all.



Continued: Russian Military Modernization in 2021

Source: Roman Biryulin, “Оружие России опережает время (Russia’s Weapons Are Ahead of Time),” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online* (official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense), 30 December 2020. <http://redstar.ru/oruzhie-rossii-operezhaet-vremya/>

The Army and Navy are being rearmed at rapid rates. Developments of new types of weapons are being conducted and advanced models are being tested. Deputy Defense Minister Aleksey Krivoruchko discusses new Strategic Rocket Forces systems, ships, aircraft, air defense systems, missile and artillery systems, armored combat vehicles, and unmanned aerial vehicles of various designations... About this, and also about other successes in the spheres of the improvement of the domestic weapon system in the year that is coming to an end and the plans for the future.

The development of robot complexes and equipping the troops with them, including complexes with unmanned aerial vehicles, is a priority task of the Russian Federation Armed Forces force structure and development. To what extent has the functionality of UAVs been expanded?

We are completing the development of complexes with multifunction unmanned aerial vehicles of various classes, which are capable of accomplishing missions in the composition of groups or “swarms” in coordination with manned aircraft, and also jointly with ground and naval robot complexes, to increase our troops’ capabilities to accomplish their assigned missions.

This first and foremost concerns the use of small manned aerial vehicles. The employment of those UAVs has firmly become customary and has been transformed into an everyday event today. Military formations in all of the Russian Army’s branches and types of troops and also troops, which are not part of the branches and types of troops, from the tactical to the strategic level, are being equipped with complexes with UAVs of various types and designations. The corresponding subunits and services have been created, the special training of personnel has been organized, and the repair and servicing of the aircraft is being conducted.

The first models of complexes with medium-range reconnaissance-strike unmanned aerial vehicles and with loitering munitions, which are successfully completing testing in combat conditions, have already been supplied to the troops. The unmanned aerial vehicles that are being developed to equip our Army are capable of accomplishing missions in conditions of the countermeasures of enemy electronic systems and air defense weapons. Furthermore, they are equipped not only with systems, which ensure the accomplishment of reconnaissance and strike missions, but also with equipment to accomplish special missions, including in support of the employment of air-launched, sea-launched, and ground-based precision-guided weapons.

The missions, which are being accomplished by UAVs, are constantly being expanded. If small UAVs were employed for optical-electronic reconnaissance in the initial phase, they are accomplishing EW missions, communications relay, cargo delivery, providing target designation to guided weapons, and even strike missions at the present time. The extensive employment of small UAVs permits a massive reduction of the expenditure of munitions to destroy targets and the increase of the flexibility and efficiency of the employment of artillery. In so doing, they are being integrated into the single reconnaissance-information space, which supports the dissemination of information to the command and control agencies in real time on the ground, naval surface, and air situation, which is needed to make effective decisions on troop command and control and the employment of weapons...High importance is being assigned to the development of large strike UAVs at the present time...which are equipped with weapons and satellite communications, based upon them at the present time. These aircraft will emerge at flight tests already in 2021 with their subsequent massive series production and delivery to the troops...

Source: Nikolay Protoporov, “‘Мир изменится’: чем армия России будет воевать в ближайшие годы (‘World Changes’: Russian Army’s Combat Arsenal for Coming Years),” *RIA Novosti Online* (state-owned domestic news media outlet), 05 Jan 2021. <https://ria.ru/amp/20210105/vooruzheniya-1591565765.html>

The Defense Ministry annually orders thousands units of modern combat equipment while the development and improvement of armaments continues constantly. In the near future, the military will receive a unique weapon based on other physical principles—at times, it seems that these things are straight from Sci-Fi movies. The RIA Novosti reports on the most interesting and anticipated of these novelties...

The advanced long-range interception aviation system (PAK DP) will replace the MiG-31 supersonic interceptor. Work on this project began in 2017. The designers are offering several PAK DP variations. But it is already clear now that the aircraft will be faster, more maneuverable, and will possess more powerful strike capabilities... The advanced long-range aviation system (PAK DA) is another future aircraft, designed to replace the Tu-95 and Tu-160 strategic bombers, as well as the Tu-22M3 long-range aircraft... The PAK DA has a “Flying Wing” layout, with integration of stealth technologies. It is known that this strategic bomber will be able to stay airborne for up to 30 hours and to travel tens of thousands of kilometers. It has not been decided yet whether the missile-carrier should be supersonic or subsonic, but it will definitely be equipped with the most advanced avionics and automatic equipment...

The Poseidon underwater vehicle is one of the most anticipated developments for the Russian Navy. The project is of great concern to the United States, since their powerful missile defense may prove to be absolutely worthless with the adoption of this unmanned underwater vehicle. After being delivered to a certain area of the world ocean, the drone leaves the submarine and switches to autonomous navigation. It has a nuclear propulsion system and therefore it has an unlimited range of operation. It may opt for the most unpredictable routs. When submerged, the Poseidon travels much faster than the submarines and can dive to a depth of more than a kilometer. It can be armed with both conventional and nuclear warheads. The unmanned underwater vehicle can operate against both enemy large ships and coastal targets. The warhead, the capacity of which reaches 100 kilotons, according to experts estimates, may cause irreparable damage to any coastal nation... Another major project being implemented in the interests of the Navy is the fifth-generation Khaski-class multirole nuclear submarine. Their main purpose is countering Ohio and Columbia class American strategic submarines, as well as aircraft carrier groupings. There are two variants of this type of submarine—armed with Kalibr antisubmarine cruise missiles and Tsirkon hypersonic antiship missiles...



Role of the Russian Aerospace Forces 15th Special Purpose Army

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying articles discuss the operation of the Russian Aerospace Forces' 15th Special Purpose Army [15-я армия воздушно-космических сил (особого назначения)]. The 15th Special Purpose Army is responsible for missile warning, supporting missile defense, space monitoring, and the command and control of most of Russia's satellites and associated ground assets. The accompanying excerpted article from *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense, provides an interview with the commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces' 15th Special Purpose Army Lieutenant-General Andrey Vyshinskiy. General Vyshinskiy provides an overview of his unit's missions, mentioning that his organization controls 80% of Russia's 150 satellites.

The accompanying excerpted article from the *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation* website, states the 15th Special Purpose Army executed 550,000 communications sessions to command and control these satellites. Finally, the accompanying excerpted article from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyi Kuryer*, which is published by the Association of Military Industrial Companies, describes the operation of Russia's missile warning system. In particular, the article mentions how improving the space segment (satellites) of the missile warning system could double Russia's early warning time for ballistic missile launches from fifteen to thirty minutes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Of the total number of spacecraft in the composition of the Russian orbital constellation, more than 90 percent are functioning in support of the Russian Federation Ministry of Defense and over 60—within the fulfillment of the Federal Space Program and in support of other ministries and departments.”



Lieutenant-General Andrey Vyshinskiy, the commander of 15th VKS Special Purpose Army.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense https://function.mil.ru/images/upload/2017/EVS_7789.JPG, Attribution: CC BY 4.0



Continued: Role of the Russian Aerospace Forces 15th Special Purpose Army

Source: Yuliya Kozak, “Им по плечу задачи космического размаха (They Can Handle Missions of a Spatial Scale),” Krasnaya Zvezda Online (official newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defense), 22 October 2020. <http://redstar.ru/im-po-plechu-zadachi-kosmicheskogo-razmaha/>

...Today three formations are part of the composition of 15th VKS Special Purpose Army: The Main Missile Attack Warning Center, the Main Space Situation Surveillance Center, and the Main Test Space Center imeni G.S. Titov. The military units are deployed on the country's entire territory from Kaliningrad to Kamchatka...

First of all with the need to provide the required missile attack warning time, which will be adequate for the country's military-political leadership to make a decision on retaliatory operations, and also for the conduct of the continuous surveillance of the space situation, the detection of threats in space and from space, and support of the launches and command and control of the designated spacecraft. Today only our combined formation accomplishes

these types of missions...Lieutenant-General Andrey Vyshinskiy, the commander of 15th VKS Special Purpose Army, told a Krasnaya Zvezda correspondent about all of this in a conversation on the eve of the professional holiday.

To what extent has 2020 been saturated with those special missions? Which of them do you consider to be the most significant?

...The combat crews of the Main Missile Attack Warning Center detected more than 60 launches of domestic and foreign ballistic missiles and space rockets. The specialists of the Main Space Situation Surveillance Center have taken for tracking more than 1,500 new space objects and have detected more than 250 maneuvers of foreign spacecraft and 14 dangerous closures of domestic satellites with other space objects...

Since 15th Army's specialists control our spacecraft, tell us what the qualitative and quantitative state of the Russian orbital constellation is today? Are only military satellites or are civilian satellites also in your purview?

The orbital constellation of domestic spacecraft is being improved and renewed in accordance with the State Armaments Program until 2025 and numbers more than 150 spacecraft. Of them, more than 80 percent are under the control of the Main Test Space Center imeni G.S. Titov, which is part of 15th Army's composition...Communications, navigation, topogeodesic and meteorological, remote Earth sensing and the monitoring of the situation on its surface, and also scientific spacecraft are functioning in orbit today. Of course, the Main Center controls not only military spacecraft but also civilian spacecraft - scientific and socioeconomic. Of the total number of spacecraft in the composition of the Russian orbital constellation, more than 90 percent are functioning in support of the Russian Federation Ministry of Defense and over 60 - within the fulfillment of the Federal Space Program and in support of other ministries and departments...

What other missions does the Main Space Situation Surveillance Center accomplish? Which systems and complexes are in the inventory?

The capabilities of the outer space monitoring system are increasing along with the development of advanced missile attack warning facilities. It is a component of the country's aerospace defense and has distinctive features. This is a large information system based upon specialized and interactive systems, which are designed for the continuous assessment of the space situation both in peacetime and in wartime. Therefore, the primary missions, which have been defined for the Main Space Situation Surveillance Center, are continuous analysis of the space situation, the maintenance of the Main Space Objects Catalogue, and the detection of a possible dangerous closure of domestic satellites with space objects. The space monitoring system's specialized radiotechnical, laser-optical, and optical-electronic ground equipment, which are deployed in the Moscow Region, Altay Kray, the Far East Region, the Karachayev-Cherkessia Republic, and the Republic of Tajikistan, permit continuous monitoring of the situation in near-Earth space.

“If a satellite detects an ICBM launch from U.S. territory, this information will be received at the command station 30 minutes prior to its approach of Russian territory. On the other hand, radars can detect a missile when it is 15 minutes from the Russian border. This is a very big difference for making such important decisions.”



Continued: Role of the Russian Aerospace Forces 15th Special Purpose Army

Source: “Более 550 тысяч сеансов связи проведено в 2020 учебном году подразделениями связи 15-й армии ВКС (ОсН) (More than 500,000 Communications Sessions Conducted During 2020 Training Year by Communications Subunits of the 15th Special Purpose Army of the Aerospace Forces)”, *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Online*, 23 October 2020. <https://structure.mil.ru/structure/forces/vks/news/more.htm?id=12320917@egNews>

During the 2020 training year communications subunits of the 15th Special Purpose Army of the Aerospace Forces conducted more than 550,000 communications sessions in support of the launching and controlling of space satellites and the uninterrupted functioning of the space reconnaissance and missile attack warning systems. In so doing, the average daily metric was more than 1,600 communications sessions.

Servicemen of communications subunits of the 15th VKS Special Purpose Army participated in the support of military and dual use satellite launches. In addition, specialists of communications subunits also executed tasks to support the flight control of the integrated Russian segment of the International Space Station...

Source: Vladimir Tuchkov, “«Золотой петушок» набирает вес (The ‘Golden Cockerel’ Gains More Weight), *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online* (Weekly news outlet focusing on the military and defense industrial complex founded by private company and published by the Association of Military Industrial Companies, 30 December 2020. <https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/59462>

For three more years, the missile warning system will suffer from nearsightedness. Next year, the upgraded ballistic missile warning system will transition from the operational testing mode to operational readiness. This information was provided by the general designer of the missile warning system, Sergei Boyev. However, for three more years this hawk-eyed ‘golden cockerel,’ in Pushkin’s parlance, will have reduced functionality due to extended crisis in the domestic aerospace industry. Modernization of the ballistic missile warning system occurred after several new elements were added to the system, which will improve the efficiency and accuracy of data about the ballistic and strategic cruise missile launches in both the Eastern and the Western hemispheres. In addition, new relay stations and command posts were added to the system, and existing data transfer channels were upgraded...

The missile warning system is a strategic complex of special technical means used for detecting launches of ballistic missiles, calculating their trajectories, and transmitting this information to the command post. After receiving this information, an act of aggression against a country with the use of nuclear weapons will be noted and a decision will be made about the retaliatory actions. Retaliatory actions may include launching missiles, which are directed toward the aggressor’s territory, as well as activation of the anti-missile defense system at the highest degree of readiness...

Structurally, the missile warning system consists of two segments: the ground segment and the orbital segment, which are integrated into one system by the command and control posts and via secure and redundant data transmission channels. The ground segment is a network of powerful permanent radar stations, both Daryal type and over-the-horizon radars with the operational range of up to six thousand kilometers. They monitor outer space and the near-earth environments, as well as detect, identify, and track objects which could pose a threat for national security. The orbital segment is a constellation of satellites designed to detect missile launches by detecting engine plumes. When the setup of the orbital constellation is complete, the system should be able to track the entire territory of the Earth, both land and water.

In 2015, deployment of a new constellation was initiated, which should include ten Tundra satellites. They are more advanced than the satellites of the first generation. New satellites are able to detect engine plumes, determine the type of a rocket, and calculate the flight direction and coordinates of the target. Some satellites must be on a geostationary orbit and some on a high-altitude elliptical orbit. A highly elongated ellipse (the apogee is approximately 39 thousand kilometers, the perigee 1,600 kilometers) is oriented a certain way to allow satellites to remain over U.S. territory for extended periods of time. To date, four Tundras have been launched into space. I would like to believe that by 2024 there will be ten of them, as planned. Only in this case will the Central Command Station be receiving telemetry data from space about all situations all over the world...If a satellite detects an ICBM launch from U.S. territory, this information will be received at the command station 30 minutes prior to its approach of Russian territory. On the other hand, radars can detect a missile when it is 15 minutes from the Russian border. This is a very big difference for making such important decisions.



The Russian Armed Forces' Patriot Park for all Believers

OE Watch Commentary: As reported earlier (see: “Russian Religious Patriotism,” *OE Watch*, Jul 2020), this past summer, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) staged an elaborate ceremony to dedicate a new Orthodox cathedral to the Russian Armed Forces within Patriot Park, located just outside Moscow. The huge memorial complex is designed to commemorate all those who fought and died during the Great Patriotic War (WW II). However, because many non-Orthodox fought in the war and since Russia is a multi-denominational state, Russians who practice a different religion are now also requesting representation within Patriot Park.



President Putin with Orthodox Patriarch Kirill in Patriot Park.

Source: Kremlin.ru [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_in_Patriot_Park_\(2018-09-19\)_04.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_in_Patriot_Park_(2018-09-19)_04.jpg), Attribution: CCA 4.0 intl

The first excerpt from the official Russian news agency *TASS*, points out that “the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) cannot discuss with the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation the construction of religious sites of other confessions at Patriot Park in Kubinka.” According to the article, the reluctance of the

ROC to broach this topic, stems from previous discussions where the MoD claimed that it “does not consider it possible to build another religious facility near the park.” Some belonging to the other traditional faiths in Russia (Islam, Judaism and Buddhist) do not agree with this decision.

The second excerpt from the mostly independent Russian news source, *Islamnews.ru* describes how Jewish and Muslim clerics are attempting to gain religious representation at Patriot Park. The article describes how “the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia supported the initiative of the head of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation to build worship facilities of other faiths in Patriot Park.” The excerpt emphasizes that since today “there are good, warm relations between representatives of different religions and peoples... it would be logical and correct that this fact be reflected in the historical and museum complex.” The article also posits that such a move will “be a good vaccination against the emergence of extremist and xenophobic sentiments.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia supported the initiative of the head of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation to build worship facilities of other faiths in the Patriot Park...”

Source: “В РПЦ заявили, что не обсуждают с Минобороны постройку храмов других конфессий в Кубинке (The Russian Orthodox Church said that they are not discussing with the Ministry of Defense the construction of churches of other confessions in Kubinka),” *TASS* (official Russian state news agency), 2 December 2020. <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/10155477>

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) cannot discuss with the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation the construction of religious sites of other confessions at the Patriot Park in Kubinka. This was announced to TASS on Wednesday by the head of the Synodal Department for Cooperation with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies of the Moscow Patriarchate, Bishop of Klin Stefan (Privalov), who is also the head of the main church of the Russian Armed Forces in the Patriot Park.

“This issue has already been discussed several times. We have Poklonnaya Gora - there is both a synagogue and a mosque. ...Near the Patriot Park [the Russian Orthodox Church], we can only talk about our own church,” Bishop Stephen said. According to his information, the Ministry of Defense does not consider it possible to build another religious facility near the park.

Source: “Российские евреи поддержали предложение муфтия Гайнутдина о храмах всех вероисповеданий в парке Патриот (Russian Jews supported the proposal of Mufti Gainutdin about churches of all faiths in the Patriot Park),” *IA IslamNews* (considered a mostly independent news source), 9 December 2020. <https://islamnews.ru/news-rossiyskie-evrei-podderzhali-predlozhenie-muftiya-gaynutdina-o-khramakh-vsekh-veroispovedaniy-v-parke-patriot>

The Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia supported the initiative of the head of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Russian Federation to build worship facilities of other faiths in the Patriot Park.... In Russia today there are good, warm relations between representatives of different religions and peoples. And it will be logical and correct that this fact will be reflected in the historical and museum complex.... This can be a good vaccination against the emergence of extremist and xenophobic sentiments.



Powerful Russian UAV Images

OE Watch Commentary: It appears that Russia's problem fielding an attack unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) could soon be resolved. As discussed last month ("Karabakh War Might Spur Russian Attack UAV Development," *OE Watch*, January 2021) Russian defense analysts clearly understand the advantages that attack UAVs play on the modern battlefield and have expressed concern at their country's apparent lag in developing these weapons. In what may be an attempt to assuage these apprehensions, the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) included two images of new Russian attack UAVs in their 2021 promotional calendar. The brief excerpt from the mostly pro-Kremlin site, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, describes the characteristics and a few of the problems in fielding the Orion, one of the new Russian attack UAVs.

The author, military journalist Victor Baranets, begins by reminding readers that "for several decades, Russian military scientists and designers have been struggling to create an attack drone, [and despite]... billions of rubles spent," the MoD still had not produced such a weapon. Baranets posits that this new attack UAV "was already being developed in the depths of secret design bureaus," thus explaining the lack of public knowledge of this weapon. He describes some of the characteristics of the Orion, stating that it can be armed with "several KAB-20 precision aerial bombs... can loiter in the sky for up to 24 hours... and in total carries a payload of as much as 250 kilograms." The Orion also "automatically takes off and lands, operates at a distance of up to 250 km from the control center... [with] a maximum speed is 200 km/h."

To partially explain the delay in fielding this system, Baranets asserts that "the West cut off the supply of many components for UAVs to Russia." Quoting an expert, however, these supply restrictions have worked in Russia's favor, since "technologies have been developed in the country that did not exist at all before we started solving this problem." Baranets concludes his analysis by stating that "a couple years ago" the Orion UAV "was first tested in a real combat situation in Syria," and since it "successfully passed the exam" will now "enter service with the Russian army."

End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)



Orion attack UAV from 2021 Ministry of Defense Calendar.
Source: mil.ru, Attribution: CCA 4.0 Intl

“...For the first time, a portrait of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) “Orion” in an attack version appeared on the calendar from the Ministry of Defense...”

Source: Victor Baranets, “Высокоточные авиабомбы и 24 часа в воздухе: что из себя представляет российский беспилотник «Орион» в ударном варианте (Precision bombs and 24 hours in the air: what is the Russian drone ‘Orion’ in the attack version?),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (mostly pro-Kremlin news organization), 28 December 2020. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/1712105/4345955/>

...For the first time, a portrait of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) “Orion” in an attack version appeared on the calendar from the Ministry of Defense.

For several decades, Russian military scientists and designers have been struggling to create an attack drone that would be no worse than Israeli, Turkish or American combat vehicles of a similar class. Billions of rubles were spent on this, but such a “winged hawk” that would suit the Ministry of Defense did not work. Although rumors were still leaked in the media that a “product” was already being developed in the depths of secret design bureaus, which was not inferior to the best foreign models.

And so the Russian Ministry of Defense published its calendar for 2021 with photographs of modern weapons. And there for the first time “officially” appeared a portrait of the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) “Orion” in the attack version (earlier it was spoken of only as a reconnaissance vehicle). Moreover, some curious details of the creation of this (previously covered by a veil of secrecy) combat vehicle and its characteristics have become known.

...It carries several KAB-20 corrected aerial bombs under its belly. Such ammunition weighs about 21 kilograms and has a high-explosive fragmentation warhead of 7 kilograms. The bombs are equipped with satellite or laser homing and are designed for high-precision destruction of lightly armored vehicles and enemy personnel. The installation of up to four air-to-ground missiles is also envisaged....

Orion belongs to the class of medium-altitude (can climb to an altitude of 8 thousand meters) long-duration spacecraft. Yes, yes, it can loiter in the sky for up to 24 hours. Such a UAV weighs 1100 kilograms, and in total carries a payload of as much as 250 kilograms. ...Orion automatically takes off and lands, operates at a distance of up to 250 km from the control center. The maximum speed is 200 km/h.

...The West has cut off the supply of many components for UAVs to Russia. “For five years, technologies have been developed in the country that did not exist at all before we started solving this problem,” stressed Nikolai Dolzhenkov, general designer....

...A couple of years ago, the “Orion” in the attack version was first tested in a real combat situation in Syria. And it successfully passed the exam for the right to enter service with the Russian army.



Russia's Hypersonic missiles in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: According to Russian Ministry of Defense news outlet *Krasnaya zvezda*, the 3M-22 Tskirkon anti-ship hypersonic cruise missile (NATO designation SS-S-33), will be tested by Russia's Northern Fleet this year. The new Russian Yasen-class submarine will be the target designator and the new Russian frigate will be the launch vessel for this anti-ship missile.

In other regional missile news, *The Barents Observer*, a Norwegian news portal published in Russian and English, states that the Kh-47M2 Kinzhal hypersonic ballistic missile will be assigned to Arctic MiG-31K Russian aircraft. Russia continues its military buildup in the Arctic with strategic, operational and tactical systems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



The Kinzhal air-launched ballistic missile attached to a MiG-31K fighter jet.
Source: mil.ru

“It will carry ... missile, artillery, radio electronic and other types of weaponry. Vertical launchers can be used for the Kalibr-NK universal missile type and the advanced “Tsirkon” hypersonic missiles.”

Source: “Адмиральская мощь «Касатонова» (The Admiral's Power of the 'Kasatonov'),” *Krasnaya zvezda* (Official news source of the Russian Ministry of Defense), 30 December 2020. <http://redstar.ru/admiralskaya-moshh-kasatonova/>

This summer the newest frigate, which is comparable to a destroyer in size, displacement and on-board weaponry, augmented the Northern Fleet. Named in honor of Hero of the Soviet Union, Admiral of the Fleet Vladimir Afanasyevich Kasatonov, who is considered to be one of the fathers of the Soviet nuclear fleet, the ship became the second Project 22350 ship and the first series-produced ship. Designed for combat with both surface as well as submarines, it is able to repel massed air attacks and to conduct strikes on land.

.... Roll stabilizers of a new design were also used, which made the use of all weapon types and equipment possible during Category 5 sea states....Composite construction materials in the ship's superstructure lower the level of the ship's secondary radar field by absorbing and scattering radio waves....The architecture of the superstructure was developed using “Stealth” low-observability technologies. All of this has led to a significant lowering of the radar and optical observability of the frigates.

It will carry ... missile, artillery, radio electronic and other types of weaponry. Vertical launchers can be used for the Kalibr-NK universal missile type and the advanced “Tsirkon” hypersonic missiles. There are 16 launchers on the “Admiral of the Fleet Kasatonov.” All of the missile silos have well-constructed protection. The artillery weaponry of the ship consists of the A-192M automatic 130-mm artillery mount. The munitions inventory allows it to strike coastal, naval and air targets.

The frigate's antisubmarine weapons consist of two quadruple launch complexes for the “Paket-NK” antisubmarine and anti-torpedo defense system, which are side-mounted in the middle portion of the superstructure....

Air defense is provided by the latest “Redut” air defense missile system located on the bow section of the hull. The munitions load consists of 32 medium-range air defense guided missiles and long-range missiles with a firing range of up to 150 kilometers. If necessary the missile cells can contain 128 short-range missiles with a firing radius of up to 15 kilometers...The “Admiral of the Fleet Kasatonov” develops a speed of up to 30 knots and has a sailing range of 4,500 miles. The crew includes 170 sailors plus a 20-man naval infantry subunit....



Continued: Russia's Hypersonic missiles in the Arctic

“Several joint exercises involving the Yasen-class submarines and the Admiral Gorshkov series frigates will take place in 2021. The maneuvers will be conducted within the Northern Fleet training program.”

Source: Roman Kretsul and Aleksei Ramm, “Всё «Ясень»: субмарины наведут «Цирконы» на противника (All Yasen-class submarines will provide the finish for the enemy),” *Izvestia* (Russian daily broadsheet newspaper), 17 December 2020. <https://iz.ru/1100830/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/vse-iasen-submariny-navedut-tcirkony-na-protivnika>

The Defense Ministry intends to conduct a series of naval exercises, during which it plans to rehearse the interaction of the latest surface and submarine ships....Several joint exercises involving the Yasen-class submarines and the Admiral Gorshkov series frigates will take place in 2021. The maneuvers will be conducted within the Northern Fleet training program.

The submarines will detect the hypothetical enemy and provide target designation to the frigates for Tsirkon launches. The frigates will be provide cover for the submarines with their long-range antiaircraft missile systems. Such interaction will make it possible to destroy enemy ships while remaining invisible and absolutely unexpected for the enemy.

Northern Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Aleksandr Moiseyev stated earlier that the Navy is adopting the most modern models of military equipment....Project 22350 frigates will become the main Tsirkon hypersonic missile carriers. The lead ship of this series production will conduct the tests.

Little is known about the characteristics and features of this unparalleled hypersonic missile. Some of the data was presented after the first comprehensive test, which took place on 6 October of 2020. In his report to the President, General Staff Chief Valeriy Gerasimov mentioned the flight range of 450 km, altitude of up to 28 km, 4.5 minutes of time to the target, and the speed of Mach 8. Experts conclude that the missile enters the stratosphere after the launch and stays there in the course of the flight to the target location area then dives to strike the designated enemy target.

Thanks to the missile's operational range and the noiselessness of the Project Yasen submarines, Russian sailors will be able to sink enemy ships without putting themselves at risk. Captain 1st Rank Igor Kurdin, stated..."The Yasen possesses exclusive search capabilities with the aid of a sonar system and other means of detection. At the same time, the submarine itself remains unnoticed. A surface ship is very easy to track. Meanwhile, the submarine can find the target, conduct concealed tracking and transmit target designation to the frigate. It is able to use its weapons at the maximum distance without entering the range of enemy fire assets. At the same time, the Tsirkon missile is such a powerful weapon and such a tough target to defend against that it is virtually guaranteed to destroy any ship."

Having transmitted the data, the submarine remains hidden from the enemy. After delivering the strike, the submarine's crew determines whether the target is hit and, if necessary, will carry out a repeated strike using its own weapons....

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Northern Fleet prepares deployment of hypersonic missile,” *The Barents Observer* (a Norwegian news portal published in Russian and English), 16 December 2020. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/12/northern-fleet-prepares-deployment-hypersonic-missile-kinzhal>

The likely coming to the north of the new missile has been known since Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov in December 2019 met with 150 military attaches from foreign diplomatic missions. Gerasimov then told his foreign guests that “a network of airports is under development, that will provide an expanded geography for the use of this [missile] complex,” thus hinting that it could be used in the new airfields currently built in the Arctic.

Russia is expanding existing and building new runways at least five locations in its far North, including Rogachevo in Novaya Zemlya, Nagurskoye in Franz Josef Land, Sredniy in Severnaya Zemlya and Kotelny in the New Siberian Islands. MiG-31 fighter jets are used as carriers of the Kinzhal, and the aircraft currently based near Monchegorsk, Kola Peninsula, could be applied....

The new missile system is similar to an air-carried version of the Iskander land-based short-range ballistic missile. However, the deployment of such a missile on an aircraft gives it a more dangerous strategic position. Unlike cruise missiles launched from an aircraft, the Kinzhal goes ballistic. Like other ballistic missiles launched from silos or submarines, going ballistic via space means hypersonic speed.

Test shooting of the Kinzhal took place over the Barents Sea in November 2019. Then the speed of the missile reportedly reached 10 Mach, ten times the speed of sound. The missile can carry both conventional and nuclear warheads. It is believed to have a range of up to 2,000 km and will pose a totally new military challenge for neighboring countries in the Arctic.



Russian Pacific Fleet rearming Naval Infantry with BMP-3F

OE Watch Commentary: According to the excerpted article from *Izvestia*, a Russian daily broadsheet newspaper, naval infantry from the Pacific Fleet will be the first to get the BMP-3F. As explained in (“Potential Equipping of Russian Naval Infantry with the BMP-3F,” *OE Watch*, November 2020) field-testing of the Naval Infantry version of the BMP-3 took place during the Kavkaz 2020 exercise. The field tests were successful and the Eastern Military District’s two naval infantry brigades are being reequipped. Although heliborne landings are preferred for initial Russian amphibious landing, this upgrades their direct amphibious assault capability. Initially, one battalion per brigade will be so equipped.

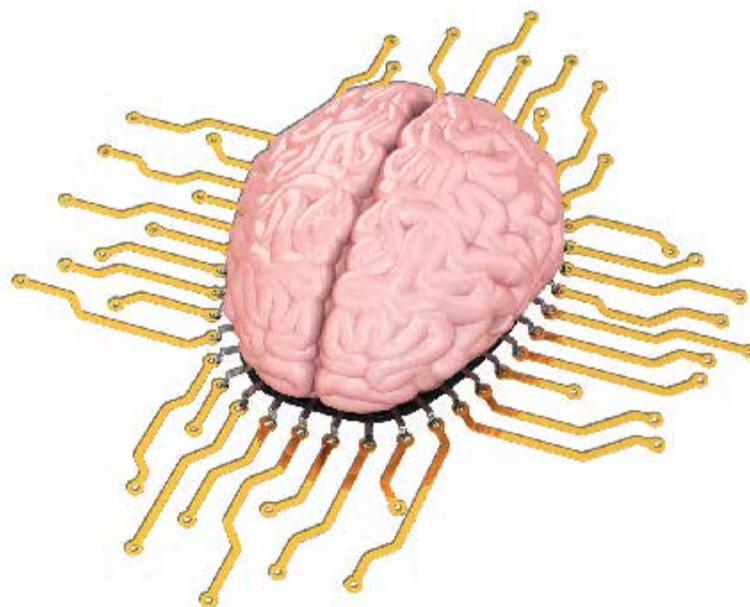
The recent (“Kurile Islands Getting Up-armored,” *OE Watch*, December 2020), addressed the deployment of the T-72B3 main battle tank to the Naval Infantry of the Pacific Fleet. These articles demonstrate not only the strengthening of the Eastern Military District’s defensive capabilities, but also of the increasing role of the Naval Infantry in Russia’s Rapid Reaction Force. The Airborne Forces and Naval Infantry have long been the major part of Russia’s rapid reaction capability, but Naval Infantry modernization has lagged. In 2010, Somali pirates seized the Russian oil tanker *MV Moscow University*. Russian naval infantry from the Udaloy-class *Marshal Shaposhnikov* recaptured the tanker. It’s a long way from the Pacific to Africa, but as Russia negotiates for a naval base in Somalia, Russia expands its limited blue-water capability with ports on both sides of the Suez Canal. Depending on Somalian basing, the Pacific Fleet may play a bigger role in the Arabian Ocean. Upgrading its naval infantry could support that role. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, Pacific Fleet naval infantrymen will be the first to get the new BMP-3F. One battalion in each of the two Eastern Military District Naval Infantry Brigades will be upgraded. The BMP-3F combat vehicle was previously supplied only for export. This vehicle will dramatically increase the firepower and mobility of the “Black Berets” in the Far East.”

THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

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

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





Continued: Russian Pacific Fleet rearming Naval Infantry with BMP-3F

Source: Anton Lavrov and Roman Kretsul, “С корабля навал: дальневосточные морпехи получают тяжелую бронетехнику (If attacked from the sea: Far Eastern Naval Infantrymen receiving heavily armored technology),” *Izvestia* (Russian daily broadsheet newspaper), 24 December 2020. <https://iz.ru/1103734/anton-lavrov-roman-kretcul/s-korablia-napal-dalnevostochnye-morpekhi-poluchat-tiazheluiu-bronetekniku>

According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, Pacific Fleet naval infantrymen will be the first to get the new BMP-3F. One battalion in each of the two Eastern Military District Naval Infantry Brigades will be upgraded. The BMP-3F combat vehicle was previously supplied only for export. This vehicle will dramatically increase the firepower and mobility of the “Black Berets” in the Far East.

Delivery of the new armored vehicles will begin next year [2021]. The 40th Separate Naval Infantry Brigade on Kamchatka will initially receive the armored vehicles. Earlier Primorye-based [Sakhalin Island] 155th Brigade Acting Commander Captain 2nd Rank Igor Tatarchenko reported that his unit’s subunits will also get the BMP-3F in the near future.

*Those vehicles disembarked from a landing ship in support of Russian naval infantrymen for the first time at the “Kavkaz-2020” Strategic Command-Staff Exercises that took place at Opuk Range in September. *Izvestiya* previously reported that the experiment was successful.*

Increased attention is being paid to reequipping the Pacific Fleet Naval Infantry. In recent years, it has received not only BTR-82A armored transport vehicles but also T-80BV tanks, and also thoroughly modernized BMP-2Ms [Armored Infantry Vehicles]. Unique exercises occurred in the Far East in August involving the Naval Infantry. The “Black Berets” disembarked from the sea and from the air simultaneously onto the [Arctic] Chukotka Peninsula for the first time. Approximately 4,000 military personnel and more than 800 pieces of equipment participated in the opposing-force brigade maneuvers.

According to Military Historian Dmitriy Boltentsov, “In Soviet times, the 55th Naval Infantry Division, which was deployed in Primorye, started to receive the upgraded version of the BMP-3 that had just been accepted into the inventory. They managed to reequip one battalion, but then the 1990s arrived and this process was halted. The contemporary naval variants have powerful weaponry - two guns and several machineguns. The subunits’ firepower in these vehicles is much higher than in the BTR-82. Furthermore, they are better armored. All of this is particularly important while conducting amphibious landings. The naval infantrymen will have all of the needed weapons in order to suppress enemy weapon emplacements. Furthermore, the tracked vehicles have better cross-country capability, and this is critical, since wheeled vehicle mobility is often limited on the Pacific coast.”

In recent years, the Naval Infantry has been equipped with new tanks and self-propelled guns which correspond to the new missions assigned to these forces. “Today the Naval Infantry is part of the rapid reaction forces. These subunits can be loaded onto a ship and set off for any point of the world. The availability of heavy weapons permits them to independently accomplish any missions.”

The total strength of the Russian Naval Infantry is estimated to be 12-13,000 personnel. Three fleets have one brigade each. The Pacific Fleet has two. The Caspian Sea Flotilla, has one regiment which was formed in 2018. According to the Ministry of Defense, the “Black Berets” equipment level is maintained at the 100 percent. All of the subunits are at permanent combat readiness and, together with the Airborne Troops, constitute the base of the Russian rapid reaction forces.

There are 2-3 naval infantry battalions and one air assault battalion in each of the brigades. A portion of the personnel are parachute trained. But, the “Black Berets” have a “heavier” structure than the airborne. There are more armored vehicles in their units. There are tanks and self-propelled artillery and air defense missile systems in many of them. Some brigades have “Grad” multiple rocket launcher systems assigned.

There are plans to improve the naval infantrymen’s delivery systems. Initially, they planned to deploy the first larger “Mistral” Class universal landing ships in the Pacific Ocean. The needed infrastructure for their basing had already been created at Vladivostok. The breach of contract by France due to the anti-Russian sanctions did not halt these plans.

The keels of two Russian equivalents to the “Mistrals” - the Project 23900 universal landing ships - were laid at Kerch’s “Zaliv” Shipyard this year. Besides the traditional amphibious landing techniques, they will be able to redeploy the “Black Berets” to the coast using helicopters and speedboats.

The Northern Fleet was augmented by the Project 11711 Large Landing Ship (BDK) “Ivan Gren” in 2018. The acceptance into the fleet’s composition of the second ship of the same type the “Petr Morgunov” is expected soon. It is in the test phase right now.

The conventional BMP-3, which is being supplied to the Ground Troops, also has an amphibious capability. But it was developed to negotiate rivers and small bodies of fresh water. The designers had to rework it for use by the Naval Infantry. They modified the air intake to an extendable telescoping tube. They installed anti-wave barriers on the hull and turret and increased their buoyancy and stability on the water. As a result, they can safely employ the vehicle with sea waves of up to Sea Force 3.

The vehicle is capable of being in the water for up to seven hours. In the process, its speed is higher than that of the tactical variant and reaches 10 kilometer per hours. The tracked vehicle accelerates to a speed of up to 70 kilometers per hour on a good road on land and 45 kilometers per hour on a dirt road.

The naval variant lacks the self-ditching feature and additional armor of the modernized ground-forces BMP-3. On the other hand, the naval BMP retained the firepower of the ground-forces version. A 100-millimeter low ballistic gun permits it to fire at point blank range and also along a high trajectory. Guided antitank missiles are also launched through the tube. Furthermore, it has a rapid-fire 30-millimeter gun and machineguns...



Armenian Assessments of the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War

OE Watch Commentary: The Armenian government carried out several reforms in the armed forces following the April 2016 clashes in Nagorno Karabakh, including acquisitions of weapons and equipment, in order to avoid another scenario of losing territory to Azerbaijan. The accompanying excerpted article provides a look at how the September-November 2020 war, which resulted in Azerbaijan gaining a significant amount of territory, is driving examinations of lessons learned for the Armenian government and armed forces following the recent conflict.

The article, from the Armenian news website *News.am*, first looks at how “a number of Russian sources this week reported that specialists from the Military Academy of the Air Defense Forces of Russia conducted a thorough analysis of the large-scale losses of Armenian air defense systems in Nagorno-Karabakh and the almost complete dominance of Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).” The Russian sources reported that “the issue was a low radar cross-section of Turkish UAVs, which did not enable enough time to detect them, giving them an opportunity to successfully open fire,” but the article notes how “representatives of the academy did not discuss these issues (in a report) and there were no field tests that showed ‘low efficiency’ of Russian air defense systems.”

Despite the fact that there was no report from the Russian air defense academy, the article mentions how “politicians in Yerevan have also put forth various accusations against Russian weapons and air defense systems in particular.” Outside of this, the article includes statements from the former secretary of the security council of Nagorno-Karabakh. The former secretary claimed that “Armenian politicians and the military did not prepare for a large-scale armed conflict” and that officials “reassured themselves with the thought that a negotiating body would come to their assistance, having neither the capabilities nor the military contingent to deal with Azerbaijan by force.” Lastly, the article states that Armenian forces “reacted sporadically and haphazardly” to Azerbaijani actions on the line-of-contact in recent years prior to the 2020 war and that this includes “the inability to create a well-controlled, multi-component and layered air defense system.” As the Armenian government continues to assess what happened with its armed forces during the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war, air defense will be one area to watch for reforms. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“For a long time, Azerbaijan was consistently preparing to break the defenses of Armenians on the line of contact, accumulating reserves and conducting reconnaissance, including reconnaissance in force.”





Continued: Armenian Assessments of the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh War

Source: “Уроки Карабаха: могут ли российские средства ПВО противостоять беспилотникам (Lessons of Karabakh: can Russian air defense systems counter unmanned aerial vehicles),” *News.am* (Armenian news website based in Yerevan), 22 December 2020. <https://news.am/rus/news/620332.html>

A number of Russian sources this week reported that specialists from the Military Academy of the Air Defense Forces of Russia conducted a thorough analysis of the large-scale losses of Armenian air defense systems in Nagorno-Karabakh and the almost complete dominance of Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)...

“Apparently, the issue was a low radar cross-section of Turkish UAVs, which did not enable enough time to detect them, giving them an opportunity to successfully open fire,” said one of the sources...the sources stated results of field tests of air defense systems, including the Buk-M1, the Tor-M1, Osa-AKM, Pantsir-S1 and Tunguska-M1, and reportedly show their low efficiency when operating against small UAVs with a radar cross-section of less than 0.01 square meters...

However, representatives of the academy did not discuss these issues (in a report) and there were no field tests that showed “low efficiency” of Russian air defense systems...Some Russian media sources published reports with titles such as “The ineffectiveness of modern air defense systems in the Karabakh conflict”...The media outlets that circulated this information could draw attention to at least some, at first glance, insignificant issues.

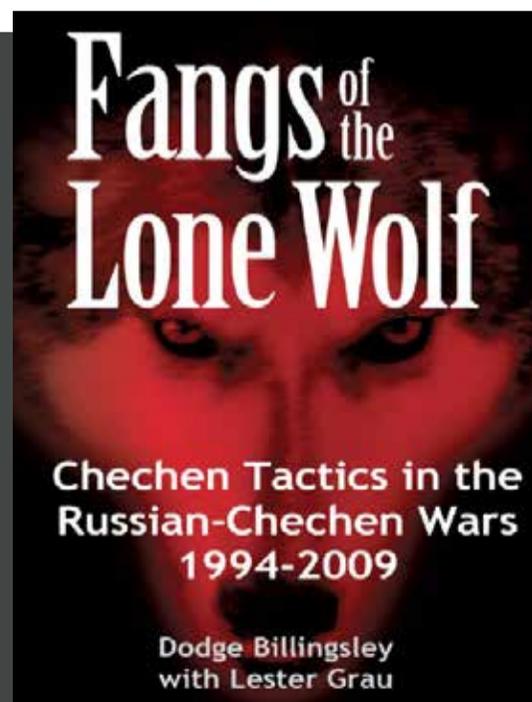
For example, “the Turkish UAV’s radar cross-section was too small is to blame.” Nonetheless, the wingspan of the Bayraktar TB2 is 12m and its length is 6.5m. This is noticeable to almost any radar station...Its speed and service ceiling make it a target for almost any air defense system.

There is a notably smaller radar cross-section of the Israeli Harop UAV...The area of the reflective surface of the Harop is estimated to be 0.5 square meters.

...it should be remembered that politicians in Yerevan have also put forth various accusations against Russian weapons and air defense systems in particular...The reason for the defeat and failures of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh are not in the quality of Russian weapons, but in the lack of preparation for an armed conflict, starting with operational equipment in the theater to the number of trained specialists and last but not least, the calculations of air defense systems...

...according to Samvel Babayan, the former secretary of the security council of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Armenian politicians and the military did not prepare for a large-scale armed conflict. They reassured themselves with the thought that a negotiating body would come to their assistance, having neither the capabilities nor the military contingent to deal with Azerbaijan by force...

For a long time, Azerbaijan was consistently preparing to break the defenses of Armenians on the line of contact, accumulating reserves and conducting reconnaissance, including reconnaissance in force. Armenians reacted sporadically and haphazardly...as well as the inability to create a well-controlled, multi-component and layered air defense system. As a result, on the first day of the war on 27 September, according to Babayan, the Armenians in Karabakh lost up to 50 percent of their air defense systems and 40 percent of their artillery from Azerbaijani strikes...



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>



US-China Competition in the New OE: A Turkish Perspective

OE Watch Commentary: As 2020 came to a close, many television programs in Turkey featured debates about how the year's developments would shape the future geopolitical environment. One noteworthy program on *ArtiTV* (an independent and objective Turkish TV station based in Germany), featuring Soli Özel, a well-respected Turkish sociologist and political scientist, claimed that one of the most important questions of the new OE would be whether the world would see a “China-US competition” or a “China-West” competition. As the first accompanying passage notes, Özel claims that the answer to this question will depend on Europe, particularly on how much coordination Europe will show in their stance on China and Huawei, as well as how much the US will invest in its relations with Europe. According to Özel, the outcome will determine the economic, political and strategic power distribution in the new OE.



Emblem of the European Union.

Source: User:Verdy p, User:-xfi-, User:Paddu, User:Nightstallion, User:Funakoshi, User:Jeltz, User:Dbenbenn, User:Zscout370 via Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Europe.svg, Attribution: Public Domain

It is in this context that the second passage from *Ec.europa.eu* (the official website of the European Commission) is noteworthy. It reports on a “Comprehensive Agreement on Investment” signed between the European Union and China in the last days of 2020. This agreement gives European firms greater market access in China, and eases Chinese government requirements on joint ventures and technology transfers (in some sectors) in Europe. The agreement reduces potential future restrictions to China in Europe, making it a big economic and diplomatic win for China.

This agreement gives European firms greater market access in China, and eases Chinese government requirements on joint ventures and technology transfers (in some sectors) in Europe. The agreement reduces potential future restrictions to China in Europe, making it a big economic and diplomatic win for China.

This appears to be one of the latest examples of China's whole-of-government approach to coercive competition with the US. China is contesting the US in the economic and diplomatic sphere by separating it from its traditional allies and partners. If the Turkish expert is right, this development would tip the scale towards a “China-US” competition as opposed to a “China-West” competition in the coming era. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“We are at the beginning of a new era, one in which China has become extremely powerful, while the US has lost its prestige and trustworthiness in the eyes of its allies...”

Source: “Aydın Selcen ile Dünya ve Biz - 2020’de Türkiye ve dünya gündeminde neler yaşandı? (The World and Us with Aydın Selcen – What did Turkey and the World Witness in 2020?),” *ArtiTV* (an independent and objective Turkish TV station based in Germany), 2 January 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjodb2NDgws>

[Soli Özel:] “We are at the beginning of a new era, one in which China has become extremely powerful, while the US has lost its prestige and trustworthiness in the eyes of its allies --due to its governance style over the last four years, and the impression its given of being a country that doesn't keep its promises. Within this context, a new era is starting, one that will shape the economic power distribution, and in parallel, the political/strategic power distribution. On the one had, we have an aggressive China that will grow 8% next year, while all advanced countries are shrinking; on the other hand, [we have] a US that will take at least two years to repair itself and its institutions. The competition between these two sides, the approach that their allies and Europe will take, will shape the new era.

...
[Soli Özel:] In the Biden era, EU-US relations will determine whether its going to be a China-West competition or a China-US competition. In the next one to two years, this will be determined by whether the Europeans will have a joint strategy, and to what extent they will give up on Huawei; as well as how much the US is open to investing in its relations with Europe and how much US internal mechanisms will allow Biden to do this.”

Source: “EU and China reach agreement in principle on investment,” *Ec.europa.eu* (the official website of the European Commission), 30 December 2020. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2541

The EU and China have today concluded in principle the negotiations for a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI). ...China has committed to a greater level of market access for EU investors than ever before, including some new important market openings. China is also making commitments to ensure fair treatment for EU companies so they can compete on a better level playing field in China...

President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen said: “Today's agreement is an important landmark in our relationship with China and for our values-based trade agenda. It will provide unprecedented access to the Chinese market for European investors...”



Turkey's Caucasus Policy Increases Tension with Iran

OE Watch Commentary: Turkish and Iranian tensions sparked after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a speech in Azerbaijan that included verses by a nationalist Azeri poet on December 10, 2020. Iran perceived this as Turkey's outreach for stronger bonds with Azerbaijan and as a threat to its sovereignty due to its large Azeri minority. Iran views Turkey's growing influence in the Caucasus and active involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a threat to its interests in the region. While the first accompanying article highlights the implications of Turkey's Caucasus policy on its relations with other regional players, the second article reports on the tension between Turkey and Iran.

The first article from *al-Monitor*, an independent news organization with analysts from the Middle East, claims that the Turkish President's outreach to Azerbaijan may signal a shift in Turkish foreign policy. The author claims that part of this foreign policy readjustment entails Turkish military and security cooperation with the Central Asian Turkic republics to isolate Iran and counterbalance Russia in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions. To achieve its objectives, the author states that Turkey would need to rely on its Western allies and reset its relations with the United States under the new administration. However, this strategy seems to complicate Turkey's foreign policy in other regions in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and Libya where it needs cooperation from Russia and Iran in Syria to counterbalance its Western allies.

According to the second article from the Turkish pro-government newspaper, *Sabah*, Turkey, with its role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, has changed the balance of power in the Caucasus at the expense of Russia and most importantly Iran. The author, known for his close ties to the Turkish government, states that there are a few major reasons why Iran quickly condemned the reading of the poem by the Turkish President. First, Turkey's increasing regional influence and the capabilities it displayed in support of Azerbaijan is unsettling for Iran. Second, the role of Israeli drones in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the prospects of an Israel with improved relations with Turkey is a serious concern for Iran. Third, Iran is concerned about the new US administration's Middle East policy and its implications on Iran's regional policy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“To counterbalance Russia and isolate Iran to the north, that is the Black Sea and the Caucasus, Turkey would need to lean on the Western security bloc...”



Visit of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Azerbaijan, 2020.

Source: The Presidential Press and Information Office of Azerbaijan via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Recep_Tayyip_Erdogan_2020_visit_to_Baku_with_Ilham_Aliyev_33.jpg, Attribution: Creative Common Attribution 4.0 International



Continued: Turkey's Caucasus Policy Increases Tension with Iran

Source: Metin Gürcan, "Is Turkey on course of foreign policy shift with pan-Turkist flavor?" *al-Monitor* (an independent news organization based in Washington DC with analysts from the Middle East), 24 December 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/turkey-russia-iran-foreign-policy-shift-to-panturkist-flavor.html>

On Dec. 10, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended a celebratory military parade in Baku, where his speech included verses by a nationalist Azeri poet that sparked a diplomatic row with Iran. For some Turkish observers, Erdogan's speech resonated as the signal of a shift in Ankara's foreign policy.

... Erdogan's emphasis on stronger bonds with Azerbaijan reinforced anticipation that the focus of his foreign policy will increasingly shift from the Arab world to the Caucasus, the Black Sea and Caspian basins, and Central Asia. Efforts to invigorate ties including military and security cooperation with the Central Asian Turkic republics — which Ankara has neglected for some time — should not come as a surprise.

Whether this new inclination is a transient or lasting one is hard to gauge, given the fast U-turns in Erdogan's foreign policy record. Still, judging by the writings of scholars close to the government, Ankara appears on course to enter the new year with a pan-Turkist perspective at the expense of angering Moscow and Tehran.

...

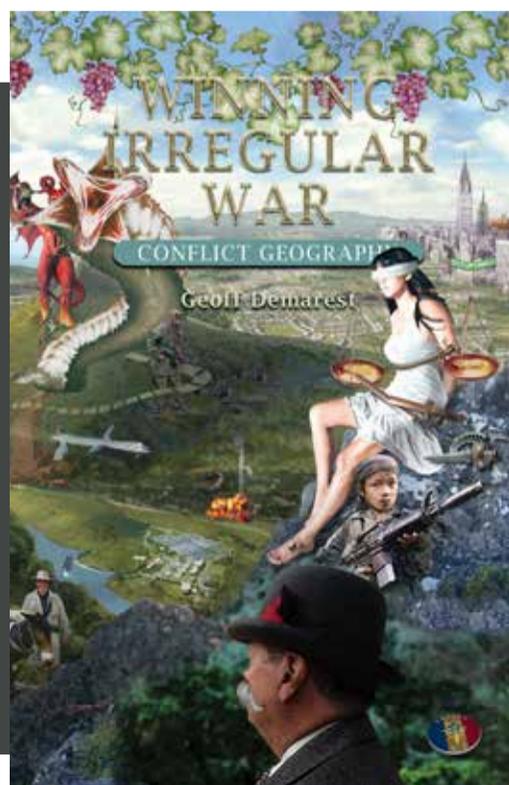
Seemingly, Ankara's preparations for a Joe Biden White House involve plans... that would aim to isolate Iran and contain Russia in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions with Israel's support. Such objectives, Ankara seems to believe, will strike a chord with the Biden administration, which assumes office Jan. 20.

Yet such a shift would come with the increased risk of a geopolitical disconnect between Turkey's postures to the north and the south. To counterbalance Russia and isolate Iran to the north, that is the Black Sea and the Caucasus, Turkey would need to lean on the Western security bloc, get NATO involved, improve ties with Ukraine and Israel and, most importantly, reset ties with Washington under the Biden administration.

Source: Burhanettin Duran, "Ortadoğu yeni döneme girerken İran'ın derdi? (Iran's problem as the Middle East enters a new era?)," *Sabah* (Turkish pro-government newspaper), 15 December 2020. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/duran/2020/12/15/ortadogu-yeni-doneme-girerken-iranin-derdi>

The balance of power in the Caucasus has shifted against Russia and especially against Iran. Tehran is envious that Ankara has accomplished in a few years what they have been pursuing for a decade. Moreover, with each move, Ankara exhibits more effectiveness. For Tehran, Israel joining Turkey-Azerbaijan cooperation is also a nightmare scenario...

The Arab countries are developing new relations with Ankara and Tel Aviv, including Arab regimes that side with Israel against Iran. In this new era, the big game is between regional powers [including] Turkey, Iran and Israel and Ankara has the upper hand. The Iranian elite should now put aside their nationalistic sentiments and exaggerated hopes and focus on the new reality of regional geopolitics.



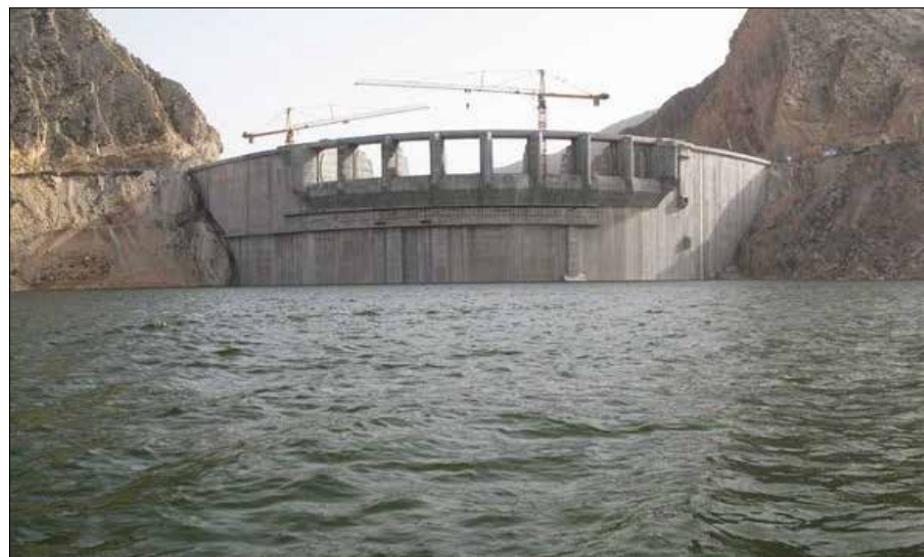
Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. As Geoff Demarest puts it: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



Iran-Azerbaijan to Cooperate on Hydroelectric Power

OE Watch Commentary: In the post 11 September 2001 years, Azerbaijan positioned itself as an ally of the United States in the Global War on Terrorism. This led the Congress to wave Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act which banned most foreign assistance, both civilian and military, to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan and Turkey, meanwhile, blockaded Armenia which, in the 1988-1994 Nagorno-Karabakh War, occupied not only the former Soviet autonomous Nagorno-Karabakh oblast which international law considers Azerbaijani territory, but also seven surrounding Azerbaijani districts. This blockade forced Armenia to rely on Iran as its main export route for agricultural and manufactured goods. Armenia's close ties to Iran juxtaposed sharply with Azerbaijan's broad antagonism toward the Islamic Republic of Iran and increasingly close strategic ties to the West.



The Khoda-Afarin Dam on the Aras River along the Iran-Azerbaijan Border.

Source: Holy Defense News Agency, https://defapress.ir/files/en/news/2020/12/24/63306_947.jpg

In recent months, however, Azerbaijan and Iran have quietly reconciled. On 14 September 2020, just two weeks before the outbreak

of Armenia-Azerbaijan hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Iranian and Azerbaijani transport ministers met to discuss expanding rail and road links between the two countries. Azerbaijan is also the central pivot in a north-south transport corridor linking Iran and Russia.

The excerpted article from Iran's official state news organization, *Islamic Republic News Agency*, highlights a meeting between Azerbaijan's deputy prime minister and Iran's minister of electricity in which the two finalized agreements to upgrade and operate the Khoda Afarin Dam, an earth-fill embankment dam on the Aras River which separates Iran from Azerbaijan. While Iran and Azerbaijan had discussed dam operation in years past, such conversations were largely mooted by the fact that Armenian forces had occupied the border area since 1993. Azerbaijani forces re-established Azeri control over the region in October 2020, however. Such quick agreement on both Khoda Afarin and Qiz Qalehsi, another Aras River hydroelectric project, highlights growing Iranian-Azerbaijani cooperation. That the Islamic Republic largely blockaded Armenia during the 44-day Nagorno-Karabakh that ended 10 November further shows the extent of the two Shi'ite countries' cooperation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Azerbaijan pays special attention to the development of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Source: “Zarafiyat-e Jadid Hashiyeh Rud Aras baraye Hamkari Iran va Jomhuri-ye Azerbaijan” (“New capacities along the Aras River for cooperation between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan”), *Islamic Republic News Agency* (Iran's official state news organization), 22 December 2020. <https://www.irna.ir/news/84157981>

On the sidelines of a Tuesday [22 December] meeting at the Ministry of Energy with Minister of Energy Reza Ardakanian, [Azerbaijan] Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev told reporters, “New capacities along the Aras River in water, electricity and agriculture sectors has increased cooperation between the two countries.” He continued, “Azerbaijan pays special attention to the development of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and, based on this, I traveled to Iran today with a high-level delegation of Azerbaijani officials to advance and develop the plans of the two countries....” He [Mustafayev] assessed this visit as an important sign of the interest of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the development of relations with neighboring countries, especially Iran.... The Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan continued, “We will cooperate with Iran in the field of synchronization of the electricity network of Iran and the Russian Federation.” He referred to the issue of Iran's electricity exports to the Republic of Azerbaijan and said, “The necessary infrastructure has been provided for it.” “We are cooperating with Iran in other areas as well,” Mustafayev added. “The Khoda Afarin Dam and Qiz Qalehsi project are among these projects.”



Possible Developments in Chinese Military Systems Over 2021

OE Watch Commentary: The following article, published by *Global Times*, a daily newspaper under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party's People's Daily newspaper, commenting on international issues from a Chinese nationalistic perspective, discusses a number of military developments that could materialize over 2021. As China continues to modernize, new military systems and weapons are coming to light. For example, China's third aircraft carrier could make its first appearance. It is expected to be larger than its predecessors and to be equipped with a more advanced electromagnetic catapult system. The Type-054B frigate could "see movement" in 2021. The long anticipated Type 054B, which will replace the Type 054 frigates launched in the early 2000s, is expected to be equipped with 32 vertical launching system cells. It will mainly consist of medium and short-range ship-to-air missiles and anti-submarine missiles. It is expected to carry out patrol, escort, or maritime presence missions in medium and low intensity environments. China might also procure Type 054A frigates, Type 052D destroyers, Type 055 large destroyers, Type 071 amphibious landing ships, and 075 amphibious assault ships. China's new-generation fighter jet, believed to be an aircraft carrier-based fighter jet, is expected to make its maiden flight. The article also expects to see mass-produced J-20 stealth fighter jets making public debuts. News on the H-20 stealth bomber, which has been in development for several years could also become available, shedding more light on its capabilities.



PLA Navy frigate Yueyang (FF 575).

Source: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Shannon Renfro, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e5/People%27s_Liberation_Army_%28Navy%29_frigate_PLA%28N%29_Yueyang_%28FF_575%29_steam_in_formation_with_42_other_ships_and_submarines_during_Rim_of_the_Pacific_%28RIMPAC%29_Exercise_2014.jpg, Attribution: Public domain

According to the article, 2020 was an "unsettling" year during which some of China's more recently developed equipment played a key role in various missions. For example, the Y-20 was used to transport medical goods and personnel during the ongoing pandemic both domestically and abroad. The PLA launched anti-ship ballistic missiles (DF-26 and DF-21D) into the South China Sea after the United States "sent dual aircraft carrier strike groups" into the area. The PLA Navy's Type 075 amphibious assault ship completed its maiden voyage. The country's second aircraft carrier and the Y-8 special mission aircraft both appeared in the Taiwan Straits. The Type 15 light tank was frequently used in plateau missions during tensions along the China/Indian border. With China's bold new goal of the mechanization and informationization of its forces by 2027, we can expect these types of developments in its military to accelerate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“With China setting the centennial goal by 2027 for its military in November, urging it to modernize military theories, organizations, personnel and weapons and equipment...there is no doubt that China will continue to develop new, world-class weapons for years to come.”

Source: Liu Xuanzun, "From 3rd Aircraft Carrier to Fighter Jets: Weapons to Expect in 2021," *Global Times* (a daily newspaper under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party's People's Daily newspaper), 30 December 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202012/1211451.shtml>

With China setting the centennial goal by 2027 for its military in November, urging it to modernize military theories, organizations, personnel and weapons and equipment, analysts said there is no doubt that China will continue to develop new, world-class weapons for years to come.

*The construction of China's third aircraft carrier, which is widely expected to be larger than the country's current two and feature a more advanced electromagnetic catapult system, has been a focus of several media outlets. Beijing-based naval expert Li Jie told the *Global Times* in an interview in September that the carrier could be launched in 2021. Citing an anonymous insider, *The Diplomat* magazine reported on Friday that the Type 054B frigate, a newly developed warship reportedly equipped with an integrated electric propulsion system and more advanced than the Type 054A, could "see movement" in 2021. The report also said that between 2021 to 2025, China could procure more Type 054A frigates, Type 052D destroyers, Type 055 large destroyers, Type 071 amphibious landing ships and Type 075 amphibious assault ships, with the third Type 075 expected to be launched in the last days of 2020 or early 2021. China's new-generation fighter jet is also scheduled to make its maiden flight in 2021, according to a statement the Chinese Aeronautical Establishment released on its WeChat public account in June...*



People's Republic of China revises the National Defense Law

OE Watch Commentary: According to the Chinese *Ministry of Defense website*, the People's Republic of China recently revised the National Defense Law to meet new national defense and security requirements. At a press conference in December 2020 the Ministry of National Defense spokesperson discussed the importance of the revision of the law first promulgated in 1997. The law has an important role in national defense construction and military modernization. The revision is designed to meet new tasks and requirements of national defense and military development in the new era. The revision also incorporates “Xi Jinping Thought” into the new law, the national security outlook, and importantly, the military strategic guideline for the new era. The military strategic guideline is issued by the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (Xi Jinping), and lays the foundation for the country's military strategy. This includes concepts for use of force in support of the communist party's strategic objectives, guidance on threats, and establishes priorities for planning, modernization, force structure and readiness. The military strategic guidelines have only been revised a few times since the end of the Cold War (1993, 2004, and 2014). This press conference appears to confirm that a new military strategic guideline for the new era was issued.

The key revisions were required by the military reforms and reorganizations that have occurred under President Xi during the past few years. This has included creation of theater commands, reorganization, reform, and resubordination of organizations within the Central Military Commission, the services and the People's Armed Police. The tasks and goals of the armed forces have been revised to meet new security requirements regarding border, maritime, air defense and other major security areas such as outer space, electromagnetic and cyber domains. Revisions also address national defense research and production, military procurement, national defense education and mobilization, the rights and status of military personnel, and policies and institutions concerning foreign military relationships.

The National Defense Law revision has coincided with the recent release of several new regulations that are likely related: a regulation on officer management, the regulation on officer professionalization, the regulation on officer selection, the regulation on party committee work in the military, and the regulation on military academy education reforms. It looks like the National Defense Law revision and issuance of a series of regulations are designed to address the significant recent military reforms, and to jump start lingering reforms to improve the quality of the officer corps and military education which is critical to the overall military reform effort. The recent PRC focus on building expeditionary force capabilities and potentially conducting operations abroad likely played an important part in revising the law as important new requirements have emerged. **End OE Watch Commentary (McCauley)**

“National defense is the security guarantee for the survival and development of a country. The National Defense Law is the basic law of the state in the field of national defense to guide and regulate national defense and military development.”

Source: “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on December 31,” *Ministry of Defense website*, January 2, 2021, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2021-01/02/content_4876356.htm

On December 26, the Standing Committee of the 13th NPC deliberated and passed the revised National Defense Law of the People's Republic of China at its 24th session. It was signed by President Xi Jinping through the No.67 presidential decree on the same day and will take effect on January 1, 2021. It is a significant milestone in China's national defense legislation.

Since it was promulgated in 1997, the previous edition of the National Defense Law has played an important role in building and consolidating national defense and advancing the modernization of national defense and the armed forces. However, with the development and changes of the world, the nation, the Party and the military, the previous edition no longer fully suits the new tasks and requirements of China's national defense and military development in the new era and needs to be revised and improved.

A strong country stands on the basis of a strong legal system. Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the revised National Defense Law follows Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military, the overall national security outlook, and the military strategic guideline for the new era. Being target-oriented and problem-based, the revised National Defense Law emphasizes the Party's centralized and unified leadership, meeting reform requirements, taking in practical experience and addressing concerns of different groups. It will provide a solid legal guarantee for safeguarding national sovereignty, security and development interests and promoting national defense and military modernization.



Indonesian Navy Concerned about Chinese Seaglidors

OE Watch Commentary: On 4 January, one of Indonesia's most widespread mainstream publications, *Kompas*, featured the excerpted Indonesian-language article. It discussed how Indonesian fishermen were surprised to find what they believed was an underwater Chinese drone in seas off South Sulawesi's coast. Although the article mentions they found this 2.25 meter-long and 175 kilogram object on 20 December, it was not until early 2021 that Indonesia made an announcement about it.

When Indonesia's navy analyzed the object, the article notes they determined it was actually a Chinese seaglider, which had the logo of "China Shenyang Institute of Automation-Chinese Academy of Sciences" inscribed on it. The seaglider was similar to one that

Indonesia discovered in 2019 near Riau Islands, which are across the Malacca Strait from Malaysia and Singapore. The article further asserted that even though these objects were not drones, seaglidors still undermine Indonesia's maritime security because they record strategic data on underwater salinity, currents, temperature, and contours. This data, in turn, according to the article, could allow Chinese submarines to better understand how to penetrate Indonesia's defenses and hide under the sea to avoid being detected. Further, the article mentioned Chinese seaglidors have been found in India's territorial waters, which indicates China is deploying them to other Indo-Pacific countries besides Indonesia.

The article's conclusion also recalls that although Indonesia is developing its own underwater drone technology, as a result of COVID-19's negative impact on Indonesia's economy, the country has reduced its defense budget. Despite demands to increase maritime patrols and underwater radar surveillance systems, it is unclear if the country's budget will be sufficient. At the same time, the article emphasizes that Indonesia is strategically situated in the middle of the South China Sea and there is a lack of clarity about the nature of the balance of power between the United States and China. This, according to the article, makes the reduction of the defense budget of particular concern. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Indonesian Sea and Coast Guard P.112, 2017.

Source: Indonesian Ministry of Transportation, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indonesian_Sea_and_Coast_Guard_P.112,_2017.jpg, Attribution: CC x 2.0

“The existence of seaglidors belonging to other countries certainly undermines Indonesia's national security and defense.”

Source: “Temuan ‘Drone’ di Laut Indonesia dan Terancamnya Keamanan Nasional (Finding of a ‘Drone’ in Indonesian Seas and Its Threat to National Security).” nasional.kompas.com (one of Indonesia's most widespread mainstream publications), 4 January 2020. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/01/04/11500251/temuan-drone-di-laut-indonesia-dan-terancamnya-keamanan-nasional?page=all>

In early 2021, the public was shocked by ‘underwater drones’ caught by fishermen off the coast of the Selayar Islands, South Sulawesi. The drone with a series of sensors on its nose had a length of 2.25 meters and weight of 175 kilograms. The Chief of Staff of the Indonesian Navy (KSAL) confirmed that the finding was not a drone, but a seaglider. In 2019, a similar thing happened in the waters of Bintan Regency, Riau Islands.

The object that was initially suspected of being a drone by fishermen turned out to be a seaglider which was also thought to belong to China. On the seaglider was found Chinese characters that read the name China Shenyang Institute of Automation-Chinese Academy of Sciences. The existence of seaglidors belonging to other countries certainly undermines Indonesia's national security and defense. This is because the seaglider has strategic data recording capabilities. Some strategic data that can be recorded by seaglidors include data on salinity, currents, temperature, and underwater contours. This data is very important for submarine operations. Not only Indonesia, but India has also experienced a similar incident because it found a Chinese seaglider in its territorial waters.

Indonesia also has its own underwater drone technology that is increasingly being developed. The existence of Indonesia in the middle of the South China Sea conflict and the lack of a national defense budget results in uncertainty about how the balance the power of China and the United States will play out in conflict. The threat is exacerbated by the depletion of the defense budget amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile air and maritime patrol aircraft must be added to the budget.



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* (a bi-monthly political theory periodical under the Central Party School and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party), 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



Draft Evasion in the People's Republic of China

OE Watch Commentary: While the People's Republic of China (PRC) has focused efforts on recruiting quality personnel, targeting college students and graduates, conscription continues in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). With continued conscription comes occasional reports of draft evasion. The *Ministry of Defense website* recently published an article on two young men from the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in southeast China refusing military service. Repercussions for refusal to serve can be significant. In this case the two men are prohibited from employment for an unspecified period of time. This includes banning from employment in all companies, government agencies, associations and schools in the region. They will also be "exposed" by local television stations for a month. Further, they were both fined approximately \$5,000.

One of the men was enlisted into the PLA in September 2020, but resisted military discipline, training and management. After repeated requests to leave the military he was discharged in December 2020. The other man also enlisted in the military in September 2020 and was discharged after refusing to accept military discipline.

The PLA press in early January 2021 also reported on a young man being punished for refusing to perform military service after enlistment. The man reportedly signed up for service and was assigned to a paramilitary People's Armed Police Force (PAPF) unit. He too resisted military discipline, training and management. After repeated applications for discharge, he was expelled from the PAPF. As in the previous cases, this man received punishments.

These recent reports are not isolated. According to the excerpted article from *Global Times* (an English daily under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party's People's Daily newspaper), each year there are reports of objection to or expelling of young men from military service resulting in punishment. While the reports are not numerous, the fact that the official PRC and PLA press do report incidents of draft evasion would appear to indicate that refusal to serve in the military is somewhat of a problem, with reporting of punishments no doubt meant to preclude personnel from refusing military service. **End OE Watch Commentary (McCauley)**

“Two young men from Southwest China’s Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region will be listed as “dishonest persons” for rejecting their military service duties. They will be prohibited from employment for an unidentified period of time, a local media reported.”

Source: “Young man punished for refusal to perform military service after enlistment,” *PRC Ministry of Defense website*, January 1, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1211561.shtml>

“Yang was enlisted by the armed forces in Southwest China’s Yunnan Province on September 1, 2020, but developed a strong resistance to discipline, normal education, training and management in the barracks, and requesting to leave many times. Yang was discharged from the troops on December 4, 2020.

Similarly, Liao was enlisted in September 2020 but failed to endure the barracks life and refused to accept the discipline of the troops. He was discharged too.”

Source: “Two young men in Guangxi are censured for rejecting military service,” *Global Times* (an English daily under the auspices of the Chinese Communist Party's People's Daily newspaper), 1 January 2021. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1211561.shtml>

“On October 30, 2019, according to relevant law and regulations including the Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China and the Regulations on Discipline of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (Trail), Yu was declared to be expelled from the military and subjected to the following punishments:

- I. Forbidding Yu to be employed as a civil servant or in those jobs managed in accordance with the Civil Servant Law of the People's Republic of China.*
- II. Forbidding him to apply for going abroad within two years since November 8, 2019, and indicating him as “rejection of military service” on the “military service status” in the household registration information system.*
- III. Forbidding him to be admitted or re-enter college within two years since November 8, 2019.*
- IV. Cancelling Yu's preferential treatment, impose on him a fine of two times the preferential treatment for local conscripts in 2019.*
- V. Yu's refusal of performing military service after enlistment and the corresponding punishments will be announced to the society through media.”*



Taiwan Military Exercises in Perspective

OE Watch Commentary: In mid January international news agencies including Singapore based *Channel News Asia*, who's news stories are based on AP and Reuters dispatches, recently reported on Taiwan military exercises. According to Major General Chen Chong-ji, the exercise at Hukou Army Base was “intended as a show of Taiwan’s determination to maintain peace between the sides through a show of force.” Taiwan military exercises are not new but these exercises take place within the context of steadily increasing Chinese military movements near Taiwan and as Major General suggests, they are meant to send a deterrent signal to China.

The second excerpted article addresses the strength of that deterrent in a round about way. The article published by *Focus Taiwan*, the on-line English language news outlet for the Taiwanese government’s *Central News Agency*, is based on analysis from two Taiwanese military experts. The two analysts suggest that China’s strategy is to “wear down the nation’s military,” to “win by attrition.” While the article’s focus is on the Taiwanese air force and the logistics associated with Taiwanese air power, it can be extrapolated across the entire Taiwan military. The article states that recent Chinese incursions into what Taiwan considers its airspace pose a significant challenge to the readiness of the Taiwan air force. For decades there was an assumption that Taiwan was capable of providing for its own defense but that has changed. China has more of everything. Against this backdrop Taiwan’s military is under strain. It is predominantly conscription based and struggles with issues many conscript based militaries struggle with including neighboring South Korea. Many young people in Taiwan do not see the military as a desirable option and do not pursue careers in uniform past their required military duty. Thus while these recent Taiwanese military exercises are meant to have a deterrent value, they are also “meant to reassure the public the military is maintaining its guard.” One can’t help but wonder if they are also intended to maintain and bolster support from the international community to support Taiwan in case of an escalation of tension with Beijing.

End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)

“Chen said the exercise was intended as a show of Taiwan’s determination to maintain peace between the sides through a show of force. The drills are also meant to reassure the public the military is maintaining its guard ahead of next month’s Chinese New Year festival, when many troops take leave.”



2017 Han Kuang annual exercise.

Source: President, Republic of China | Government Website Open Information Announcement, Attribution: CA by 2.0



Continued: Taiwan Military Exercises in Perspective

Source: “Taiwan military stages drill aimed at repelling China attack,” *Channel News Asia* (Singapore based independent regional news service), 19 January 2021. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/taiwan-military-drill-china-attack-13992060>

Taiwanese troops using tanks, mortars and small arms staged a drill on Tuesday (Jan 19) aimed at repelling an attack from China, which has increased its threats to reclaim the island and its own displays of military might.

“No matter what is happening around the Taiwan Strait, our determination to guard our homeland will never change,” said Major General Chen Chong-ji, director of the department of political warfare, about the exercise at Hukou Army Base south of the capital Taipei.

Chen said the exercise was intended as a show of Taiwan’s determination to maintain peace between the sides through a show of force.

The drills are also meant to reassure the public the military is maintaining its guard ahead of next month’s Chinese New Year festival, when many troops take leave.

China’s increased threats come as economic and political enticements bear little fruit, leading it to stage war games and dispatch fighter jets and reconnaissance planes on an almost daily basis toward the island of 24 million people, which lies 160km off China’s southeast coast across the Taiwan Strait.

Along with the world’s largest standing military, numbering around 2 million members, China has the largest navy, with about 350 vessels, including two aircraft carriers and about 56 submarines. It also possesses around 2,000 combat fighters and bombers and 1,250 ground-launched ballistic missiles, considered a key strategic and psychological weapon against Taiwan.

Taiwan’s armed forces are a fraction of that number, with much of its ground force consisting of short-term conscripts, and its fleet numbers only around 86 vessels, roughly half of them missile boats for coastal patrol.

“A Taiwan defense ministry official recently told CNA that the increased frequency of PLA incursion into Taiwan’s ADIZ means Taiwan’s military aircraft have been forced to increase maintenance, including fueling and replacing spare parts, increasing the workload of maintenance crews and military logistics personnel... the increased frequency of PLA incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ is meant to drive Taiwan’s air force to exhaustion so the PLA wins the war of attrition.”

Source: “Experts urge Taiwan to prepare for war of attrition with China,” *Focus Taiwan* (Taiwan government’s Central News Agency’s English on-line news outlet) 4 October 2020. <https://focustaiwan.tw/cross-strait/202010040011>

Two local military experts recently called on Taiwan’s armed forces to be prepared for a war of attrition with China, following an increase in Chinese military maneuvers near Taiwan in recent months with the aim of wearing down the nation’s military.

China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has sent planes into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ) and across the Taiwan Strait median line more than 28 times this year.

On each occasion, Taiwan’s Air Force intercepted the PLA aircraft.

The dramatic increase in incidents has not only forced Taiwanese pilots and fighter jets to maintain a higher degree of combat readiness, it had also led to a huge increase in maintenance costs for Taiwan’s armed forces.

A Taiwan defense ministry official recently told CNA that the increased frequency of PLA incursion into Taiwan’s ADIZ means Taiwan’s military aircraft have been forced to increase maintenance, including fueling and replacing spare parts, increasing the workload of maintenance crews and military logistics personnel.

One of the main challenges is due to the fact that most Taiwanese military aircraft were made overseas and Taiwan does not have the ability to build these spare parts itself, according to the official.

...

... the increased frequency of PLA incursions into Taiwan’s ADIZ is meant to drive Taiwan’s air force to exhaustion so the PLA wins the war of attrition.



Will India Face Sanctions over S-400s?

OE Watch Commentary: On 14 December 2020, Turkey became the first NATO-member to be subject to the CAATSA sanctions, due to its purchase of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia. It became only the second country (after China) to face these sanctions. India, who also signed a deal to purchase the S-400 system from Russia (due to be delivered at the end of 2021) watched this process closely to glean how it would be treated.

While the first accompanying passage from *The EurAsian Times* (a digital news site covering South Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia) claims that India will be exempt from sanctions, the second passage, also from *The EurAsian Times* claims that India will be dealt with by the same yardstick as Turkey. The passage from *Medyascope* (an independent on-line Turkish news platform) discusses how the CAATSA sanctions on Turkey are meant as a deterrent to India and others who may be considering buying the S-400s (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq and Egypt). The passage claims that by imposing sanctions on a NATO-ally, the US sends a message to non-NATO countries that they too will face sanctions.



5P85TM TEL for S-400 Triumph air defense system.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin via VitalyKuzmin.net, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/2011-Victory-Day-Parade/i-MjLpvrh>
Attribution: CCA by NC-ND 4.0 International License

One of the ways that great power competition manifests itself into other parts of the world is via foreign military sales. While Russia seeks to sell its S-400s to US allies and others, the sanctions on a NATO-member is an important message to potential buyers. The manner in which sanctions increase or decrease according to future Turkish actions on the S-400 will also send a message to others considering a significant military deal with a US adversary. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“US sanctions may be...coming [for India] once the [S-400] procurement is done, since Turkey, a NATO-ally, too has been slapped with sanctions...”

Source: “Why India, Unlike Turkey, Will Not Invite US Sanctions Over Its S-400 Deal With Russia,” *The EurAsian Times* (a digital news site covering South Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia), 15 January 2021. <https://eurasianimes.com/why-india-unlike-turkey-will-not-invite-us-sanctions-over-its-s-400-deal-with-russia/>

India is going ahead with its plan to induct the Russian S-400 Triumph surface-to-air missile. Undeterred by the prospect of the US imposing sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which it has done on Turkey, a NATO member, as well as China, New Delhi is keen to acquire the deadly missiles.

...

India seems to have taken the calculated risk that given the growing strategic ties between Washington and New Delhi, a trend that will be further strengthened under the incoming Biden- Presidency, the US will find a way for a waiver of the CAATSA in favor of India.

...

Turkey's case, unlike India, is different. Turkey, as a member of NATO, is predominantly dealing with the Western arms in general and the American systems in particular. The Americans have a legitimate fear that the purchase and pursuit of the S-400 system would endanger the security of US military technology and personnel. That is precisely the reason why the US has decided to backtrack from its decision of providing the F-35 aircraft to Turkey.

Source: “If US Presses India Out of Russian S-400 Deal, Pakistan Could Be Its Prospective Buyer,” *The EurAsian Times*, 7 January 2021. <https://eurasianimes.com/if-us-presses-india-out-of-russian-s-400-deal-pakistan-could-be-its-prospective-buyer/>

India is now completely in the US bloc but despite that the US sanctions may be incoming once the procurement is done, since Turkey, a NATO-ally, too has been slapped with sanctions as the country had gone ahead with S-400 after refusing US stealth jet fighters. Turkey would cry foul if India is not dealt with the same yardstick.

Source: “Transatlantik: CAATSA Yaptırımları, 10 yıl sonra Arab baharı (Transatlantic: CAATSA Sanctions, The Arab Spring 10 years later),” *Medyascope* (an independent on-line Turkish news platform), 21 December 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0nEgxfSMKqY&t=1731s>

The incoming US administration... will not compromise on the S-400 issue. Because this issue is not just limited to Turkey. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq and Egypt all want to buy S-400s. India has already signed a contract. So [the US] will surmise that if they don't impose sanctions on a NATO ally, they can't do anything to these other countries.



India Adding Artillery Brigade to Mountain Strike Corps

OE Watch Commentary: The Indian Armed Forces established its Mountain Strike Corps a couple of years ago as part of an effort to have a few divisions capable of operating in mountainous terrain along the Indian-Chinese border (see: “India Tests its New Integrated Battle Groups,” *OE Watch*, November 2019). India’s 2020 border clashes with Chinese forces has hastened several reforms in the armed forces and as the accompanying excerpted article reports, the Mountain Strike Corps continues to develop.

The article, from the commercially funded and independent online news website *ThePrint*, reports that the Mountain Strike Corps is “set to get its own artillery brigade.” The article notes how “an artillery brigade is already attached to the Mountain Strike Corps’ only division but the new brigade will be attached to the Corps” and that Indian officials said “work has already started on raising the new artillery brigade, which will see larger deployment of the Ultra Light Howitzers besides other guns.” The article provides an update that the “Mountain Strike Corps has only one division as of now” and that sources in the Indian government said “there was no progress in the potential raising of another division, which is meant to be based in Pathankot.”



Indian Army Aviation Corps and Air Defence Arty Joint Display Ex.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indian_Army_Aviation_Corps_and_Air_Defence_Arty_Joint_Display_Ex_2.jpg, Attribution: CC BY YA 4.0

The article provides some background on the delay to fully strengthen the corps and that “originally envisaged way back in 2000, the Mountain Strike Corps was finally sanctioned only in 2013.” It goes on to note that “while the corps was supposed to have two divisions instead of the regular three, only the Panagarh-based 51 Division was raised,” how “plans for raising of the second division were put on hold due to a paucity of funds” and that “it was then thought that the MSC can be divided into Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs).” Ultimately, the Mountain Strike Corps remains under strength, but the addition of the artillery brigade at the corps level shows how the Indian government is still developing the unit.

End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)

“An artillery brigade is already attached to the Mountain Strike Corps’ only division but the new brigade will be attached to the Corps”

Source: Snehesh Alex Philip, “Amid China stand-off, Mountain Strike Corps to get its own artillery brigade,” *The Print* (commercially funded and independent online news website), 11 December 2020. <https://theprint.in/defence/amid-china-stand-off-mountain-strike-corps-to-get-its-own-artillery-brigade/564973/>

Amid the ongoing tensions with China in Eastern Ladakh, the Panagarh (West Bengal)-based Mountain Strike Corps (MSC) is set to get its own artillery brigade, ThePrint has learnt.

An artillery brigade is already attached to the Mountain Strike Corps’ only division but the new brigade will be attached to the Corps.

...Sources in the defence and security establishment said work has already started on raising the new artillery brigade, which will see larger deployment of the Ultra Light Howitzers besides other guns.

...The Mountain Strike Corps has only one division as of now. Sources, however, said there was no progress in the potential raising of another division, which is meant to be based in Pathankot.

...“The armoured elements in the heights are possible in Ladakh and some areas of Sikkim but not in the rest of the terrain. Air Power is essential but it is dependent on weather. The only thing available to act as a punisher round the clock in the mountains are the artillery,” a source said...

...Although originally envisaged way back in 2000, the Mountain Strike Corps was finally sanctioned only in 2013...

While the corps was supposed to have two divisions instead of the regular three, only the Panagarh-based 51 Division was raised. Plans for raising of the second division were put on hold due to a paucity of funds. It was then thought that the MSC can be divided into Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs), a new concept brought in by then Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat.

The Mountain Strike Corps, also known as the 17 Corps, debuted last year in the massive exercise called “HimVijay”, which also saw the IBGs concept in action.



Indonesia Arrests Longtime Wanted Terrorist Zulkarnaen

OE Watch Commentary: On 21 December, Indonesian-language publication *Kompas*, which is mainstream and has wide distribution in Indonesia, reported on the arrest in Java of longtime Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) member, Zulkarnaen. The excerpted article recounted how Zulkarnaen established what once was Southeast Asia's most lethal terrorist movement, JI. However, JI has become largely defunct in the past decade due to successful Indonesian counter-terrorism operations.

The article states Zulkarnaen believed small teams operated more efficiently. Therefore, in the early 2000s, he led many small cells throughout Indonesia, whose attacks were collectively claimed in the name of JI. After his recent arrest, the article notes Zulkarnaen stated that when an assignment was given to a JI cell, there was an accelerated period of training before an attack would be carried out. This maintained operational security and limited the opportunities for preemptive counter-terrorism interventions. According to the article, Zulkarnaen's cells were responsible for the 2002 Bali bombing and others on an Ambon church and Philippines' embassy in Jakarta in subsequent years. His biography, according to another Indonesian-language website, *detik.com*, also mentions his training Indonesians in Afghanistan for several years before 9/11.



Bali Bombing Mural.

Source: Sardaka, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:\(1\)Bali_Bombing_Mural.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:(1)Bali_Bombing_Mural.jpg), Attribution: CC x 4.0

The path to arresting Zulkarnaen in the excerpted article began as early as 2007, when JI was banned by Indonesia's government. After this Indonesia began a more serious crackdown on JI, and, in 2019, a five-member JI cell was uncovered by Indonesia's Densus 88 counter-terrorism unit. One year later, in 2020, and only weeks before Zulkarnaen's arrest, the *detik.com* article noted another JI member, Upik Lawanga, was arrested and that Zulkarnaen was responsible for hiding him. This, in turn, led to Zulkarnaen's own arrest in a compound surrounded by five armed guards.

Although neither JI nor Zulkarnaen has conducted any major terrorist attacks in recent years in part because the counter-terrorism pressure has been high, the arrest of Zulkarnaen and other JI members provides justice for JI's victims. It also demonstrates that Indonesia will be relentless in pursuing both past and present terrorist masterminds. That said, it is worth noting that Indonesia announced it released 82-year old JI founder Abu Bakar Bashir from prison on 8 January on grounds of his poor health. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“In forming this small team, Zulkarnaen recruited a number of prospective terrorists who were all scattered throughout Java.”

Source: “Cerita Zulkarnaen Bentuk Kelompok Teroris JI (Zulkarnaen’s Story on Forming the JI Terrorist Group),” *nasional.kompas.com* (mainstream Indonesian-language publication), 21 December 2020. <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/12/21/10244961/cerita-zulkarnaen-bentuk-kelompok-teroris-ji-rekrut-ali-imron-hingga-amrozi?page=all>

Source: “Ditangkap, Zulkarnaen Teroris Bom Bali I Pernah Latih Militer di Afghanistan (Arrested, Zulkarnaen the Bali Bombing Terrorist Has Militarily Trained in Afghanistan),” *news.detik.com*, 14 December 2020. <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5294964/ditangkap-zulkarnaen-teroris-bom-bali-i-pernah-latih-militer-di-afghanistan>

Strong relations between Ethiopia and Kenya matter for AMISOM, and their weakened alliance is worrying. They are experiencing political differences regarding Somalia’s federal-state relations, especially on Jubaland and the disputed Gedo region. While Ethiopia’s support seems to lean towards the interests of the federal government, Kenya inclines more towards the states.

AMISOM thus faces several risks that may negatively affect its operational capabilities and effectiveness. This could boost al-Shabaab’s ability to carry out terror attacks and expand its territorial control.

Another internal problem that affects AMISOM’s operational effectiveness and its exit plan is tension between the government and its federal member states, especially Jubaland State. Relations deteriorated due to political disagreement over power sharing. While the member states want a semi-autonomous region, the central government wants centralised power.



Iran and Turkey to Collaborate in Technology Sharing

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey and Iran share a 332-mile border. Citizens of both countries enjoy visa-free travel in the other. The shah of Iran modeled many of his reforms after those of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. However, after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, the two countries have taken sharply divergent strategic postures. Turkey remains a member of NATO and long sought European Union accession. The Islamic Republic of Iran, meanwhile, firmly rejected Western influence and, since 1984, became formally designated a state sponsor of terrorism.

However, in recent years there has been a broad rapprochement between Turkey and Iran driven in part by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's growing hostility toward the West. Turkey, for example, became the primary intermediary in a number of Iranian counter-sanctions schemes.



A newly-constructed Iranian industrial park zone in Qazvin.

Source: Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization, https://isipo.ir/uploads/forms/form_22/85233770029600514624718947263530.jpg

The excerpted article from the Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization's website highlights another aspect of growing Iran-Turkey ties: While both countries emphasize development of their own industrial and technological base, both are also keen to infuse their indigenous industries with new technologies. That both countries are seeking to facilitate such exchanges may complicate Turkey's ties with the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union, each of which remain suspicious of Iranian intentions and worried with regard to intellectual property rights. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“There will be cooperation in technology exchange There will be cooperation in technology exchange”

Source: “Eyjad-e Markaz-e Da’imi Tobadel Fonavari Iran va Turkiyeh” (“Establishment of a permanent center for technology exchange between Iran and Turkey”), *Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization*, 26 December 2020. <http://isipo.ir/index.jsp?fkeyid=&siteid=1&pageid=306&newsview=12601>

Establishment of a permanent center for technology exchange between Iran and Turkey

Following the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the organizations in charge of small and medium industries in Iran and Turkey, which was aimed at improving economic and trade cooperation and the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises in the world markets, the Action Plan of this memorandum was discussed, exchanged, and agreed upon in the second meeting of the Joint Committee for Implementation. The second meeting of the Joint Executive Committee between the Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) and Turkey's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization. (KOSGEB) was held by video conference.... According to the agreed Action Plan, there will be cooperation in technology exchange, establishment of a permanent center for technology exchange between Iran and Turkey, transfer of experiences in the field of business clusters, subcontracting systems and financing of small and medium enterprises, cooperation between guarantee funds, and holding of meetings to attract investments. There will also be face-to-face meetings between Iranian and Turkish businessmen, consultant training courses and cooperation between the business development services during a work calendar and after the approval and signature of the heads of the two organizations.



Iran's Ballistic Missile Redline

OE Watch Commentary: In the days preceding 3 January, a succession of Iranian officials marked the first anniversary of the death of Qods Force chief Qassem Soleimani. Their speeches threatened America and their rhetoric blustered. The excerpted account from *Entekhab*, a popular Iranian reformist website, is no different. It features Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Air Force chief, discussing the Islamic Republic's missile program.

He makes several important points: First, Hajizadeh speaks about how Iran has exported not only its missiles but also the ability to manufacture them, to both Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon; both are U.S.-designated terrorist groups and Hajizadeh suggests, as per the Supreme Leader's dictates, that any group willing to fight Israel on its borders will be able to access Iranian missile technology.

He also suggests that the Iranian missile barrage on Ayn al-Asad, an Iraqi base where American troops are co-located with their Iraqi counterparts, changed the narrative with regard to American power in the wake of the death of Soleimani. This appears false given that the barrage, despite injuring several dozen American troops, did not force a change in American posture and, quite the contrary, antagonized the Iraqi government which argued that the Iranian attack on the al-Asad Air Base was as much a violation of Iraqi sovereignty as the initial American attack on Soleimani.

For policymakers, however, Hajizadeh's comments about Iran's ballistic missile program being non-negotiable may be the most policy relevant. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called Iran nuclear deal, omitted regulation of Iran's missile program. Iranian authorities themselves said that they would limit the range of their missiles to 2,000 kilometers, roughly 1,240 miles (See: "IRGC: Iran can Extend Ballistic Missile Range," *OE Watch*, February 2019). In the years since signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has both tested several dozen missiles and focused on increasing their precision (See: "Iran Claims Enhanced Missile Precision," *OE Watch*, May 2017). Western diplomats suggest that the status of Iran's missile program would be top of the agenda in any effort to negotiate a new agreement with Iran. Any Iranian red-line regarding its missiles undercuts hopes that returning to and advancing past the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action will be a quick endeavor. Hajizadeh's statement that Iran's current 1,240-mile range is a self-imposed limit not written into any treaty arrangement will highlight Western suspicions that Iran's satellite launch program is merely a cover for longer range ballistic missiles.

That the same Hajizadeh speech was covered in much the same way by *Tasnim*, an outlet affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, underscores how discourse from across the official spectrum from reform to hardline approaches the ballistic missile redline with unanimity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



General Hajizadeh, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Air Force.
Source: Entekhab.ir, https://www.entekhab.ir/files/fa/news/1399/10/13/995076_852.jpg

“Everything you see about missile power in Gaza and Lebanon has been done with the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Source: “Sardar Hajizadeh: Ghalet Mikonad Kasi Bekhahad dar Baath Tavan Moshaki Mozakareh Konad” (“General Hajizadeh: It is wrong for anyone to want to negotiate on missile power”), *Entekhab*, (one of the most highly visited news websites in Iran, close to reformists), 2 January 2021. <https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/593748>

General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, commander of the Revolutionary Guards' Air Force, in a conversation on the occasion of the anniversary of the martyrdom of [late Qods Force Chief] Gen. Hajji Qassem Soleimani, said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran, according to the order of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, will support anyone who is on the front line against the Zionist regime.” Hajizadeh added: “Gaza and Lebanon are at the forefront of this battle and everything you see about missile power in Gaza and Lebanon has been done with the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran.” He continued, “We taught our allies and friends on the resistance front how to make fish hooks instead of just [providing] fish, and they now have these capabilities and technologies....”

In an interview with *Al-Manar*, the commander of the IRGC Air Force said about the rain rocket of the American base of Ayn al-Asad after the martyrdom of Gen. Soleimani, “We have undermined the prestige and hegemony of the United States....”

Regarding Iran's missile capability and efforts to limit it, the IRGC Air Force commander also said, “This missile capability is non-negotiable and it would be wrong for anyone to negotiate on this issue.” No official is allowed to negotiate missile power, and this is the red line.” Hajizadeh stated, “The power of our missile can be seen in the comments of our enemies. No one has forced us to limit the range of missiles to 2,000 kilometers.... It was our decision and not an eternal limit.”



Counterterrorism, Trade, and the Western Sahara: Algeria to Deepen Security Cooperation with Mauritania

OE Watch Commentary: The Algerian government is embarking on a concerted campaign to deepen economic and security relations with Mauritania. In early January, Major General Mohamed Bamba Meguett, Chief of Staff of the Mauritanian Armed Forces, spent three days in Algeria, meeting with his local counterparts and catching glimpses of Algeria's domestic weapons industry. According to the first accompanying excerpt, from *al-Araby al-Jadid*, a pro-Qatar pan-Arab daily, Algeria offered to supply the Mauritanian army with domestically produced military vehicles, ammunition, and other equipment. They also made plans for Mauritanian soldiers to study and train in Algerian military academies.

Algeria's outreach to Mauritania also includes a push to resurrect the Joint Operational Military Staff Committee (known as CEMOC for its French-language acronym), a coordination framework for the armed forces of Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger to jointly combat terrorism in the Sahel. Initially proposed by Algeria in 2010, the plan never materialized and was eclipsed by the 2017 French-led "Group of Five" or "G5 Sahel" Joint Force (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania). According to the excerpt from Turkey's state-run news agency *Anadolu Agency*, France and Algeria are putting forth competing models to deal with armed groups in the Sahel, with the French model emphasizing "direct military intervention in the Sahel countries," while the Algeria model favors an approach wherein countries operate only within their borders, while sharing intelligence and coordinating military operations.

Algeria's overtures to Mauritania are not merely about securing the Sahel from jihadist marauders. They are also motivated by competition with Morocco for influence in northwest Africa. Algeria has been a longtime backer of the Polisario Front, the Western Saharan (Sahrawi) armed independentist movement. In mid-November, a gunfight erupted between Polisario fighters and the Moroccan military in the village of Guerguerat, near the Western Sahara-Mauritania border. Since then, several countries have moved to recognize Moroccan claims on the Western Sahara. As the final accompanying excerpt from *al-Araby al-Jadid* notes, Mauritania has historically been an arena of Algeria-Morocco competition, in particular as it relates to the Western Sahara.

There is also a commercial dimension to Algeria's interest in Mauritania. As one of the excerpts explains, the new Algerian government is focused on strengthening trade with West Africa and the Sahel. In 2018, Algeria and Mauritania opened their first border crossing near the Algerian desert city of Tindouf, home to the largest concentration of displaced Sahrawis and considered a center of gravity for the Polisario Front. Algerian interest in West Africa is likely boosted by Chinese interest in Algeria as a gateway to Sub-Saharan Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Tindouf, Algeria.

Source: Habib kaki, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7b/Tindouf_%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%81.jpg, Attribution: CC0 1.0

“Mauritania has long been the subject of a power struggle between Algeria and Morocco because of the Sahara issue, an issue that has always governed the nature of Mauritania’s relations with both Algeria and Morocco...”



Continued: Counterterrorism, Trade, and the Western Sahara: Algeria to Deepen Security Cooperation with Mauritania

Source: الجزائر تدعو إلى مسار جديد من التعاون العسكري مع موريتانيا
(Algeria Calls for a New Path in its Cooperation with Mauritania),” *al-Araby al-Jadid* (a pro-Qatar pan-Arab daily), 6 January 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/y25vxakx>

General Mohamed Bemba Muqit visited Algerian military vehicle production sites. In addition to training Mauritanian military cadres in Algeria’s various schools and military academies, Algeria offered to supply military vehicles, ammunition and other equipment manufactured in Algeria for the Mauritanian army.

A month ago, the Algerian army announced its intention to grow its military industry by developing a number of its industrial establishments and provide them with the latest technologies. In a previous meeting with the directors of the military industry’s factories and companies, Chengriha urged them to enhance the various branches and specialties in the fields of research, development and military manufacturing, to include not only meeting the needs of the army locally but also to penetrate regional and international markets and seriously think about exporting Algerian military industry products, especially to neighboring countries such as Tunisia and Mauritania, and African Sahel countries such as Niger.

The Algerian army owns a factory to manufacture military and armored vehicles, established in partnership with the German brand “Mercedes,” a factory for machine guns, research centers and workshops for developing unmanned aircraft and assembling gunships, other factories for maintenance, ammunition and explosive materials, and workshops for the implementation of video surveillance systems for large installations and facilities.

Source: انتكاسة فرنسا بالساحل.. هل تعزز تعاون الجزائر وموريتانيا عسكريا؟
(France’s setback in the Sahel, Will it strengthen Algeria and Mauritania’s military cooperation?)” *Anadolu Agency* (Turkey’s state-run news agency), 11 January 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/y2alcn4s>

In a move that would revive the spirit of the so-called “countries in the field” (Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger) that was formed in 2010, Chengriha stressed “the importance of making greater use of the available security cooperation mechanisms, especially the CEMOC Joint Military Staff Committee,” which has its headquarters in the city of Tamanrasset, in the far south of Algeria. Chengriha identified the nature of this cooperation in “exchanging information and coordinating actions on both sides of the common borders of member states.” Herein lies the essence of the dispute between Algeria’s vision of combating terrorist organizations, and the French tactic fighting it in the Sahel region. Paris prefers direct military intervention in the Sahel countries, through military bases, combat aircraft, helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles, in addition to military teams on the ground, through the Group of Five coalition (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania), which was formed in 2017. Meanwhile, Algeria believes that every Sahel country should fight terrorist groups within its territory with intelligence and military coordination between these countries on the borders.

Source: أسباب وراء الاندفاع الجزائرية نحو موريتانيا 3
(3 Reasons for Algeria’s Push toward Mauritania),” *al-Araby al-Jadid* (a pro-Qatar pan-Arab daily), 8 January 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/yxbktshr>

Recently, Algeria has rushed in a notable way toward its southern neighbor Mauritania, through an intense series of ministerial visits to Nouakchott, substantial Algerian support for Mauritanian efforts to confront the Coronavirus epidemic, and military cooperation between the armies of the two countries. There is also an agreement for security cooperation on the horizon, as well as preparations for a large economic presence after the first commercial land crossing between the two countries was opened in August 2018...

Algeria is focusing more on its relations with surrounding and neighboring countries, especially in the Sahel region. [President Abdelmadjid] Tebboune’s creation of the Agency for International Cooperation, which is in charge of setting policies with neighbors and is headed by Muhammad Shafiq Mesbah, a former officer in the intelligence service, contributed to the drafting of these new policies, especially towards Mauritania. Relations with Nouakchott are currently receiving significant political, economic and security attention...

*... there is also a political factor behind this push, namely Algeria’s search for a fulcrum in West Africa in the context of its new policies toward that region. These calculations are not unrelated to political competition between Algeria and Morocco over who has the largest presence in the region, especially given Mauritania’s political connection to the Western Sahara conflict as a United Nations observer country. It also has a geographical connection to the Guerguerat crossing, which was the subject of a recent dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front. In this context, the Mauritanian researcher in political affairs, Abdallah Ould Biba, said in an interview with *al-Araby al-Jadid*, that “Mauritania has long been the subject of a power struggle between Algeria and Morocco because of the Sahara issue, an issue that has always governed the nature of Mauritania’s relations with both Algeria and Morocco. The recent Algerian interest in Mauritania is also related to the development of Nouakchott’s position supporting the international solution and moving away from the Moroccan proposal.”*



Reasons Behind the Resurgence of ISIS in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: ISIS is staging a comeback in the Syrian Badia (Syrian Desert). The accompanying Arabic-language media passages highlight some of the reasons behind this. One factor, according to the first article from *180post* (an independent Lebanese news website), is that ISIS does not suffer from a manpower shortage and has as many as 10,000 fighters distributed across the Syrian Desert's nooks and crannies, under new leadership that is more familiar with the terrain. ISIS tactics have also shifted recently, the other *180post* article notes, from planting IEDs along desert roads to nighttime ambushes of government convoys and vehicles. A 31 December ambush garnered substantial attention, after ISIS fighters killed over three dozen Syrian soldiers from the Syrian Army's 4th Division as they drove home along the desert highway, intending to spend the New Year with their families in the city of Homs. ISIS attacks have also targeted tankers ferrying crude oil from Deir Ezzor province to Syrian refineries. The tankers are owned and operated by the Qaterji Group, an economic arm of the Syrian Army's 4th Division, which is controlled by the president's brother Maher al-Assad and considered close to Iran.



Palmyra, Syria.

Source: James Gordon from Los Angeles, California, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palmyra,_Syria_-_3.jpg, Attribution: CC BY-SA 2.0

The excerpt from *al-Araby al-Jadid* (pro-Qatar pan-Arab daily), explains how ISIS has been able to benefit from a number of developments, including the coronavirus pandemic, Iranian-backed militia repositioning following the killing of Qasem Soleimani in early 2020, and tensions between Turkey and the SDF. ISIS is focused on Syrian loyalist forces and assets partly because they are softer targets than the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which are backed by the U.S.-led coalition. An analyst cited in the article notes that “the [Syrian] regime does not have the ability to confront the expansion of ISIS.” The final excerpt, from *al-Modon* (Lebanon-based independent online newspaper), highlights how ISIS has benefitted from internal competition and lack of coordination within the Syrian loyalist camp. The article argues that Syrian-Russian forces have attacked ISIS reactively and without coordination between Syrian ground forces and Russian airpower. Furthermore, Russian-Iranian competition for control over population centers in or at the edge of the Syrian desert, particularly along the Euphrates from Deir Ezzor to Albu Kamal, has kept Iran from committing its Euphrates-based Syrian allies to a difficult battle in the desert.

The Syrian government and people are facing what may be their most difficult economic year yet, as sanctions, Lebanese financial collapse, acute mismanagement and corruption, and the effects of COVID-19 all come together in a perfect storm. As with other unrelated events, ISIS is likely to benefit from this state of affairs and may soon recommence attacks on Syrian government-controlled population centers at the western edges of the desert. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...The regime does not have the ability to confront the expansion of ISIS...”

Source: سوريا: داعش يتمكن في البادية.. وحراس الدين يكسر الطوق
 “Syria: ISIS is Winning in the Desert... And Horras al-Din Breaks the Siege,” *180post* (an independent Lebanese news website), 5 January 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/yypcxzhr>

ISIS “does not suffer from a manpower or fighter shortage despite the great losses suffered last year”... This suggests that the number of ISIS fighters, between active and sleeper cells, may be in the vicinity of ten thousand... What is certain is that new leaders were appointed in the Badia region a few months ago, after the killing of Abu Ayyub al-Iraqi, who did not have enough experience dealing with desert areas. These new appointments have played a prominent role in stimulating ISIS activity in the region, giving it more security and military dimensions than the operations carried out under previous leadership. ISIS media revealed that the leader responsible for the security detachments in Deir Ezzor is Abu Mansour Al-Ansari. This came in an interview with him published in the newspaper al-Naba, issued by ISIS’s central media office. The group’s leadership in the other parts of the Badia remains unknown.



Continued: Reasons Behind the Resurgence of ISIS in Syria

Source: داعش يُبدّل معادلاته السورية: حرب إستنزاف طويلة
 “ISIS is Changing its Syrian Equation: A Long War of Attrition,” *180post* (an independent Lebanese news website), 7 January 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/yx8q59nt>

A Syrian source on the ground told 180post that previously ISIS relied on booby-trapping roads at night and targeting vehicles from a distance. However, continuous combing operations carried out by the Syrian forces on the main roads stopped the number of attacks and prompted the organization to adopt new tactics, instead launching direct night-time attacks on roads... Since the beginning of the year 2020, after the near elimination of ISIS in Syria, what remained of its fighters retreated to pockets in the desert, where the organization changed its way of operating, moving away from centralized operations and relying on decentralized leadership. This, it seems, gave its fighters greater freedom of movement to launch sporadic attacks, without engaging in direct confrontations with the Syrian forces... ISIS is trying to change the fighting balance and turn it into a long war of attrition, by moving away from massing in fixed locations and carrying out operations focused on security rather than military operations, which requires intense security work in addition to military action...

Source: داعش 2020: نشاط في البادية السورية وتراجع في العراق
 “ISIS 2020: Active in the Syrian Desert and Retreating in Iraq,” *al-Araby al-Jadid* (pro-Qatar pan-Arab daily), 1 January 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/y3wl575r>

In an interview with al-Araby al-Jadid, Orabi Abdul-Hayy Orabi, a researcher on Islamic groups, said that there are a number of reasons for ISIS’s reemergence in Syria... “The organization is benefiting on the margins from major incidents. It benefited from the emergence of the Corona virus, intensifying its operations in Syria and Iraq. When Qassem Soleimani was assassinated at the beginning of the year 2020, it benefited from the changes that took place in the stationing of Iranian militias in the eastern countryside of Deir Ezzor, in Syria’s far east,” he said, “and several operations against it were conducted in the new areas in which it was stationed.”

Orabi explained that the organization “concentrated its operations in the Syrian desert because it found that the regime forces are much weaker in the eastern Euphrates River area than the SDF, which is supported by the international coalition.” He added: “The regime does not have the ability to confront the expansion of ISIS.” And he indicated that the organization “has adopted a policy of periodic escalation followed by disappearance, attacking the main roads in the Badia on which the regime depends, through ambushes and improvised explosive devices. It has exhausted its enemies in the Syrian Badia by taking advantage of the operations and movements of these enemies. The organization has increased the pace of security work and promoted new leaders in the Badia, all of which has led to an escalation of its operations.”

Source: أسباب فشل القضاء على “داعش” في البادية السورية؟
 “Reasons Why ISIS Hasn’t Been Destroyed in the Syrian Desert,” *al-Modon* (Lebanon-based independent online newspaper), 4 January 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/y3rqzcs>

The first reason behind the failure of the regime, Russia and Iran to eliminate ISIS cells in the Badia lies in the fact that the military operations are inconsistent reactions and lacking in strategy. They always come in response to violent attacks by the organization, which cause heavy losses to the regime and its allies...

The operations by the regime and its allies against ISIS cells were not only reactive but they also lacked joint strategic planning. The anti-ISIS alliance does not have a specific military plan or timeline to eliminate these cells, but rather relies on sporadic attacks that are often on the ground without air support, or operations carried out by warplanes alone, as is happening now in the Badia.

The second reason is Russian-Iranian competition for influence in eastern Syria... Both sides refrain from pushing their military weight on the ground in the battle to clear the Badia, fearing that the other side will take advantage of the military vacuum to consolidate its influence. The Iranian forces have not participated in the White Desert Operation or the current operation so far, while Russia is content with air participation to support the advancing regime forces on the ground...

The presence of the organization in remote areas in the Badia, far from the populated communities, constitutes a fundamental factor in the inability of the regime and its allies to obtain intelligence through the traditional method of recruiting collaborators outside the ranks of the organization to inform on movements and collect initial intelligence information... Constant movement in the vast countryside, the guerrilla tactics adopted by the organization, and the ability of its elements to hide in the desert are additional factors that help it survive and make it



Anatomy of Yemen's Armed Groups

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage is drawn from a long report on Yemen's armed groups, published in the pro-Hadi government independent Yemeni news website *al-Masdar Online*. The report provides an exhaustive overview and useful details on key units fighting in Yemen. *Al-Masdar's* editorial line supports the Saudi-backed government led by Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi, and the report is comprehensive on armed formations backed by Saudi and the UAE. Information on the Houthis and allied groups, on the other hand, is useful but admittedly thinner on detail, reflecting effective Houthi control over sensitive information.

The article's authors believe that the pro-Hadi forces are capable of military victory, provided two main conditions are met. The first of these is unification of anti-Houthi forces, including the various units backed by the UAE (Republican Forces, Southern Transitional Council, Elite Forces, etc.) and the National Army backed by Saudi Arabia. For several years, Saudi and Emirati-backed factions have fought for control over resources and territory in the south, most notably the capital Aden and most recently in Abyan province.

According to the article, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have established 60 new military units in the past five years. The Riyadh Agreement, the political mechanism designed to institutionalize this unification, has finally begun sputtering to life after over a year of dormancy, though its durability remains to be seen. The article's authors argue that Saudi control over weapons purchases made by their allies in the Yemeni National Army ought to be loosened. As the article explains, the Saudi-backed army inherited mostly Russian/Soviet equipment that is incompatible with Saudi-provided, Western-manufactured equipment. A loosening of Saudi restrictions on their Yemeni allies' weapons procurement, according to the article, would go some way in helping them "regain momentum in the fighting and achieve successes." The article contrasts between the National Army, which inherited substantial equipment but lacks ammunition or spare parts for much of it, with the Emirati-backed forces led by Tariq Saleh, which were equipped from scratch with brand new vehicles and weapons, many of them manufactured in the UAE. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Saudi Arabian soldier from the First Airborne Brigade with a UAE soldier, 2016.

Source: Saudi88hawk, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7a/Saudi_Arabian_soldier_from_the_First_Airborne_Brigade_with_a_UAE_soldier%2C_2016.jpg, Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

“...Saudi Arabia and the UAE have established nearly 60 new units, brigades and battalions, within the past five years...”

Source: جيش وجيوش.. البنادق المشتركة في اليمن (Army and Armies... The Shared Guns in Yemen),” *al-Masdar* (pro-Hadi government independent Yemeni news website), 3 January 2020. <https://almasdaronline.com/articles/212047> (English version available at: <https://al-masdaronline.net/national/915>)

According to the defense minister, there are approximately 320,000 members of the military in the Hadi-led government. The Fourth Military Region (Aden - Taiz - Lahj - Abyan – Al Dhale) is the most populous, as it represents 56 percent of the military's forces, according to information obtained by Almasdar Online from an informed military source who was not authorized to speak with the press... Those military regions with fewer numbers of military forces face more confrontations with the Houthis than more heavily populated regions...

According to three high-ranking officers in the military who talked to Almasdar Online, the Yemeni government was unable to make new arms deals because the Saudi-led coalition procured and distributed the arms. “The Yemeni military now has weapons, but it does not have the appropriate ammunition or spare parts. The Yemeni military is mostly armed with Russian weaponry and ammunition, while Saudi military equipment is largely American, French and British,” one officer added...

It is extremely difficult to obtain information about the composition of Houthis forces... All of the military leadership positions are now occupied by Houthis. Former military forces who want to join their ranks must undergo cultural and religious courses, regardless of their rank, according to a number of officers in Sanaa who spoke to Almasdar Online... According to two military sources working in the Houthi-run military in Sana'a, the number of actual Houthi forces is close to 200,000, of whom 130,000 have been recruited since the beginning of the Saudi-led intervention...

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have established nearly 60 new units, brigades and battalions, within the past five years, according to an official who works on this file in the presidential office...

Tariq [Saleh] and his forces left Sana'a without any equipment or weapons. Even their military uniforms were left behind. The UAE turned it into the most advanced military unit on the western coast. It has hundreds of modern vehicles, dozens of armored vehicles, in addition to transport and support equipment, and heavy weapons such as cannons, tanks and rocket launchers, as well as drones, naval boats equipped with guns, and modern military communications units, according to a commander close to Tariq...

If the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement is successful, the government is able to operate from Aden, the conflict within the coalition is solved, government arms deals are allowed, and all parties unify to confront the Houthis, then it is expected that the military will regain momentum in the fighting and achieve successes.



PKK Casts Shadow on Turkey-Iraq Relations

OE Watch Commentary: On Dec. 17, 2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan welcomed Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi to Turkey. The visit took place after months of tense relations over several issues, with the main irritant being the presence of the PKK militants in northern Iraq. Most recently, the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq (KRG) asked the United States to deploy forces to monitor border crossings between the KRG and the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria as a method of monitoring the PKK's movement. As the accompanying articles report, the PKK continues to influence Ankara's relations with Baghdad.

According to the first article from *al-Monitor*, an independent news site with analysts from the Middle East, the presence of the PKK in northern Iraq continues to be a thorny issue in Iraqi-Turkish relations. Turkey is unhappy about the PKK's presence there while the Iraqi Government has been accusing Turkey of violating its sovereignty through cross-border operations and establishing military posts on Iraqi soil. Despite these exchanges, both countries have maintained their relations because Iraq needs Turkey to counterbalance Iran's influence in the region and both countries need each other to alleviate their economic problems.

The second article is from *Orsam.org.tr*, a pro-Turkish government Middle East Strategic Research Center. The article states that due to ongoing Turkish military operations the PKK has employed a new strategy of moving into Iraqi cities rather than staying in its camps in the Qandil Mountains of Iraq. The article notes that the PKK's entry into residential areas has reached a level that threatens the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) authority as well as the sovereignty of Iraq. The recent friction between the PKK and the KRG's Peshmerga forces stems from this new strategy. The author claims that Sinjar was an important example of implementing the new strategy. That's why both Turkish and Iraqi governments have focused on disarming and controlling the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), a PKK affiliate active in Sinjar. Ankara fears that Sinjar might be another Qandil for the PKK because of its strategic location. The article also notes that Iran-backed militias, the Popular Mobilization Forces opposed the effort to disarm the YBS, which they support. The presence of Iran-backed militias in northern Iraq could pose threat to the US forces in Iraq and Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“Turkey’s ongoing military operations against the PKK within Iraq remain a source of contention between the two neighbors.”





Continued: PKK Casts Shadow on Turkey-Iraq Relations

Source: Amberin Zaman, "Iraq, Turkey agree to cooperate on counterterrorism, trade," *al-Monitor* (an independent news site with analysts from the Middle East), 17 December 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/turkey-iraq-cooperate-terror-energy.html>

Turkey and Iraq pledged to cooperate against common terrorist threats and boost trade and energy ties... during talks between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi...

...Erdogan said, "...There is no place for terrorism in the future of neither Turkey nor Iraq..."

Kadhimi said, "Iraq's position is very clear. There is no question of tolerating any organizations that threaten Turkey's national security on our territory..."

Turkey's ongoing military operations against the PKK within Iraq remain a source of contention between the two neighbors. Turkish airstrikes that have killed dozens of Iraqis, most of them Kurds, are an embarrassing infringement of Iraqi sovereignty that Baghdad appears powerless to prevent. Its repeated demands for Turkish troops to pull out of Bashiqa north of Mosul have also gone unheeded.

...

The desire to improve relations was clear on both sides and for Iraq, good relations with Turkey serve as a counterweight to Iranian influence.

...

In a bid to preempt further military incursions that have seen thousands of Turkish troops deploy across Iraqi Kurdistan, Baghdad recently pledged to uproot the PKK from its strategic foothold in Yazidi-dominated Sinjar. Kadhimi said, "We are keen to work together against the Islamic State and other organizations and we took a step in the Sinjar region for this."

Turkey says Sinjar is the main conduit for PKK rebels moving men and arms to northeast Syria, where a PKK-allied and US-backed Kurdish administration is in control. It has targeted the area with airstrikes, most recently in June.

The PKK denies it has forces still deployed in Sinjar... A local Yazidi force known as the Sinjar Resistance Units that was trained by the PKK is meant to be integrated into Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units and other Iraqi security structures under the terms of an agreement facilitated by the United Nations.

Source: Bilgay Duman, "PKK'nın Irak'taki Yeni Stratejisi (PKK's New Strategy in Iraq)," *Orsam.org.tr* (a pro-Turkish government Middle East Strategic Research Center), 05 January 2021. <https://orsam.org.tr/tr/pkknin-iraktaki-yeni-stratejisi/>

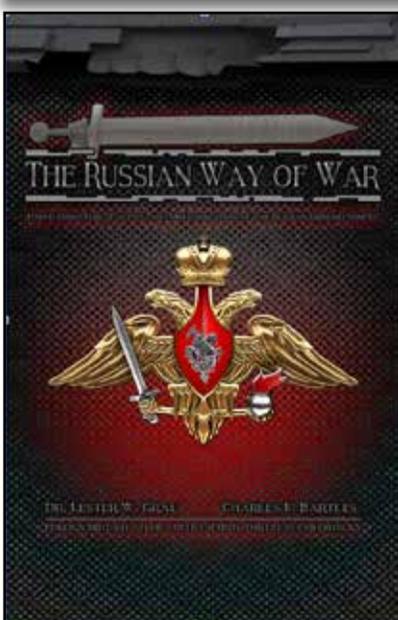
As a result of Turkey's Operation Claw, which began in May 2019 into Northern Iraq, the PKK have moved from mountains to residential areas... Tactically, this move aims to slow down Turkey's operation... strategically, the PKK's entry into residential areas has reached a level that threatens the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) authority governing these areas and also it has reached to a level that threatens the sovereignty of Iraq.

...

It would not be wrong to say that the PKK is trying to control Northern Iraq in a similar manner to what the PKK's branch in Syria, the YPG, is trying to do... it is also known that the PKK and PKK-affiliated groups continue to remain in the areas of Sinjar and Sinjar Mountain... the PKK has also been mobilized to expand to other civilian areas as its operational environment narrowed in Sinjar.

...

...the presence of militia groups close to Iran in the ranks of the Popular Mobilization Forces in northern Iraq is remarkable... In addition, the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ) have received their salary from the Popular Mobilization Forces...



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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Rwanda Sends Troops to Fight Rebels in the Central African Republic

OE Watch Commentary: When the Central African Republic (CAR) was under siege from various rebel groups angry that former President Bozize was not being allowed to run in the recent election, the country appealed for help from the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Despite Rwanda already being a major contributor of troops to the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), according to the excerpted accompanying article from *The New Times* (Rwanda's largest private media organization), it quickly agreed to send additional military personnel to help combat the rebels. CAR hoped that Rwanda's response would encourage other ECCAS members to also commit troops to further assist government and UN forces who have struggled to maintain peace and stability.

While Bozize's disallowed candidacy was the proximate cause for the recent flare-up of violence, a failure at power sharing between the government and the armed rebels who control significant parts of the country, along with ongoing religious animosities, has long fueled the fighting. Meanwhile, the CAR army is seriously lacking in the military materiel to combat those rebels as it is under an arms embargo, limiting it to weapons with a caliber of 14.5 millimeters or less, ground-military vehicles, and RPG's.

In early January Faustin-Archange Touadera was declared the presidential winner. Going forward he faces a continuing rebellion that many accuse Bozize of leading. It remains to be seen if the new president will be able to bring peace and stability to his nation, which while rich in diamonds and gold, has seen five coups and numerous rebellions since gaining independence in 1960. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Rwandan soldiers such as these have been deployed to combat rebels in the Central African Republic during that country's election.

Source: Sgt. Heather Doppke/AFRICOM/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/africom/48941435733>, Attribution: CC BY 2.0

“By quickly agreeing to help and sending troops to help the Central African Republic’s national army battle rebels, and save lives, Rwanda set a good example that other regional countries should follow.”

Source: James Karuhanga, “Rwanda acted exemplary, says CAR defence minister,” *The New Times* (Rwanda’s largest private media organization), 3 January 2021. <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/rwanda-acted-exemplary-says-car-defence-minister>

By quickly agreeing to help and sending troops to help the Central African Republic’s national army battle rebels, and save lives, Rwanda set a good example that other regional countries should follow.

The 12-member bloc of which Rwanda is a member aims to achieve collective autonomy, raise the standard of living of its populations and maintain economic stability through harmonious cooperation.

Shedding light on CAR’s challenge, Koyara said her country has a land size of more than 600,000 square kilometres with an army that is under reconstruction and is still struggling under the arms embargo.



Al-Shabaab Benefits from AMISOM's Growing Internal Problems

OE Watch Commentary: The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a peacekeeping force comprised of troops from several African nations, faces the strongest challenges to its ability to conduct military operations since its inception. One particular problem, as the accompanying excerpted article from the *Institute for Security Studies* (a South African non-profit think tank emphasizing security related issues), reports, is that Kenya and Ethiopia, two of the largest troop contributing nations and normally key allies in the fight against terrorism, have seen their alliance weakened and their foci distracted from the primary mission. For Kenya, a large contributing factor is a maritime territorial dispute with Somalia, which, along with accusations of election meddling, resulted in a diplomatic row that included Somalia expelling Kenya's ambassador. As for Ethiopia, its attention has turned to the war in Tigray.

Further fraying their alliance is a disagreement over what form Somalia's government should take. Kenya leans towards relatively autonomous states, but Ethiopia prefers a strong federal government. As the struggles between the Somalia government and the country's individual states are already draining the political capital necessary to pursue peace, Kenya and Ethiopia on opposite sides of this matter not only causes tension between those two countries, it also creates tension between Somalia and AMISOM, potentially weakening all involved.

The beneficiary of AMISOM's most recent internal struggles, according to the article, will be al-Shabaab. There is great concern that as AMISOM withdraws its personnel and materiel from Somalia this year, and with the Somali National Force potentially still not ready to provide security nationwide, voids could be created that al-Shabaab would readily fill. A weakened alliance between Kenya and Ethiopia, combined with other factors dragging down AMISOM, such as uncertain funding, could see al-Shabaab, making significant gains, and thus hampering the efforts of interested outside parties to bring peace to the nation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Kenyan forces attached to AMISOM.

Source: AMISOM/Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM_Kismayo_Advance_21_\(8049967218\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:AMISOM_Kismayo_Advance_21_(8049967218).jpg) Attribution: Public Domain

“AMISOM thus faces several risks that may negatively affect its operational capabilities and effectiveness. This could boost al-Shabaab’s ability to carry out terror attacks and expand its territorial control.”

Source: “Regional Conflicts Add to Somalia’s Security Concerns,” *Institute for Security Studies* (a South African non-profit think tank emphasizing security related issues), 15 December 2020. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/regional-conflicts-add-to-somalias-security-concerns>

Strong relations between Ethiopia and Kenya matter for AMISOM, and their weakened alliance is worrying. They are experiencing political differences regarding Somalia’s federal-state relations, especially on Jubaland and the disputed Gedo region. While Ethiopia’s support seems to lean towards the interests of the federal government, Kenya inclines more towards the states.

AMISOM thus faces several risks that may negatively affect its operational capabilities and effectiveness. This could boost al-Shabaab’s ability to carry out terror attacks and expand its territorial control.

Another internal problem that affects AMISOM’s operational effectiveness and its exit plan is tension between the government and its federal member states, especially Jubaland State. Relations deteriorated due to political disagreement over power sharing. While the member states want a semi-autonomous region, the central government wants centralised power.



Boko Haram's Anonymous Spokesman Speaks on Massacres

OE Watch Commentary: The Nigerian online publication *HumAngle* was formed in 2020 by mid-career Nigerian journalist Ahmed Salkida, who was an original follower of Boko Haram founder, Muhammed Yusuf. Although Salkida left Boko Haram after Yusuf's death in 2009, his publication now reports beats on Boko Haram. On 3 December, *HumAngle* reported in the excerpted article about Boko Haram's video featuring an anonymous speaker who claimed Boko Haram's attack days earlier in which around 70 farmers were decapitated. The article noted that the Nigerian military dismissed the Boko Haram video claim, despite evidence that Boko Haram actually committed the massacre. A previous *HumAngle* article also translated the speaker's words in the video.

According to the excerpted article, the speaker was young, which contrasts with Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, who is now over fifty years old. In addition, the speaker was calm, which also contrasts with Shekau, who is known for bombastic video claims. The speaker's ideology was no less brutal than Shekau, however. The article noted the speaker justified the massacre on grounds that a villager informed on a Boko Haram member to Nigerian soldiers, who arrested the member.



Nigerien soldiers at the Nigerian Border, near Diffa, 2015.
Source: Idriss Fall (VOA), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nigerien_soldiers_at_the_Nigerian_Border,_near_Diffa,_2015.jpg. Attribution: CC x 2.0

This same anonymous speaker also appeared in another video that *HumAngle* covered on 14 December. In that video, the article noted the speaker claimed Boko Haram's attack in Toumour, Diffa region, Niger, that killed 27 people and destroyed dozens of displaced persons' homes. Although the article speculated the attack might have related to elections in Toumour, the speaker calmly claimed it was because Christmas was approaching. The speaker also accused the victims, who were mostly Muslims, of being pagans.

In both videos, the speaker was veiled, and his identity remains unknown. Meanwhile, Shekau has eluded capture for more than ten years and continues to be Boko Haram's leader and public face, including when he claimed the kidnapping of several hundred boys in Kankara, Katsina State that *HumAngle* covered on 17 December. However, the other two videos with the anonymous speaker indicate there is likely a line of succession and equally brutal, albeit more composed, potential future leader in waiting. The prospect of Boko Haram enduring beyond Shekau's lifetime has significance not only for Nigeria's counter-insurgency against Boko Haram, but also Boko Haram's rivalry with the larger faction, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), which expelled Shekau in 2016 because of his excessive brutality. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The Shekau faction of Boko Haram claimed responsibility for slaughtering 78 farmers after accusing them of arresting one of their members and handing him to the Nigerian military.”

Source: “Army Dismisses Boko Haram’s Claim On Zabarmari Massacre As Fallacy and Propaganda,” *humangle.ng* (Nigerian online publication formed by journalist with past ties to Boko Haram founder), 3 December 2020. <https://humangle.ng/army-dismisses-boko-harams-claim-on-zabarmari-massacre-as-fallacy-and-propaganda/>

“Boko Haram Claims Responsibility For Zabarmari Massacre In A New Video,” *humangle.ng*, 1 December 2020. <https://humangle.ng/boko-haram-claims-responsibility-for-zabarmari-massacre-in-a-new-video/>.

“Boko Haram Claims Responsibility For Attack In Diffa, Niger Republic,” *humangle.ng*, 14 December 2020. <https://humangle.ng/boko-haram-claims-responsibility-for-attack-in-diffa-niger-republic/>.

“‘Some Of Us Were Killed’: Abducted Kankara Boys Speak In New Boko Haram Video,” *humangle.ng*, 17 December 2020. <https://humangle.ng/some-of-us-were-killed-abducted-kankara-boys-speak-in-new-boko-haram-video/>.

Nigerian Defence Headquarters dismissed the claim by Boko Haram terror group that the recent massacre of over 70 rice farmers in Borno State, Northeast Nigeria was retaliation for the arrest of one of them, describing it as a mere fallacy and propaganda. According to the Defense Spokesperson, the terror group uses propaganda whenever it loses ground as one of its major weapons. “Our message here for the general public is that they should not be discouraged and that we are moving forward and with your cooperation, we are going to end this menace,” he said.

In a video obtained by *HumAngle*, the Shekau faction of Boko Haram claimed responsibility for slaughtering 78 farmers after accusing them of arresting one of their members and handing him to the Nigerian military. On Sunday, 43 victims of the massacre were given a mass burial led by Babagana Zulum, Governor of Borno State.



Nigerian Military's Misuse of Funds Hurts Its Counterterrorism Effectiveness

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past decade Nigeria's defense spending has seen substantial boosts. However, despite the additional money, since 2017 the country has not been able to improve its dismal rank as the third-worst nation prone to terrorism. As the excerpted accompanying article from *The Conversation: Africa* (an independent source of news and views from the international academic and research community), notes, this begets the question as to why there is such a mismatch between funding the military and its effectiveness in combating terrorism.

Research by the article's author points to several factors for this discrepancy, beginning with corruption as military personnel, politicians, and others divert a portion of the approximately \$2 billion annual defense allocation to themselves. Unfortunately, much of this graft is difficult to uncover. For example, the acquisition of materiel frequently lacks transparency as well as appropriate monitoring, periodically resulting in the purchase of outdated weapons ill-suited against the well-equipped terrorists. Other funds, while not stolen, appear to be spent without a benefit-cost ratio in mind. For example, the military leadership often seeming more interested in spending on overseas trips, building facilities, or procuring office supplies rather than investing in training and other actions that tend to have a greater ability to enhance combat capabilities.

There are other factors impeding the ability of the Nigerian armed forces to effectively carry out operations against terrorists, including politics, unhealthy rivalry among the various military branches, and delayed passage of defense budgets. Still, the main problem seems to be not so much a lack of money allocated to the military, but rather the money allocated being misspent. However, based on the history of previous attempts, implementing reforms such as increased oversight could prove quite difficult, with the result that its counterterrorism effectiveness will continue to be impaired. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

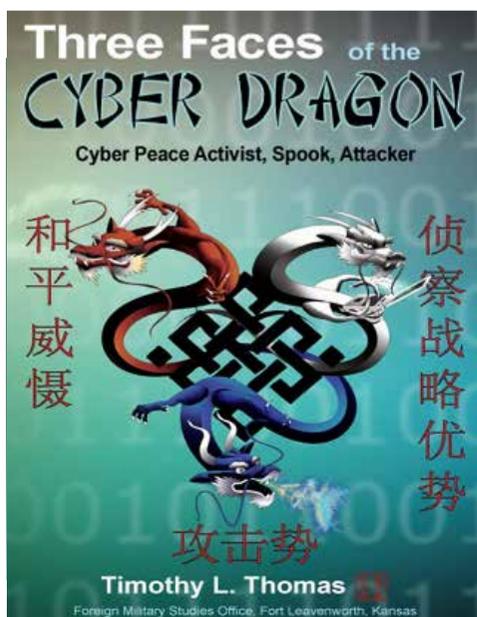
“To avoid wasteful military spending and attain stable security in Nigeria, there must be transparency and accountability in military budgeting and procurement processes.”

Source: Temitope Francis Abiodun, “Why there’s a mismatch between funding for Nigeria’s military and its performance,” *The Conversation Africa* (an independent source of news and views from the international academic and research community), 18 November 2020. <https://theconversation.com/why-theres-a-mismatch-between-funding-for-nigerias-military-and-its-performance-149554>

We were told also that payments were not made to soldiers on the battleground as budgeted.

There was also evidence of weak monitoring, controls and audits of the military budget, which allowed corruption and waste to get through. Various public scrutiny institutions, particularly audit agencies, anti-corruption bodies and Parliamentary Public Accounts Committees, were usually reluctant to investigate the military. There were even instances in which it appeared they had been prevented from doing so.

To avoid wasteful military spending and attain stable security in Nigeria, there must be transparency and accountability in military budgeting and procurement processes. There must be regular oversight functions from the ministry of finance and Budget Office and the Public Accounts Committees of the National Assembly.



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>



Brazil Vacillates on Key 5G Decision

OE Watch Commentary: The Brazilian government is close to making a decision on which 5G system to adopt, even though the government has given no clues as to whether it will welcome Chinese participation in the building of those networks. The author of an article in *Veja* (the leading weekly magazine in Brazil, sometimes described as center-right politically) notes that many countries in the European Union have decided not to permit China to participate in the building of their 5G networks. While significant chunks of the world have come to a similar conclusion, the article states that relatively fewer debates have taken place within Brazil, even though the country has said it would like to render a decision soon. *CNN Brasil* (the Brazilian arm of the American media company) notes that banning Chinese telecommunications companies, such as Huawei, from building Brazil's 5G networks would be costly. The company provides more than 50% of the equipment to Brazil's seven telecommunications companies, all of which would have to be replaced at significant cost. Declaring Chinese telecommunications companies ineligible to participate in building 5G networks would also carry noteworthy diplomatic risk for Brazil, says *CNN Brasil*. The country maintains robust trade relations with China, especially in the agriculture sector. Brazil's decision is a critical one for the operational environment because it will define the direction of the country's digital economy; impact the economy's competitiveness, depth of intellectual property protection, and privacy; and determine its level of cybersecurity for years to come. **End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)**



President Daniel Ortega's sweeping election changes indicate he is committed to remaining in power despite the potential costs.

Source: <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/the-internet-5g-technology-free-4899254/> Attribution: Pixabay

“There are also serious diplomatic problems that can evolve from the decision to bar Huawei...as there is no technical opinion to justify this decision, the Planalto Palace would have to make a declaration similar to that of the United States, that it would be blocking the company by security measures.”

Source: “A Questão do 5G e o Brasil (The 5G Issue and Brazil),” *Veja* (the leading weekly magazine in Brazil, sometimes described as center-right politically), 21 December 2020. <https://veja.abril.com.br/blog/murillo-de-aragao/a-questao-do-5g-e-o-brasil/>

The debate in Brazil is limited. The echo of the financial system's concerns about the problem has not yet arrived here. Nor was there any further reflection on the reasons for the European decision to discard the Chinese offer. It is right to consider, however, that the choice will play a critical role in matters of competitiveness, intellectual property, privacy, and information security in our country.

Source: “Brasil Deve Decidir se Chinesa Huawei Entra no Leilão do 5G (Brazil Must Decide Whether Chinese Huawei Enters the 5G Auction),” *CNN Brasil* (the Brazilian arm of the American media company), 20 December 2020. <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/business/2020/12/20/o-que-esta-acontecendo-com-a-disputa-da-huawei-pelo-leilao-de-5g>

Banning Huawei from the auction can cause major problems for the Brazilian economy. The most direct would be the financial cost of replacing all equipment already owned by Huawei with equipment from other companies. 5G technology demands a large infrastructure capacity, fiber optic cable, antennas. It is much easier to adapt the structures already installed by Huawei than to replace...there are also serious diplomatic problems that can evolve from the decision to bar Huawei...as there is no technical opinion to justify this decision, the Planalto Palace would have to make a declaration similar to that of the United States, that it would be blocking the company by security measures.



Mexico Poised to Legalize Marijuana and Become the Largest Cannabis Market in the World

OE Watch Commentary: In November the Mexican Senate voted to approve the legalization of marijuana throughout the country. The lower chamber of Mexico's legislature is likely to pass the legislation by the end of January or early February, writes the news outlet *Infobae* (an Argentine news outlet with a strong presence throughout Latin America). Passage of this legislation would make Mexico the third country to fully legalize marijuana, after Canada and Uruguay, and the largest potential consumer market with 88 million adults. According to *El Tiempo* (one of the largest dailies in Colombia with a strong reputation for reporting), the legislation would create a separate regulatory body, the Mexican Institute for the Regulation and Control of Cannabis, run by the Secretary of Health. The author notes that business groups are already uniting to advocate for the passage of the legislation and to push for greater commercial vision of Mexico's cannabis industry. While the Mexican government hopes to curtail organized crime groups and persistent violence in the country, the law would likely have only a marginal impact on criminal groups' bottom lines, given how diversified their sources of revenues are. Beyond drugs, cartel revenue streams include: human smuggling, weapons trafficking, money laundering, and gasoline theft, among others. Further, this law could alter the operational environment because the Mexican government's ability to regulate such a complex, sprawling market, prioritizing small businesses and corporate growers and excluding marijuana cultivated by criminal groups, is a serious question moving forward.

End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)



Mexico will likely legalize marijuana in an attempt to reduce cartel violence and drug trafficking.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marijuana_Plant_03.JPG, Attribution: Wikimedia Commons

“Whoever thinks that this law will be a magic formula that will reduce crime and homicides is being too optimistic... experts say that Mexico’s only realistic possibility of confronting the cartels is through capable police institutions, which the country has failed to build.”

Source: “México se Convertirá en el Mercado Legal de Cannabis Más Grande del Mundo (Mexico Will Become the Largest Legal Market for Cannabis in the World),” *Infobae* (an Argentine news outlet with a strong presence throughout Latin America), 3 January 2020. <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2021/01/03/mexico-se-convertira-en-el-mercado-legal-de-cannabis-mas-grande-del-mundo-pero-eso-no-le-ayudara-a-combatir-al-crimen-organizado-la-dura-advertencia-del-wsj/>

Authorities hope that Mexico’s legalization for recreational use will increase competition, lower prices and reduce the black market for drug gangs. Some 200 organized crime groups operate in Mexico, where around 270,000 people have been killed since 2006... Whoever thinks that this law will be a magic formula that will reduce crime and homicides is being too optimistic...experts say that Mexico’s only realistic possibility of confronting the cartels is through capable police institutions, which the country has failed to build.

Source: “Así Sería el ‘Mercado de Cannabis Legal’ Más Grande del Mundo (This Would be the World’s Largest Legal Cannabis Market),” *El Tiempo* (one of the largest dailies in Colombia with a strong reputation for reporting), 4 January 2020. <https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/mexico-tendra-el-mercado-de-cannabis-legal-mas-grande-del-mundo-558651>

Cannabis represents only a small percentage of the profits of criminal groups. Their main source of income comes from cocaine, synthetic drugs such as fentanyl, and theft of gasoline. For that reason, the legalization of marijuana will only have a marginal impact on criminal groups.



Daniel Ortega consolidates his dictatorship in Nicaragua

OE Watch Commentary: The National Assembly of Nicaragua passed a law, pushed strongly by President Daniel Ortega, which bans members of the country's political opposition from running in elections if they are deemed "traitors" or "coup plotters." According to *El País* (a Spanish news outlet with excellent contacts throughout Latin America), the Ortega regime is likely to label participants in Nicaragua's April 2018 protests as "traitors" and "coup plotters," thereby making them ineligible to run in upcoming elections. Elections in November 2021, the author writes, are critical to resolving Nicaragua's political crisis. The author continues by noting that the latest law combines with other recent actions by the Ortega government to clamp down on the operations of non-governmental organizations; censor speech that is unfavorable to the ruling government; and impose sentences of life imprisonment on those convicted of "hate crimes." Another outlet, *Al Navío* (a Spanish news source that generally focuses on the business investment climate in the region), writes of the attempt to eliminate political dissent in Nicaragua, as well as the prospect of Ortega holding elections in November 2021 without opposition. The reporter also notes the similarities between Ortega's survival strategies and those of Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's strongman. A consolidated dictatorship in Nicaragua could well alter the operational environment by leading to the country's further diplomatic isolation, possibly pushing it into the waiting arms of great power competitors, such as Russia or China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)**



President Daniel Ortega's sweeping election changes indicate he is committed to remaining in power despite the potential costs.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Comandante_Daniel_Ortega_celebrando_su_triufo_Presidencial.jpg
Attribution: Wikimedia Commons

“This new law completely buries the national and international demand for a competitive and credible electoral process. But it also reaffirms the will of the regime to remain in power, regardless of the allegations of human rights violations.”

Source: “El Parlamento de Nicaragua Aprueba una Ley Que Anula las Posibilidades Electorales de la Oposición (The Parliament of Nicaragua Passes a Law That Annuls the Electoral Possibilities of the Opposition),” *El País* (a Spanish news outlet with excellent contacts throughout Latin America), 21 December 2020. <https://elpais.com/internacional/2020-12-21/el-parlamento-de-nicaragua-aprueba-una-ley-que-anula-las-posibilidades-electorales-de-la-oposicion.html>

This new law joins another group of rules approved in the final stretch of 2020, all aimed at silencing and penalizing dissent—including journalists—with fines, prison terms, and even life imprisonment...these laws, together with the most recent one, form the scaffolding that gives legal support to the rhetoric and repression that the Ortega government maintains in Nicaragua, especially with a de facto police state and political trials, according to opponents. This new law completely buries the national and international demand for a competitive and credible electoral process. But it also reaffirms the will of the regime to remain in power, regardless of the allegations of human rights violations.

Source: “Daniel Ortega aprueba una ley para eliminar a la oposición en las elecciones presidenciales de 2021 en Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega approves a law to eliminate the opposition in the 2021 presidential elections in Nicaragua),” *Al Navío* (a Spanish news source that generally focuses on the business investment climate in the region), 22 December 2020. <https://alnavio.es/noticia/21336/politica/daniel-ortega-aprueba-una-ley-para-eliminar-a-la-oposicion-en-las-elecciones-presidenciales-de-2021-en-nicaragua.html>

Ortega not only dedicated himself to repressing, but also carried out an intense media campaign to delegitimize popular protest. This is exactly the same tactic used by Nicolás Maduro against the protests carried out in Venezuela in 2014 and 2017. The objective was the same, to break the will of the population to fight. In practice, Ortega has become another Latin American tyrant.