

# Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH

*FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT*



Volume 11  
Issue #4  
April 2021

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

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*President Hassan Rouhani welcomes Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Saadabad Palace.*

SOURCE: Mohammad Hassanzadeh, Tasnimnews.com, via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President\\_Hassan\\_Rouhani\\_welcomes\\_Turkish\\_President\\_Recep\\_Tayyip\\_Erdo%C4%9Fan\\_in\\_Saadabad\\_Palace\\_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Hassan_Rouhani_welcomes_Turkish_President_Recep_Tayyip_Erdo%C4%9Fan_in_Saadabad_Palace_02.jpg), Attribution: CC-BY-4.0

# OEWATCH

## Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

Volume 11 | Issue 4

April | 2021

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## Russian Military Newspapers on the Decline

**OE Watch Commentary:** The military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* has long been a primary source for those following developments within the Russian armed forces. Founded in 1924, it became one of the leading Soviet newspapers during the Second World War, with subscriptions once exceeding 2 million. While hardly known for critical or investigative journalism, *Krasnaya Zvezda* and similar district military newspapers could be relied upon for mostly objective reporting on the Russian military. However, this may no longer be the case, according to a brief excerpt from the popular privately owned military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*.

The article, written by a former military journalist, describes the diminished state of official military reporting in Russia today, arguing that “the army has closed itself off from society.” Instead of reporting directly to a military news source, soldiers today must “now communicate with military journalists only with the permission of the Department of Information and Mass Communications of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (DIMK).” The author goes on to assert that “the task of DIMK employees is not so much to reveal, but to hide information.” The fear of reporting objective information in the military press stems partially from their direct subordination to the DIMK.

The author concludes by quoting “one high-ranking officer,” who told him “I don’t read *Krasnaya Zvezda*... there’s nothing interesting there.” While the author considers such a remark as “insulting,” he does not object since the newspaper today is filled with “ostrich politics,” presumably a reference to burying one’s head in the sand. He rhetorically asks, “are there no problems in the Armed Forces today that require analysis and search for solutions? ... Is there no hazing, or bribe-takers in uniform?”

Rather than addressing genuine problems in the military, the author claims that “the content of the [*Krasnaya Zvezda*] newspaper is adjusted so that the leadership of the RF Ministry of Defense will like it.” As the title of the article suggests, official Russian military journalism is now struggling in finding the balance between objective reporting and public relations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Postage stamp of vintage copy of *Krasnaya Zvezda*.  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krasnaya\\_Zvezda#/media/File:1974\\_CPA\\_4310.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krasnaya_Zvezda#/media/File:1974_CPA_4310.jpg), Attribution: Public Domain

***“The content of the newspaper is adjusted so that the leadership of the RF Ministry of Defense would like it....”***

**Source:** Valery Gromak, “Обреченные на пиар (Doomed to PR),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (popular privately owned military weekly), 2 March 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/61078>

*The Ministry of Defense media, instead of improving the activities of the department, are aimed exclusively at glorifying the leadership.*

*I served in the Armed Forces of the USSR and the Russian Federation for a total of 38 years. Almost 30 of them are in the military press.... For 13 years I was a regular correspondent for the central military newspaper of the Ministry of Defense “Krasnaya Zvezda.” I’ve seen a lot. But what is now happening with the military press is not only surprising, but causes deep regret and vexation....*

*...My colleagues, without hesitation in expressions, say that the army has closed itself off from society, that a soldier can now communicate with military journalists only with the permission of the Department of Information and Mass Communications of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (DIMK). But the task of DIMK employees is not so much to reveal, but to hide information....*

*...In Soviet times, the circulation of “Krasnaya Zvezda” was over two million copies, and the main subscribers were civilians. The newspaper was sold at every kiosk. And now? Its imprint indicates a circulation of just over 25 thousand copies, but in reality it is less. Moreover, this is mainly a mandatory subscription of military units. And only a little more than a thousand - a voluntary subscription, mostly of veterans. And this is for a million-strong army and four million military pensioners!...*

*...“I don’t read Krasnaya Zvezda,” one high-ranking officer told me, “there’s nothing interesting there.” Hearing such a thing is insulting. But there is nothing special to argue. Open a newspaper and see ostrich politics on its pages. The publications are made so as not to be responsible for them. And critical speeches cannot be found with fire during the day. Of course, no one likes criticism. But are there no problems in the Armed Forces today that require analysis and search for solutions? Is everything fine in the organization of combat training? There is no hazing, bribe-takers in uniform...*

*...The content of the newspaper is adjusted so that the leadership of the RF Ministry of Defense would like it....*

*...Finally, it is necessary to restore the authority of the newspaper’s word, and make the life of the army and navy transparent and understandable for society....*



## Less Hazing, More Corruption in the Russian Ranks

**OE Watch Commentary:** To a considerable degree, the Russian military reflects both positive and negative values of Russian society. The level of violent crime within Russian society has decreased over the past 20 years, while corruption remains a problem. As the first excerpt from the official *Interfax* news agency points out, similar trends are now being observed in the military: “military investigators report a decrease in crime in the Russian Armed Forces, including cases of hazing, but at the same time, they note an increase in corruption.”



Logo of The Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia.

Source: <https://bit.ly/3cqH5yt>, Attribution: CCA SA 4.0 Intl

The second excerpt from the mostly independent source *Svobodnaya Pressa* takes a closer look at violent crime, particularly hazing, within the ranks. The article suggests that “the ‘bullying’ has not gone anywhere,” but has rather “transformed, lost her previous violent forms: bruises, knocked out teeth, fractures, and numerous deaths.” The article interviews a representative from the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers, Valentina Melnikova, who asserts that today this less violent form of hazing is most often perpetrated by company and platoon commanders who abuse their authority. Melnikova refers to “the recent case of Ramil Shamsutdinov... who was openly bullied by one of the officers, where although he [the officer] did not beat him, did not let him sleep,” which allegedly helped to provoke the soldier to kill 8 of his fellow soldiers in October 2019. She asserts that the problem stems from officers “not understanding that soldiers are their colleagues, comrades in arms, with whom, perhaps, tomorrow they will go into battle together.”

The article concludes by quoting a couple statistics from the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia, which asserts that in 2019, “about 330 people suffered from hazing, and that “the annual so-called non-combat losses in the Russian army are estimated at about 500 people.” Included in this category are losses from “crime, illness, suicide, and accidents,” to include hazing. However, we have no corroboration of these figures. Since 2015, the Kremlin has classified the reporting of all military losses. While improvements have been made, these two articles suggest that the Russian military is still struggling to eliminate corruption and hazing in the ranks. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“The main reason for this is that commanders, from Defense Minister Shoigu to lower-level officers, do not understand that soldiers are their colleagues, comrades in arms, with whom, perhaps, tomorrow they will go into battle together....”***

**Source:** “СК заметил в российской армии снижение дедовщины и рост коррупции (The Investigative Committee noticed a decrease in hazing and an increase in corruption in the Russian Army),” *Interfax* (official Russian news agency), 10 March 2021. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/755305>

*Military investigators report a decrease in crime in the Russian Armed Forces, including cases of hazing, but at the same time, they note an increase in corruption, according to the website of the Main Military Investigative Directorate (GVSU) of the Investigative Committee (UK)... “The number of acts of corruption has increased by 8.8%,” the statement says.*

**Source:** Victor Sokirko, “Валентина Мельникова: ‘Дедовщины’ в армии нет, есть нарушение закона и прав человека (Valentina Melnikova: There is no ‘bullying’ in the army, there is a violation of the law and human rights),” *Svobodnaya Pressa* (independent Russian news media), 9 March 2021. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/291780/>

*The Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia considers company officers to be the main violators of the order...*

*The topic of ‘bullying’ in the army is as old as the world, and even when commanders and prosecutors win in the fight against ‘barracks hooliganism,’ it remains on the radar. To this day, the ‘ghost of hazing’ walks through the hidden corners of the barracks and frightens both the recruits themselves and their parents. The Ministry of Defense still nervously shudders at any mention of it and assures: “It’s over!”*

*...Much has changed in the army, ranging from the transition to a year of service, improvement of living conditions and nutrition, increased discipline, including the elimination of hazing. It was somehow not customary to remember the latter, and it might seem that they are no longer there at all. “In fact, the ‘bullying’ has not gone anywhere. Yes, it’s been transformed, lost its previous serious forms, did away for the most part without bruises, knocked out teeth, fractures, and numerous deaths. But ‘hazing’ did not leave the barracks - this is still a familiar place for hazing.”*

*“Remember, ‘bullying’ as such does not exist, it is not in its usual form in the army,” says the executive secretary of the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia Valentina Melnikova. “There is a violation of the law and human rights in the army, to call a spade a spade. Such cases, when the relationship between commanders and subordinates go beyond the statutory framework, have always been hidden.... And it is difficult to fight this system, it is disguised precisely by well-structured reporting.”*

*“I would like to emphasize once again - in military units there are constant cases of violation of the law, which cannot be called ‘bullying.’ ...officers often beat soldiers, scoff at them. This is especially common at the company level, where the company commander and platoon commanders have become the main ‘grandfathers.’ They have all the power in their hands and they use it at their own discretion. Here you can also recall the recent case with Ramil Shamsutdinov, who was openly bullied by one of the officers - he did not beat him, but did not let him sleep...”*

*“...The situation is far from ideal. The main reason for this is that commanders, from Defense Minister Shoigu to lower-level officers, do not understand that soldiers are their colleagues, comrades in arms, with whom, perhaps, tomorrow they will go into battle together.... At the same time, only last year, about 330 people suffered from hazing. In fact, there may be many more - not all of them become known to prosecutors....”*

*This statistic is partially confirmed by the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers of Russia - thanks to the calculations of the committee’s activists, the annual so-called non-combat losses in the Russian army are estimated at about 500 people. The causes of these losses include crime, illness, suicide, and accidents. Including due to hazing relationships.*



## Russia Bolstering Arctic Air Umbrella

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia continues to strengthen its northern border with significant air defense and anti-shipping capability. According to an unattributed article in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, a weekly newspaper supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Russian MiG-31 interceptor aircraft are now operational in the far Arctic reaches of the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago. The presence of MiG-31s significantly enhances security on the western approach to the Russian Northern Sea Route. The improved air posture also extends over the Northern Sea Route and the North Pole approach to Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

***“Russia has constructed an air umbrella over the northern and northwestern parts of the Northern Sea Route but its combat capabilities in the Polar Regions will be further strengthened in the near future. And unlike the Soviet-era 10th Air Defense Army, its air assets in the Arctic are small and compact but effective and multirole. Their combat capabilities are more than enough to parry any military threats in the region.”***



*Kara Sea map featuring Severnaya Zemlya.*

Source: Created by Norman Einstein, November 29, 2005, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kara\\_Sea\\_map.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kara_Sea_map.png), Attribution: CC By-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>



## Continued: Russia Bolstering Arctic Air Umbrella

**Source:** “Крылья Арктики (Wings over the Arctic),” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (a weekly newspaper supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published since 1996, with an estimated circulation of 12,000), 18 February 2021. [https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2021-02-18/5\\_1129\\_aviation.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2021-02-18/5_1129_aviation.html)

*MiG-31 heavy interceptors commenced combat alert duty on Novaya Zemlya in January of this year.*

*... According to Russia’s Defense Ministry, having the MiG-31s on combat alert duty will substantially extend the reach of the Northern Fleet’s fighter aviation in the Arctic and the airspace it can control above the Northern Sea Route.*

*... For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is an aviation group of forces in the Arctic that should resolve a large number of issues.*

*One of the primary tasks of the 45th Army is to protect the military bases, industry, and social infrastructure on the Kola Peninsula and in Arkhangel’skaya Oblast. Another priority is to cover the North Pole direction. American strategic aviation has been holding training exercises there for the past few years. In August of last year six B-52 bombers conducted joint maneuvers with Norwegian F-16 fighters.*

*The current composition of the 45th Air Force and Air Defense Army includes three fighter regiments. The 98th Composite Regiment is based at Monchegorsk, and the 279th and 100th*

*...*

*The 279th Regiment’s third squadron has flown Su-30SM fighters since 2016. ... It also has two squadrons of MiG-31 heavy supersonic interceptors.*

*Each MiG-31 squadron has its own mission. One guards the airspace over the Kola Peninsula, including the bases of nuclear and ICBM submarines, and operates in conjunction with the MiG-29Ks, Su-33s, and Su-30SMs of the two naval aviation regiments.*

*The second squadron will be rotating to various polar region airfields beginning this year. And the MiG-31BMs of the 98th Regiment’s second squadron now have combat alert duty on Novaya Zemlya. The plan is that these interceptors will subsequently use other bases.*

*The Defense Ministry announced late last year that 19 airfields in the Arctic have been refurbished or rebuilt since 2016. All-weather year-round runways are being built on Ostrov Zemlya Aleksandry on the Franz Josef Land Archipelago and on Ostrov Kotel’nyy in the New Siberian Islands, which can support the combat as well as the transport aircraft that keep the bases supplied.*

*... If the situation were to escalate, MiG-31s of the 98th Regiment’s second squadron would be tactically dispersed across the Northern Fleet strategic command’s zone of responsibility and have sufficient assets to cover the entire Northern Sea Route and the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago, and also to present an obstacle to strategic bombers and cruise missiles coming across the North Pole.*

*The MiG-31s will be supported by the Arctic bases that Russia has built on islands in the Arctic Ocean, including the “Arctic Shamrock” and “Northern Clover.” These have long-range radar stations to provide early warning of attack and to support the interception of airborne targets.*

*...*

*The arrival of Su-34s and MiG-31Ks with Kinzhals will fundamentally alter the balance of forces in the Polar Regions. These aircraft will be able to effectively strike at the bases, headquarters, control rooms, and other important facilities of the likely adversary on the western flank and their new weapon systems will give them total control of the entire Northern Sea Route. The Su-34s and MiG-31Ks will be able to quickly and efficiently rout a hostile naval task force, even if it has modern air defenses. And when necessary can rapidly deploy to other airfields in the Arctic, including those on the islands.*

*Russia has constructed an air umbrella over the northern and northwestern parts of the Northern Sea Route but its combat capabilities in the Polar Regions will be further strengthened in the near future. And unlike the Soviet-era 10th Air Defense Army, its air assets in the Arctic are small and compact but effective and multirole. Their combat capabilities are more than enough to parry any military threats in the region.*



## Russian Military Rations Improving, Including in the Arctic

**OE Watch Commentary:** On the eve of the 321st anniversary of the Russian military's Food Service, Colonel Sergey Nikhelman, chief of the Food Directorate, gave an interview with *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, a private military journal with exceptional access to the Russian military. In addition to new standard equipment, such as steamers, heating cabinets, and refrigerators, Nikhelman noted that by 2025 the directorate plans to robotize equipment and replace all towed field kitchens with kitchen trucks. This "family of Food Service Arctic equipment" includes the KA-250/30PM Arctic kitchen, KhPA-500/30PM Arctic bakery, TsVA-10/30PM Arctic water tanker, and a towed storage facility. The equipment will be mounted on DP-30 Vityaz articulated tracked all-terrain vehicles, which will make it highly functional in Russia's extreme terrain in the Far North, Siberia, the Far East, and the Arctic. This Russian attention to the details of soldier life in the Arctic is not merely mundane military logistics, but rather is what will make it a formidable force in this emerging arena of competition with the United States. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Russian combat ration IRP-P (Individual Food Rations)  
(ИРП-П), 2010.

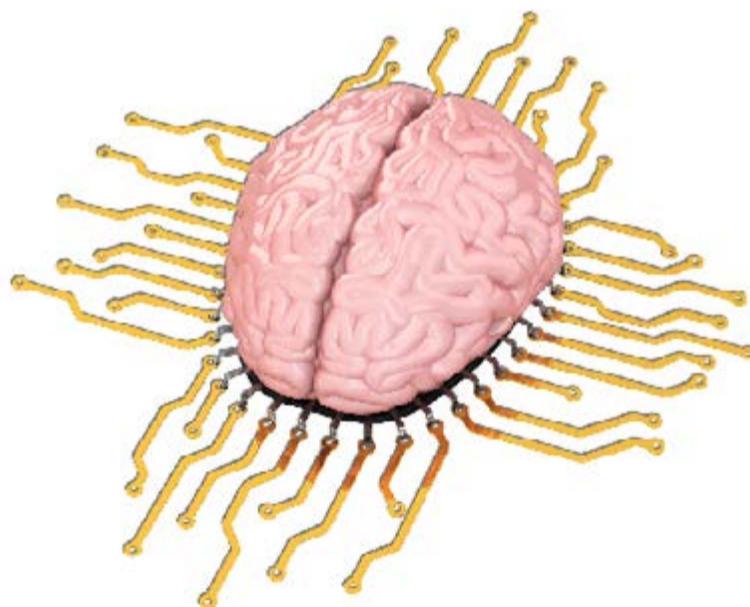
Source: Bestalex, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian\\_combat\\_ration\\_IRP-P.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_combat_ration_IRP-P.jpg)  
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*“Work has now been completed within the framework of the State Defense Order to create a family of Food Service Arctic equipment, including the KA-250/30PM Arctic kitchen, KhPA-500/30PM Arctic bakery, TsVA-10/30PM Arctic water tanker, and a management and storage module (a towed warehouse).”*

## 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 Military Rations Improving, Including in the Arctic

**Source:** Dmitri Litovkin “Саморазогревающиеся консервы и малогабаритные пайки (Self-heating meals in small packets),” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (a weekly newspaper supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published since 1996, with an estimated circulation of 12,000), 18 February 2021. [https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2021-02-18/1\\_1129\\_food.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2021-02-18/1_1129_food.html)

*On the eve of the 321st anniversary of the Food Service, Colonel Sergey Nikhelman, chief of the Food Directorate of the Ministry of Defense Resource Support Department, spoke with Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye Executive Editor Dmitriy Litovkin about changes in military food services.*

**[Nikhelman]** *Our service is responsible not only for feeding soldiers and officers, but also for making sure that the rations are tasty and full of calories. During Soviet times, the variety of food products included in the food rations was significantly smaller, and accordingly the variety of prepared dishes was low as well. Today we are working to ensure that eating in field conditions is a pleasant experience and that servicemen are capable of accomplishing their assigned mission under any conditions.*

*... Elements of buffet style dining have been introduced into military catering in the units. In accordance with the food preferences of the servicemen, they can choose from an expanded range of prepared dishes. In addition to choosing the first and second courses they can customize their own salad using various ingredients and sauces.*

**[Nikhelman]** *The work to change food rations is being carried out continuously in connection with the changing requirements for food products, State standards and the wishes of those being fed. The rations for various contingents have been developed with consideration of the missions they perform.*

*... This year we've created and will be supplying to the military a ration pack designed for the needs of the Airborne Troops, special-purpose subunits, and the naval infantry. Its special feature is its compactness and content. This individual ration pack for the Spetsnaz soldier is half the size but significantly more nutritious. There was a time in Chechnya when we were finding a lot of chocolate when examining militant caches. They literally had cartons of Snickers bars. Why? Because it's easy to eat a little bar like that, and it gives you energy. The new special rations take this into account. They have a large amount of carbohydrates. They are quickly filling and replenish energy, which is very important during intensive combat.*

**[Nikhelman]** *We encounter cold conditions in the Arctic and heat in Syria. In the North the packaging of preserved food needs to be rather different, and the contents pureed or freeze-dried. This is essential so that a soldier can quickly heat up and consume his food. It was discovered that at a temperature of -50 degrees [Celsius] it's virtually impossible to heat up an ordinary can of food with dry fuel. It's like grilling shish kebab during a frost. Try doing that at even -15 [degrees Celsius]. The meat will be burned from below and frozen on top. The same goes for ration packs. How can one eat frozen tinned meat in such conditions? Imagine being a soldier in that kind of environment. But we must provide for the accomplishment of his mission.*

*This has led to us to change the product packaging... .*

**[Nikhelman]** *Food ration standards, and rations have also been developed for ... special climatic conditions. Food supply standards ... for regions of the Far North and equivalent areas, provide for additional food to compensate for energy expenditures, which are higher in cold climate conditions compared to a temperate climatic zone. The soldier's Arctic ration has been increased by 2,000 kilocalories per serviceman. In addition to the standard set, the food ration includes sandwiches with high-caloric sausage, fruit kompot [stewed fruit drink], chocolate with a high cacao percentage, caramel, and sweet tea.*

**[Nikhelman]** *... Work has now been completed within the framework of the State Defense Order to create a family of Food Service Arctic equipment, including the KA-250/30PM Arctic kitchen, KhPA-500/30PM Arctic bakery, TsVA-10/30PM Arctic water tanker, and a management and storage module (a towed warehouse). All this equipment is mounted on DP-30 Vityaz articulated tracked all-terrain vehicles. They are intended for movement under the difficult climatic conditions of the Far North, Siberia, the Far East, the Arctic, and the Antarctic over ground with poor load bearing capacity such as swampy, snow-covered, off-road, and broken wooded terrain, and at temperatures from -50 to +50 degrees Celsius... .*



## Russia Formed 18th Motorized Rifle Division in Kaliningrad

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from the 3 February 2021 edition of *Izvestiya*, a large-circulation pro-Kremlin daily newspaper, describes the creation of Russia's newest motorized rifle division—the 18th Motorized Rifle Division (MRD). The 18th MRD is located in the enclave of Kaliningrad and is subordinate to the Baltic Fleet via the 11th Army Corps, whose headquarters are also located in Kaliningrad. The *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation* website describes the initial ceremony for the standing up of the 18th MRD. Colonel General Andrei Kartapolov, Deputy Minister of Defense and Head of the Main Military-Political Directorate, appeared to be the presiding official in attendance. The article also provides a brief history of 18th MRD.

It is important to note that the creation of this new division does not mean that the Russia has increased its combat power in Kaliningrad by one motorized rifle division. Instead, this division will mostly consist of units that were already in existence before its creation. As the above-mentioned articles point out, the new division will be built around the former 79th Motorized Rifle Brigade. The 7th Separate Motorized Rifle Regiment, 11th Separate Tank Regiment, 244th Artillery Brigade (likely to be disbanded and reflagged as a regiment), and the 22nd Air Defense Regiment will also likely be subordinated to the 18th MRD. If these units are adopted, the 18th MRD will have one fewer motorized rifle regiments than the optimal MRD configuration and most other MRDs of the Russian Ground Forces (3 motorized rifle regiment/1 tank regiment).

The accompanying excerpted article from the 10 March 2021 edition of *Izvestiya* describes the newly formed 20th Reconnaissance Battalion. This battalion, also part of the 18th MRD, may be new, but it is unlikely that it was created from scratch. Most of the 20th Reconnaissance Battalion is likely just a reflagged version of the reconnaissance battalion that was subordinated to the 79th Motorized Rifle Brigade, albeit, as the article describes, with an added long-range reconnaissance capability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



*Presentation of colors ceremony for the 18th Motorized Rifle Division.*

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12347032@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12347032@egNews), Attribution: CC BY 4.0

***“Poland borders our enclave [Kaliningrad] in the south and Lithuania in the north - NATO multinational battalions perform duty in these states on rotation. Obviously, as a result, a portion of the Russian troops will be oriented on Poland and the other portion - on Lithuania. If necessary, they [Russian forces] will be able to effectively react to a change of the situation...”***



## Continued: Russia Formed 18th Motorized Rifle Division in Kaliningrad

**Source:** Roman Krezul, Alexey Ramm, and Anton Lavrov, Калининград усиливает сухопутную группировку (Kaliningrad Is Reinforcing Its Ground Grouping), *Izvestiya Online* (Pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 3 February 2021. <https://iz.ru/1119684/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm-anton-lavrov/dobavili-sushi-kaliningrad-usilivaet-sukhoputnuiu-gruppirovku>

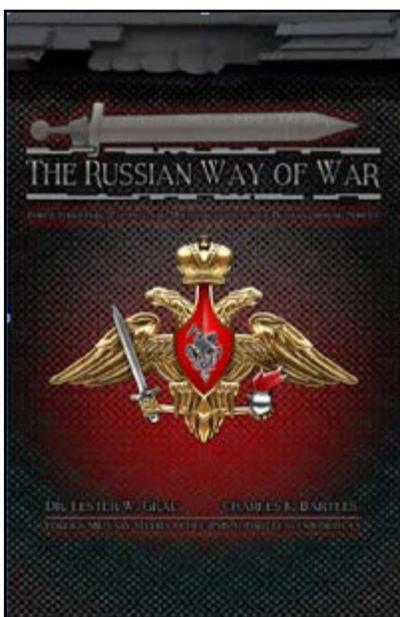
*The Ministry of Defense will strengthen the ground component of the defense of Kaliningrad Oblast. In particular, the reorganization of 79th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade has begun... This unit together with a number of others will become part of the composition of the [18th] Motorized Rifle Division, to which they will assign the enclave's defense. In the experts' opinion, the revamped grouping will be able to effectively cover Kaliningrad Oblast from various axes... The motorized rifle division on the territory of Kaliningrad Oblast will be formed this year, sources in the Military Department reported. Its units and subunits will participate in the "Zapad-2021" Strategic Exercises, which will occur in September...*

*79th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade - is the successor of 18th Guards Rifle Division, one of the most celebrated formations of the times of the Great Patriotic War. It was initially formed in 1939 under number 133. It participated in combat operations from July 1941 and held the defense on the Dnepr and in Smolensk and Kalinin (currently Tver) oblasts. The formation became one of the first to receive the status of Guards for the personnel's heroism in March 1942 and the standard number '18'. In the concluding phase of the war, the division assaulted Königsberg and Pillau and conducted engagements on the Vistula (Baltiysk) Spit. At the end of 1945, it was transformed into 30th Guards Mechanized Division, in 1957 - to 30th Guards Motorized Rifle, and in 1964 - to 18th Guards Motorized Rifle. It became 79th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade in 2001.*

*"11th Army was in the region until the beginning of the 1990s, but it was reduced later," Military Historian Dmitriy Boltenkov told *Izvestiya*. "11th Army Corps, which consists of a motorized rifle brigade and regiment and also an artillery brigade and a tank regiment, has been covering Kaliningrad Oblast in recent years. Judging by everything, they have decided to reorganize the grouping now. Poland borders our enclave [Kaliningrad] in the south and Lithuania in the north - NATO multinational battalions perform duty in these states on rotation. Obviously, as a result, a portion of the Russian troops will be oriented on Poland and the other portion - on Lithuania. If necessary, they [Russian forces] will be able to effectively react to a change of the situation..."*

*Baltic Fleet Commander Aleksandr Nosatov announced the impending formation of a full-fledged motorized rifle division in Kaliningrad Oblast in December of last year. They will include motorized rifle, tank, and artillery regiments in it. In the Admiral's words, the new formation will be part of 11th Army Corps that defends the enclave. Russian military personnel cite the buildup of the NATO multinational strike groups near the Oblast's borders as the reason for the reinforcement of the ground grouping. Among them are one tank and several battalion-tactical teams. The modernization and reinforcement of the Russian grouping in the enclave has already been continuing for several years. At the beginning of 2018, they redeployed "Iskander-M" operational-tactical missile complexes to the Oblast. According to Ministry of Defense information, Baltic Fleet 11th Armed Corps 152nd Missile Brigade was reequipped with them.*

*At the beginning of 2019, a report appeared about the creation of the 11th Tank Regiment that is deployed in Kaliningrad Oblast. The next year Defense Department spokesmen reported about the arrival in it of three dozen modernized T-72B3M tanks with significantly improved defense from shaped-charge munitions and a new fire control system. The 11th Army Corps artillery brigade received "Smerch" long-range 300mm multiple launch rocket systems (MLRSs) to replace the "Grad" 122mm MLRSs. This has permitted the increase of the formation's target destruction range and the firepower of a salvo...*



### 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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## Continued: 18th Motorized Rifle Division Formed in Kaliningrad

**Source:** Замминистра обороны РФ генерал-полковник Андрей Картаполов вручил историческое знамя мотострелковой дивизии армейского корпуса БФ (Deputy Defense Minister of the Russian Federation Colonel-General Andrei Kartapolov Presented the Historical Banner of the [18th] Motorized Rifle Division to the Baltic Fleet's Army Corps), *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Online*, 3 March 2021. [https://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12347032@egNews](https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12347032@egNews)

*On March 2, Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation - Head of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Colonel General Andrei Kartapolov, presented the historical banner of the 18th Motorized Rifle Division to the commander of the 11th Army Corps, Major General Andrei Ruzinsky during a visit to the Baltic Fleet and its subordinate units.*

*The division was first formed in the fall of 1939 and was one of the most famous formations of the Great Patriotic War. She participated in hostilities since July 1941, held the defenses on the Dnieper, in the Smolensk and other regions. For the heroism of the personnel, the unit was one of the first in March 1942 to receive the status of the Guards and the number "18".*

*At the final stage of World War II, the division stormed Königsberg and Pillau, fought on the Baltic Spit. At the end of 1945, it was transformed into the 30th Guards Mechanized Division, in 1957 - into the 30th Guards Motorized Rifle Division, in 1964 - into the 18th Guards Motorized Rifle Division. In 2001, it became the 79th separate guards motorized rifle brigade...*

**Source:** Anton Lavrov and Alexey Ramm "В тылу сражений: Калининград защитят сверхдальние (In the Rear of Battles: Extra-Long-Range Reconnaissance Personnel Will Defend Kaliningrad)," *Izvestiya Online* (Pro-Kremlin daily newspaper), 10 March 2021. <https://iz.ru/1134600/anton-lavrov-aleksei-ramm/v-tylu-srazhenii-kaliningrad-zashchitiat-sverkhdalnie-razvedchiki>

*The ground troop grouping in Kaliningrad Oblast has been reinforced with extra-long-range reconnaissance personnel. The new company will be part of 18th Motorized Rifle Division, which is being formed in the enclave right now. It soldiers can collect information deep in the enemy rear, while penetrating there in helicopters and while using parachutes. If necessary, they will easily detect especially important targets and will guide aircraft, artillery, or cruise missiles to them, the experts pointed out...The extra-long-range reconnaissance company is already at the formation stage and the recruitment of personnel is occurring, Izvestiya's sources in the Military Department reported. The subunit will be subordinate to 18th Motorized Rifle Division's newly formed 20th Reconnaissance Battalion...*

*The scouts' "primary armament" - is special equipment, which permits them to pinpoint even camouflaged targets. The "Strelets" Reconnaissance, Command and Control, And Communications Complex (KRUS) helps to guide aircraft and artillery strikes and the main thing - cruise missiles, including sea-launched "Kalibr", coastal "Bastion", and ground-based "Iskander" cruise missiles. Navigation equipment provides the capability to commanders to determine the location of their subunits and also the enemy's men and equipment with an accuracy of several centimeters. A special tablet, which the officer can use to issue orders, is part of the set.*

*"These subunits are designated for operations in the enemy's operational-strategic rear," Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy told Izvestiya. "Their primary mission in the event of the initiation of combat operations - are target designations for long-range and precision-guided weapons. The scouts are equipped with the appropriate technical systems, including satellite communications systems, long-range radio communications, the needed instruments for target designation both in the form of the transmission of the target's coordinates and also using a laser. All of this has been integrated into the integrated reconnaissance-information system and it, in its turn, becomes an element of the precision-guided weapons reconnaissance-strike loops. In the process, any Armed Forces weapons can be employed as a strike element of that loop: the missiles of ships and submarines, air-launched strike weapons, and so forth. The reconnaissance teams in the enemy rear can expose targets, which are not seen from satellites or unmanned aerial vehicles, the expert noted.*

*"The enemy employs camouflage measures and conceals the most important elements of the combat formation and the command and control systems," Viktor Murakhovskiy explained. "But the verification of those targets is important in reconnaissance. It is no secret that decoy targets are frequently employed. Let's say, terrorist formations have frequently attempted to camouflage themselves as medical facilities and they have drawn the appropriate symbols on buildings and motor vehicles. But a commander needs to have data from several sources to make a decision on the conduct of a strike. The deep reconnaissance company will become one of these sources..."*



# Capabilities and Organizational Aspects of Russia's 1B75 'Penitsillin' Acoustic-Thermal Reconnaissance System

**OE Watch Commentary:** The accompanying excerpted article from *Yezhenedelnik Zvezda*, a Russian website with geopolitical and Russian military news that is part of the Zvezda media group owned by the Russian Ministry of Defense, explains the operation and some of the capabilities of Russia's most recent attempt to diversify artillery reconnaissance capabilities.

Since the 1960s, Russia has pursued technologies to determine the location of active enemy artillery. Such artillery reconnaissance is necessary for counterbattery engagement, or the suppression of enemy guns by fire. Typically, most of these systems are radar-based and are either man portable, or mounted upon a wheeled or tracked chassis, and function by tracking the trajectory of projectiles. In recent years, due to high-speed computing, it has become possible to determine the trajectories of multiple projectiles, to include their point of impact. Today, the most popular counterbattery radars are the American AN/TPQ-36, AN/TPQ-48, and the Russian Zoopark-1M. These systems are equipped with high-speed computer processors and phased array radars capable of determining the originating point of large enemy artillery at distances of approximately 20 km. Although these systems are quite effective, they do present a significant problem. In order to function, these systems emanate a large amount of electromagnetic energy, which makes counterbattery radars easy to find and target on modern battlefields, by either antiradar missiles or artillery systems. In order to increase the resiliency of artillery reconnaissance capability, the Soviets chose to diversify their technology to include acoustic systems as well. In 1987, they fielded the AZK-7 automatic sound-ranging system, which was later upgraded to the AZK-7M. The AZK-7M functions by placing three sound monitors certain distances from one another and then triangulating the location of any given artillery sound. Although acoustic systems have a shorter effective range and are much more susceptible to environmental conditions, they are able to passively collect targeting data, a feature that significantly enhances their survivability on the modern battlefield.

As the *Yezhenedelnik Zvezda* article points out, Russia's new 1B75 Penitsillin acoustic-thermal reconnaissance system (AZTK), has six video and six thermal imaging cameras, with an electro-optical module installed on a telescopic boom. These cameras can detect flashes from artillery and other weapon systems, and then transmit this information to the system's computer for processing. The Penitsillin is also equipped with a set of sound detectors. These detectors are separate modules that are spread out on the ground and connected via wires, which are intended to track the sound of the firing and/or detonating projectiles. The 1B75 Penitsillin's architecture allows data from the sound sensors to be fused with data from electro-optical sensors. This allows the Penitsillin to calculate ranges from the various sensors, use this information to triangulate locations, and then transmit these coordinates to a command post.

Finally, the accompanying excerpted article from *Voyennoye Obozreniye*, a Russian website focused on military issues, discusses the capabilities of the Penitsillin, but also mentions the organizational aspects of the 1B75 Penitsillin's employment, by way of a theory of how the Penitsillin could be added to each of the Russian Ground Forces' and Coastal Defense Troops' artillery brigades and regiments. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

***“Using the principle of combining thermal and acoustic reconnaissance, the Penitsillin system detects the positions of “enemy” firepower. Therefore, it is impossible for the enemy to detect and suppress it using electronic warfare means: the artillery reconnaissance system does not reveal its location by the emissions of a radar station.”***



## Continued: Capabilities and Organizational Aspects of Russia's 1B75 'Penitsillin' Acoustic-Thermal Reconnaissance System

**Source:** Alexander Grigoriev, "Режим «шквал огня»: топ убойных русских новинок (In 'Barrage Fire' Mode: Top Russian Lethal Innovations), *Yezhenedelnik Zvezda* Online (part of the Zvezda media group owned by the Russian Ministry of Defense), 5 February 2021. <https://zvezdaweekly.ru/news/2021221335-KI4m2.html>

### *...'Vaccination' by High-Tech 'Penitsillin'*

*From the beginning of 2021, the latest artillery reconnaissance system, one operating on new detection principles, has begun to enter the inventory of Russian army artillery formations. Rostec's Vega concern designers chose the "medical" Penitsillin term to name their development during these challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. It truly is a kind of a battlefield antibiotic. The system is designed to reconnoiter and locate the firing positions of guns, mortars, multiple rocket launcher systems, as well as the launch positions of enemy anti-aircraft and tactical missiles, while simultaneously supporting adjustments of one's own artillery fire.*

*Using the principle of combining thermal and acoustic reconnaissance, the Penitsillin system detects the positions of "enemy" firepower. Therefore, it is impossible for the enemy to detect and suppress it using electronic warfare means: the artillery reconnaissance system does not reveal its location by the emissions of a radar station. High accuracy is another very important virtue of the Penitsillin. The system accurately determines the coordinates of a single cannon that has begun firing in five seconds. At the same time, its coverage is not sparse: it is capable of successfully detecting targets within a strip that is up to 25 km wide.*

*The data from the new Russian artillery reconnaissance systems immediately enters the joint information environment of the automated troop command and control systems. Reconnaissance-strike and reconnaissance-fire loops instantly distribute the enemy weapons coordinates to their missile troops and artillery subunits and to combat aviation command and control posts. The enemy neither has the time to continue firing, nor to leave the area: the retaliatory fire arrives extremely fast.*

**Source:** Kirill Ryabov, «Пенициллин» идет в войска (Penitsillin Goes to the Troops), *Voyennoye Obozreniye* Online (Russian website focused on military issues), 25 January 2021. <https://topwar.ru/179311-penicillin-idet-v-vojska.html>

*The Russian Army already has a whole series of artillery reconnaissance systems and spotters of various types. The new Penitsillin is similar to those, based on its functions, but it has a number of important differences that provide it with notable advantages. Its advantages are mainly associated with different principles of operation. Just like other artillery reconnaissance systems, the new Penitsillin is self-propelled and highly mobile. At the same time, it features a wheeled chassis that has well-known advantages over tracked platforms. First of all, it reduces the cost of its operation and simplifies long-distance transportation...*

*Older reconnaissance systems operated on radar detection principle, hence exposing themselves by emitting radiation, thus risking to become the next target for enemy artillery. The Product 1B75 functioning is based on receive-only principle and it does not emit any radiation toward the enemy, which makes its detection significantly more complicated or impossible. Acoustic thermal detection assets are invulnerable to electronic warfare equipment. In theory, the enemy can suppress optics using appropriate means, but for this, it is necessary to know the coordinates of the Penitsillin. Effective and specialized means for suppressing sound detectors do not exist as of yet.*

*Optical and sound detection equipment in combination with modern computers ensures high accuracy and action speed. Thanks to the modern communications systems, the Penitsillin can be fully integrated into the artillery command and control contours, which speeds up the transmission of data and accomplishment of combat missions. The only noticeable shortcoming of the system is the relatively long time for determining enemy coordinates -- from firing to data output. This interval is determined by the distance to the gun and the speed of the sound wave in the ground. Further processing of the received signals is done by a high-speed computer and takes a minimum of time. However, even with all the objective limitations, the target detection period does not exceed 5 second and does not hinder effective operation.*

*According to last year's news, the 1B75 Penitsillin will augment the arsenal of brigades and regiments of missile troops and artillery of the infantry and coastal troops. Each such formation requires not less than one reconnaissance system, which allows to plan the necessary volume of production. According to open sources, the Ground Troops currently have over 30 regiments and brigades of cannon and rocket artillery. The Coastal Troops include eight brigades, regiments, and battalions. Thus, at least 40 new reconnaissance systems are required to meet all of our artillery's requirements. By now, the Army has received one Penitsillin system for training personnel and non-specified quantity of serial products for employment in the troops. It may be assumed that purchases of these systems will continue for more than a year and will conclude with the re-equipment of most formations or all existing units. Such a lengthy process always begins with the delivery of the first unit -- and this step was taken in December.*



## Slow Expansion of Russian Forces in Kyrgyzstan

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Russian military presence in Kyrgyzstan has undergone changes in recent years, including an expansion of the Kant Airbase outside the capital Bishkek. The accompanying excerpted articles report on a couple of additional changes to the Russian forces based in Kyrgyzstan and provide a look at the greater emphasis Russian officials are putting on the region.

The article from *Kloop*, a Russian-language independent news website from Kyrgyzstan, reports on one of the recent changes to Russian forces in Kyrgyzstan and it stems from recent meetings of Russian and Kyrgyzstani officials in Moscow. It mentions how the Ministers of Defense of Kyrgyzstan and Russia “signed the Protocol on cooperation in the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in Kyrgyzstan.” The article also notes how the agreement includes a condition that “copies of the photos and videos taken during flights will be provided to the Kyrgyzstani side, except for those flights where the territory and objects of the Russian military base will be filmed.” The article ends by mentioning how “the use of Russian unmanned aerial vehicles in Kyrgyzstan was agreed upon in 2019” and that “the detachment consists of two Forpost drones (medium-range) and four Orlan-10 (short-range).”

The article from *Kabar*, the national news agency of Kyrgyzstan, reports on the meeting between Kyrgyzstan’s President, Sadyr Japarov, and Russian officials. It notes that the two sides signed agreements to continue military-defense cooperation and that this includes “the transfer in the near future of S-300 missile systems and strike unmanned aerial vehicles” to Kyrgyzstan. While the article did not mention a timeline for the transfer of either system, the protocol on the use of reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles indicates that it could happen within the next few years. It is also worth remembering that the Russian government deployed S-300s to the Russian 201st Military Base in Tajikistan in 2019. In the past, both Russian and Kyrgyzstani officials have stated that there could be an additional Russian military facility in Kyrgyzstan (see: “Russia’s Increasing Military Presence in Kyrgyzstan,” *OE Watch*, August 2020). While neither side has ruled this out, the recent changes demonstrate how the Russian government continues to increase the presence of its armed forces in Kyrgyzstan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“In particular, for the transfer in the near future of S-300 missile systems and strike unmanned aerial vehicles, which will be an important contribution of Russian to ensure security of both the Kyrgyz Republic and the external borders of the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO.”***



Russian Forpost.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D0%A4%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82\\_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%D0%A4%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82_02.jpg), Attribution: CC BY YA 3.0



## Continued: Slow Expansion of Russian Forces in Kyrgyzstan

**Source:** Kamila Baimuratova, “Правительство одобрило протокол о полетах российских дронов-беспилотников на территории Кыргызстана (The government approved the protocol on the flights of Russian unmanned aerial vehicles on the territory of Kyrgyzstan),” *Kloop* (Russian-language independent news website from Kyrgyzstan), 1 March 2021. <https://kloop.kg/blog/2021/03/01/pravitelstvo-odobrilo-protokol-o-poletah-rossijskih-dronov-bespilotnikov-na-territorii-kyrgyzstana/>

*During the visit of President Sadyr Japarov to Russia on February 25 in Moscow, the Minister of Defense of Kyrgyzstan, Major General Taalaibek Omuraliev, met with the Minister of Defense of Russia, General of the Army Sergei Shoigu.*

*After the meeting, the heads of the defense ministries signed the Protocol on cooperation in the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in Kyrgyzstan...The document came into effect immediately after it was signed for a period of five years. It will automatically be renewed unless both sides agree to terminate it...*

*The protocol notes that Russians can use drones in the presence of a representative of the Kyrgyz side. This will be carried out according to a monthly schedule, strictly agreed in advance by both sides.*

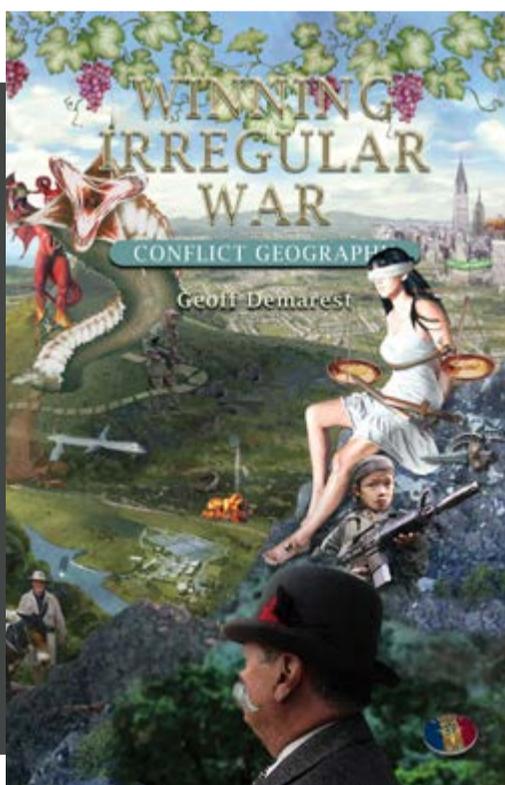
*Copies of the photos and videos taken during flights will be provided to the Kyrgyz side, except for those flights where the territory and objects of the Russian military base will be filmed...*

*The use of Russian unmanned aerial vehicles in Kyrgyzstan was agreed upon in 2019. Then, Kyrgyz officials amended the agreement on the Russian military base...the detachment consists of two Forpost drones (medium-range) and four Orlan-10 (short-range).*

**Source:** “Пресс-секретарь президента об итогах первого зарубежного визита С.Жапарова в Россию (The Press Secretary of the President on the results of the first foreign visit of S. Japarov to Russia),” *Kabar* (the national news agency of Kyrgyzstan), 26 February 2021. <http://kabar.kg/news/press-sekretar-prezidenta-ob-itogakh-pervogo-zarubezhnogo-vizita-s.zhaparova-v-rossiiu/>

*The Press Secretary of the President of Kyrgyzstan, Galina Baiterek, commented on the results of the first foreign visit of President Sadyr Japarov to the Russian Federation...“This is a continuation of the partnership within the framework of ensuring the security of Kyrgyzstan and the external borders of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organizaton)...”*

*...Agreements on the continuation of military-defense cooperation were important. In particular, for the transfer in the near future of S-300 missile systems and strike unmanned aerial vehicles, which will be an important contribution of Russian to ensure security of both the Kyrgyz Republic and the external borders of the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO...*



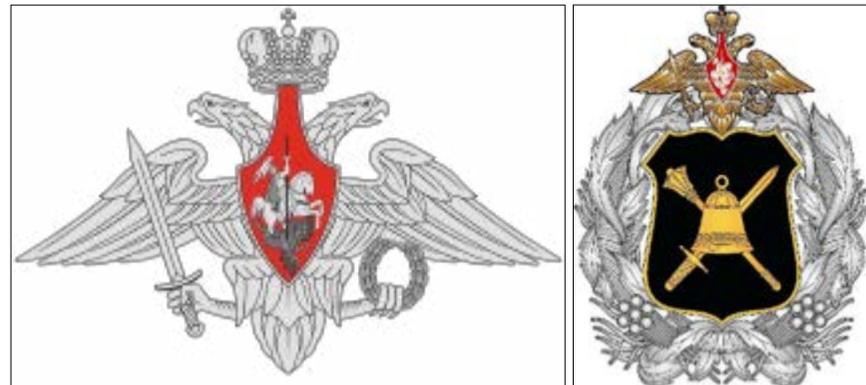
**Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. As Geoff Demarest puts it: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

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## Russian Military History: Victim and Weapon of Information Operations

**OE Watch Commentary:** Writing in the Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal, three military scholars observed that “The current environment, characterized by the sharp escalation of an information war led by the West against Russia, requires rapid and skillful countermeasures from our military-political leadership. Unfortunately, providing an adequate response to the actions of our information warfare adversaries has so far not always met with success.” The information warfare that the authors were writing about was an attack on their military history. In fact, this has been an escalating theme from the Russian General Staff for some time now. As the argument goes, for many in Russia today, history is not being learned correctly and ultimately this undermines the social cohesion necessary for military strength and sustainment. Using their Russian military science framework, competing historical concepts are laid out with regard the Second World War, which the Russian call the Great Patriotic War (GPW). The authors argue that the collective memory of the GPW is the “only thing that unites us all” and must be preserved. The authors also catalog “forms and methods”—another fingerprint of Russian military science—to identify five problems and a solution.



Emblems of the Russian Ministry of Defense and General Staff.  
Source: Public Domain

The first issue the authors note is that as Russian society embraced and was influenced by science during the Soviet period, state “propaganda,” which is a neutral or positive word from the Russian perspective, lagged and Russian citizens “fell for foreign programs” in the wake. The second issue is that current generations do not have much personal experience with GPW veterans and this paramount, unifying event has not become “their personal war.” The third cause of the problem, also aimed at Russian youth, is a noted decline in appreciation of military culture through a general degradation of education. Fourth is that there is no unified official view of the problem and alternative viewpoints of military history have emerged in Russian society: “a hellish mixture of truth, hearsay, and speculation.” According to the authors, the fifth problem is “insufficient control... over the artistic community.” This captures a range of critiques like movies depicting political officers as “hysterical,” soldiers with no “common idea” of why they are fighting, and generally “no passionate love for the Motherland.”

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To address these issues, the authors propose to build “cadres of public teachers” that connect special training in Russian history with efforts of special faculty at the Military Academy of the General Staff and newly re-introduced political officers in Russian units. This “information pyramid” will not only ensure approved military history is developed and taught in a consistent and thorough way through society, but it will also be used as an “information campaign for a foreign audience.” In discussing this, the authors specifically use military doctrinal terms, including “information pushback,” “information attack,” and “information counteraction.” This signals a broader General Staff intent to develop and deploy their military history as part of Russian military activities, including information operations, going forward. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm)**

***“We constantly suffer ‘information defeats,’ not because we are in the wrong, but because we do not know how to timely and competently deliver the truth to people.”***

**Source:** A.Yu. Golubev, I.I. Zhelnov, N.M. Kirsanova, “Воспитание военнослужащих в условиях информационного противоборства” (Educating the Military in the Context of Information Confrontation), *Военная Мысль* (Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal of military theory), No. 11 2020.

*“Today it is not sufficient to defend your service members against the information aggression of the West. Now it is necessary to ‘fight on the territory of our information adversary,’ that is, to establish an effective information campaign for a foreign audience.”*

*Military Upbringing: “Instilling among service members the high moral, psychological, and fighting qualities necessary for successful military-operational activities.” -- Russian Military Encyclopedic Dictionary*



# Instant Aggregation of Superiority: A Chinese Vision for Dominating the Future Battlefield

**OE Watch Commentary:** Chinese strategic thinkers and theorists have been focusing on what they believe the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) needs to do to achieve victory on the future battlefield. Their ideas and concepts often seem to be based on an overlap of the following three areas:

- Their research and perception of foreign military concepts and strategies;
- Ancient Chinese strategies, such as the teachings of Sun Tzu and the Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China; and
- Keeping pace with developing military capabilities.

A recent article, published in *Jiefangjun Bao*, or PLA Daily, describes a concept the authors refer to as an “instant aggregation of superiority.” This is carried out by instantly bringing together troops, firepower, information power, and cognitive power forcefully (like a burst of energy) at the precise moment needed. The authors explain that “local and instantaneous decisive superiority” will be achieved on the future battlefield through “cross domain integration and an aggregation of physical energy, information energy, and cognitive energy.” While these elements of energy work independently, they are united in action, they explain.

The authors write that the enemy’s system of systems should be thoroughly studied to find the “natural window,” or weak spots that provide a natural opportunity to weaken the force. An enemy’s weak spot might be its over-reliance on the network system of systems or its longer cycle of assembling military personnel. The authors refer to these weak spots as a “natural window” that will provide an opportunity for the PLA to weaken the entire system through various means.

Along with understanding the enemy to find a “natural window,” the authors explain that they “should fully use the art of stratagem, implement multi-domain actions, deceive and confuse the enemy, and make it difficult for the enemy to distinguish the true from the false. When referencing “the art of stratagem,” the authors seem to be alluding to *The Thirty-Six Strategies of Ancient China*, which is a list of ancient proverbs, describing cunning and subtle war tactics. For example, “Beat the grass to startle the snake,” is one such proverb that means when unable to detect the opponent’s plans, launch a direct, but brief attack to observe how they act. The authors seem to allude to this when they write, “flexible feints and probes should be used to lure the enemy into acting prematurely and rashly, discover the weak points in the enemy’s hasty response, and seize all dynamic opportunities.”

The article is noteworthy because it demonstrates how contemporary Chinese strategists strive to incorporate ancient strategies with future capabilities. The key to success, according to the article, is to identify, seize, and create or seek out a window of superiority. Stratagems, which are used within the cognitive domain, can expose a weakness or create one. Once a weakness is discovered or created, the core of the operation becomes a “multi-domain, dynamic, independent aggregation of energy, and momentum.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

***“The ultimate goal of instant aggregation of superiority is to accurately release energy for precision strikes, destroy and paralyze the system of systems, and rapidly overcome the enemy by reconstructing the multi-domain integrated kill chain and targeting enemy’s system-of-systems joints and core hubs.”***

**Source:** Herun Sheng and Cheng Shuangping, “即时聚优：现代战争制胜之钥 (Instant Aggregation of Superiority: Key to Achieving Victory in Modern Warfare),” *Jiefangjun Bao* (official newspaper of the People’s Republic of China’s Central Military Commission), 9 February 2021. [http://www.81.cn/yw/2021-02/09/content\\_9983700.htm](http://www.81.cn/yw/2021-02/09/content_9983700.htm)

*The purpose of aggregating superiority is to use superiority. Instantly aggregating superiority is the “rapid power accumulation” with independent and united action, while precisely using superiority is the “high-voltage discharge” that strikes the vital sites hard.*

*Studying the enemy’s system of systems to seek the natural window. Even the strongest enemy has weak points. The operational system of systems is composed of multiple operational systems that are huge and complex. It is impossible for each system to be completely perfect. Any weak spot within it is hidden with natural opportunities for the opponent. [We] should study in depth the composition, operating laws, and key nodes of the enemy’s operational system of systems; combine it with tracking and study of the enemy’s operational thought, organizational structure, equipment, and real-combat situation; and analyze and find their inherent shortcomings and weaknesses, so as to provide a basis for seeking the window of superiority. For example, the enemy’s higher degree of reliance on network information system of systems, longer cycle of military personnel assembly and preparations, strategic bases that have many locations and broad areas with fragile protection, and reduced operational capabilities of cross-domain mobile units may all be the natural window.*

*Creating the enemy’s dilemma to seize the dynamic window. Creating multiple dilemmas for the enemy and causing confusion, delays, or even mistakes in enemy’s decision-making and actions often can create unexpected operational opportunities and provide conditions for instant aggregation of superiority. To take the initiative to trap the enemy in a dilemma, it is necessary to rely on technological support of advanced equipment. It is even more necessary to rely on flexible strategies and tactics. [We] should fully use the art of stratagem, implement multi-domain actions, deceive and confuse the enemy, and make it difficult for the enemy to distinguish the true from the false with unclear information, thus generating their decision-making dilemma. [We should] use flexible feints and probes to lure the enemy into acting prematurely and rashly, discover the weak points in the enemy’s hasty response, and seize all dynamic opportunities.*

*The purpose of aggregating superiority is to use superiority. Instantly aggregating superiority is the “rapid power accumulation” with independent and united action, while precisely using superiority is the “high-voltage discharge” that strikes the vital sites hard. The ultimate goal of instant aggregation of superiority is to accurately release energy for precision strikes, destroy and paralyze the system of systems, and rapidly overcome the enemy by reconstructing the multi-domain integrated kill chain and targeting enemy’s system-of-systems joints and core hubs.*



## Beijing's Housing Policy in Hong Kong: Soft Power and Dense Urban Terrain

**OE Watch Commentary:** Housing and the political response to it are inherent aspects of dense urban terrain. One of the issues highlighted by last year's protests in Hong Kong over increasing pressure from Beijing was the fact that Hong Kong is one of the least affordable cities in the world. Scores of reports shed light on the lack of affordable housing, the tiny apartments in which many Hong Kong residents live, the nearly impossible task to raise one's socio-economic status, and the possible link between housing inequality and social unrest. Recently a number of editorial pieces have been published by Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, which laid out the case for Beijing to alleviate the housing dilemma in the former British protectorate.

The article suggested that there is a link between politics from Beijing and the welfare of hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong residents: "If the government wants to diminish people's electoral rights, it needs to give something back by improving their living standards and housing conditions." Many Hong Kong residents live in what are called "cage" apartments, usually not more than a few square meters—with no viable alternative on the horizon.

The second excerpted piece, a letter to the editor, also published in the *SCMP*, lambasted British colonial housing policy from the 1970s that continues to protect the rights of indigenous people of Hong Kong at the expense of the majority of the city's residents, concluding that there is plenty of land from which to build affordable housing and hence, reduce one point of friction and source of public unrest.

If Beijing can raise hundreds of thousands of Hong Kong residents out of housing poverty, it might make it easier to impose its political will on the people of Hong Kong. As the authors of the letter to the editor conclude, "If the central government truly loves the people of Hong Kong, it should try to provide us with decent housing. This would kill two birds with one stone, particularly if the government wants to influence young people and stem the growing tide of emigration." **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

***“Correlation is not causation. But Hong Kong’s post-handover housing woes have coincided with the rise of radical localism and youthful rebellion... If the government wants to diminish people’s electoral rights, it needs to give something back by improving their living standards and housing conditions.”***

**Source:** “Beijing is Right to Demand Housing Solution in Hong Kong,” *South China Morning Post* (currently owned and operated by Alibaba group), 12 March 2021. <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3125097/beijing-right-demand-housing-solution-hong-kong>

*Han Zheng, senior vice-premier of the State Council in charge of Hong Kong and Macau affairs, is the latest state leader to call attention to the city's housing problem, calling it deep-seated but saying it must be addressed, otherwise the whole community hurts.*

*Han is making a political point, not just a socioeconomic one, having tied the housing problem to the introduction of the national security law and electoral reform in tackling the city's immediate as well as longer-term problems that have caused social malaise and unrest.*

*Certainly, if you believe a school of thought that claims a high level of home ownership has a stabilising effect on social order and political stability, Hong Kong has been doing terribly in the past decade.*

*... People aged below 35 now account for just 7.6 per cent of total homeowners in Hong Kong, down by two-thirds from 22.1 per cent at the time of the handover in 1997.*

*Flat prices rose by 391 per cent between 2004 and 2019, but during the same period, the median monthly household income increased by just 78 per cent.*

*The Legco report observed: “[Young people] are priced out from the market, as their working income lags far behind the escalation in asset prices. Reportedly, worsening housing affordability has led to frustrations in the young generation.”*

*Like the national security issue, it's clear that the Hong Kong government is incapable of resolving the local housing problem, which is as much a political issue as an economic one in relation to land supply. If what Han says is a warning, then it looks like the central government is ready to clip the wings of Big Property and reduce its influence within both the business sector and the local government.*



## Continued: Beijing’s Housing Policy in Hong Kong: Soft Power and Dense Urban Terrain

**Source:** Lo Wai Kong, Lai Chi Kok, “Beijing must focus on housing to inspire love in Hong Kong,” *South China Morning Post*, 21 March 2021. <https://www.scmp.com/comment/letters/article/3126013/beijing-must-focus-housing-inspire-love-hong-kong>

*Hong Kong is in a situation where it has a reservoir of land supply but cannot tap it. That supply has been frozen by the small-house policy. Vice-Premier Han Zheng is right to insist on tackling the problem at the source. It is absurd that the rights of the indigenous people of the New Territories are protected by Article 40 of the Basic Law.*

*The colonial government granted this group of Hongkongers the right to preserve their traditions in the 1970s. Renowned Australian journalist Richard Hughes called Hong Kong “a borrowed place on borrowed time”. The indigenous people of the New Territories enjoyed unreasonable privileges from 1972 to 2021, and now we must put an end to this. The central government is going to launch sweeping electoral reforms next year. It stresses that key political positions should be in the hands of Hong Kong “*

*patriots”. I will not comment on this issue as the details of the reforms have not been released, and it is difficult to assess whether someone is truly patriotic or just paying lip service.*

*If the central government truly loves the people of Hong Kong, it should try to provide us with decent housing. This would kill two birds with one stone, particularly if the government wants to influence young people and stem the growing tide of emigration.*

*Oi Man Estate was among the early crop of the public housing estates built by the colonial government, which also launched the Home Ownership Scheme in the 1970s. Now, the central government can launch a similar project with an Oi Kong – or Love Hong Kong – Estate. The people of Hong Kong are pragmatic, and if the government shows that it truly loves its people, the people will love the government in return.*

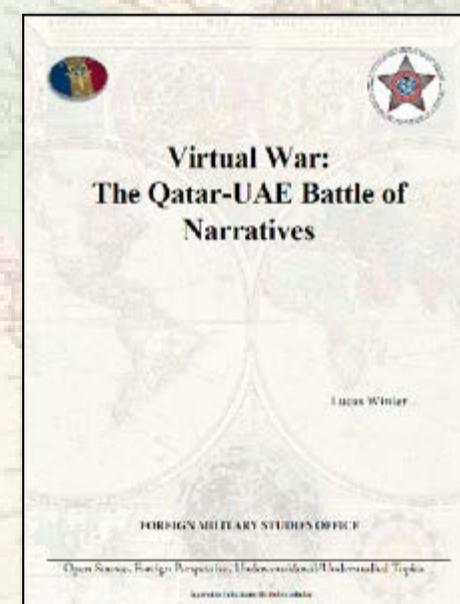
*If the government loves the people and the people love the government, Hong Kong will be harmonious and obstacles to reform will disappear.*

## VIRTUAL WAR: THE QATAR-UAE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

Lucas Winter

May 2020

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



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



## India Adding Battalions, Not Divisions, to the Army amid De-escalation Efforts

**OE Watch Commentary:** In late 2020, Indian officials announced that the Mountain Strike Corps (XVII Corps) will not be filled to its previously planned strength of three infantry divisions. Instead it will consist of one division plus an artillery brigade for the foreseeable future. While officials stated that this was partly due to funding, the accompanying excerpted articles provide an update on other developments within the Indian Army as well as separate negotiations with the governments of Pakistan and China to reduce tension on the border and avoid a conflict.

The article from *The Print*, an independent English-language news website from India, reports that the Indian Army will raise three additional battalions. It appears that the three battalions are a substitute for the two divisions meant for the Mountain Strike Corps as the article notes that “defence sources told *The Print* the sanction for the move was accorded around 2013, when the raising of the 17 mountain corps was granted” and that “the final nod to raise the battalions was received a few weeks ago.” The article goes on to note how “the additional three battalions will be raised as part of the Sikh, Kumaon, and Jammu and Kashmir Rifles regiments,” so the increase in units is not just for one region, as each of the regiments mentioned are located in different areas in northern India. Indian officials also mentioned that additional units may be raised in the future “depending on operational requirements.”

The announcement on the establishment of the new units comes as the Indian government has negotiated for a disengagement with China at the Line of Actual Control (LAC). An article from *The Hindu*, an independent English-language newspaper in India, reports that on 11 February “India and China announced an agreement for disengagement on the north and south bank of Pangong Tso to cease their forward deployments in a ‘phased, coordinated and verified manner.’” The article references some requirements stated in the agreement, including how “any structures that had been built by both sides since April 2020 in both north and south bank area will be removed and the landforms will be restored” and that “there is also a moratorium on patrolling in this area until a resumption is discussed by both sides through diplomatic and military talks.” It also notes that “once complete disengagement is achieved at all friction areas, both sides will undertake de-escalation along the LAC.”

An article from *Dawn*, an independent English-language newspaper from Pakistan, reports that at the end of February the governments of India and Pakistan “had recommitted themselves to the 2003 ceasefire arrangement at the Line of Control (LoC) and agreed to address the ‘core issues’ that could undermine peace and stability.” The article provides some background to the initial ceasefire agreement dating back to November 2003, when the two sides “agreed to cease fire along the LoC and the Working Boundary.” It also notes that “the agreement held for a few years, but regular violations have occurred since 2008.” The joint statement says “the two sides had concurred on reviving the existing mechanisms—hotline contact and flag meetings—for dealing with “any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding.” Ultimately, India is not filling its Mountain Strike Corps to full strength while it carries out diplomatic efforts with China and Pakistan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

***“The additional three battalions will be raised as part of the Sikh, Kumaon, and Jammu and Kashmir Rifles regiments”***



*The Sikh Regiment marching contingent passes through the Rajpath during the 66th Republic Day Parade, 2015.*

Source: Government Open Data License - India (GODL), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikh\\_Regiment#/media/File:Sikh\\_marching\\_contingent\\_jointly\\_won\\_award\\_for\\_the\\_best\\_marching\\_contingent\\_among\\_the\\_two\\_services\\_in\\_Republic\\_Day\\_Parade-2015.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikh_Regiment#/media/File:Sikh_marching_contingent_jointly_won_award_for_the_best_marching_contingent_among_the_two_services_in_Republic_Day_Parade-2015.jpg)



## Continued: India Adding Battalions, Not Divisions, to the Army amid De-escalation Efforts

**Source:** Amrita Nayak Dutta, “Army to raise 3 new battalions with 3,000 troops, under Sikh, Kumaon, J&K regiments,” *The Print* (an independent English-language news website from India), 19 February 2021. <https://theprint.in/defence/army-to-raise-3-new-battalions-with-3000-troops-under-sikh-kumaon-jk-regiments/606831/>

*The Indian Army will be raising three additional battalions — with a total of about 3,000 troops — to add to its manpower as part of its larger reorganisation plan and options to raise more are open...*

*Defence sources told The Print the sanction for the move was accorded around 2013, when the raising of the 17 mountain corps was granted. However, the final nod to raise the battalions was received a few weeks ago...The additional three battalions will be raised as part of the Sikh, Kumaon, and Jammu and Kashmir Rifles regiments.*

*...India’s defence establishment had time and again said a collusive threat of a two-front conflict with China and Pakistan cannot be ruled out in the future.*

*...While the raising of the three battalions are to be done now, sources said options are open for more raisings in future depending on operational requirements. Currently, there are over 400 infantry battalions in the Army...*

**Source:** Dinakar Peri, “The disengagement plan between India and China along the LAC,” *The Hindu* (an independent English-language newspaper in India), 15 February 2021. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/explained-the-disengagement-plan-between-india-and-china-along-the-lac/article33841285.ece>

*...Starting in April 2020, China amassed a large number of troops and armaments along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh and other areas along the 3,488 km LAC, leading to stand-offs and skirmishes at Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso (lake), Gogra-Hot Springs and other areas...*

*India and China on February 11 announced an agreement for disengagement on the north and south bank of Pangong Tso to cease their forward deployments in a “phased, coordinated and verified manner”, which according to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will “substantially” restore the situation to that existing prior to commencement of the stand-off last year.*

*...The agreement also entails that any structures that had been built by both sides since April 2020 in both north and south bank area will be removed and the landforms will be restored. There is also a moratorium on patrolling in this area until a resumption is discussed by both sides through diplomatic and military talks.*

*...Once complete disengagement is achieved at all friction areas, both sides will undertake de-escalation along the LAC.*

**Source:** Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan, India agree on LoC ceasefire,” *Dawn* (an independent English-language newspaper from Pakistan), 26 February 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1609468>

*Pakistan and India on Thursday said that they had recommitted themselves to the 2003 ceasefire arrangement at the Line of Control and agreed to address the ‘core issues’ that could undermine peace and stability.*

*The surprise announcement was made in a joint statement by the militaries of the two countries on a ‘hotline contact’ between their directors general military operations (DGMOs)...“Both sides agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the LoC and all other sectors, with effect from midnight 24/25 February 2021,” said a statement.*

*Pakistan and India had in November 2003 agreed to cease fire along the LoC and the Working Boundary. The agreement held for a few years, but regular violations have occurred since 2008. A sharp spike in the truce breaches has, meanwhile, been witnessed since 2014 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in India...*

*The statement said the two sides had concurred on reviving the existing mechanisms — hotline contact and flag meetings — for dealing with “any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding”.*

*Hotline contact is one of the oldest military confidence-building measures between Pakistan and India. The hotline contact was originally established in 1971, but its use followed ups and downs in the relations. The two sides had in their secretary-level talks in August 1992 agreed to resume DGMOs’ communication via the hotline on a weekly basis. The practice, however, could not become a permanent feature and remained dependent on the state of bilateral relations.*

*...Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi welcomed the agreement saying it was a positive development. “It could be a good start for the future. India will have to abide by this ceasefire agreement with sincerity. How can we make progress on the issue of occupied Kashmir unless the environment is conducive,” he said.*

*...Indian Ministry of External Affairs, in its reaction, said: “India desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan. We have always maintained that we are committed to addressing issues, if any, in a peaceful bilateral manner.”*



# 5G and Military Drones: Key Sectors of Growing Chinese-Emirati Collaboration

**OE Watch Commentary:** 2020 was a year of deepening relations between China and the UAE, according to the accompanying opinion piece written by the Emirati ambassador to China. The piece was originally published on the Arabic-language website of the *China Global Television Network*, the international division of the state-owned *China Central Television*, and subsequently reprinted in the prominent Arabic-language Emirati daily *al-Bayan*. The ambassador highlights several realms of bilateral collaboration, including COVID-19 and the health sector, cultural exchanges and events, and various trade and technical cooperation agreements. Perhaps most noteworthy among them is the UAE’s selection of the Chinese company Huawei as its main partner in implementing advanced information and communications technology platforms and infrastructure linked through a nationwide 5G network.



IDEX 2015.

Source: Mikhail Palinchak, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/poroshenkopetro/16508282899>, Attribution: CC 2.0

The latest in Chinese-Emirati military-industrial collaboration was showcased at the International Defense Exhibition and Conference (IDEX), held last February in Abu Dhabi. IDEX marked the first public revelation that the UAE was the flagship foreign customer for China’s CR500 Golden Eagle, a compact vertical take-off and landing UAV with attack capabilities developed by the China North Industries Group Corporation Limited (Norinco). The Emirati CR500 was unveiled at IDEX as a joint project between Norinco and the UAE’s International Golden Group, through a new entity called the China-Emirates Science and Technology innovation laboratory. The CR500, which is briefly described in the second excerpt from *Global Times*, an English-language Chinese publication, was first cleared for sale to an unidentified foreign buyer last November.

Emirati interest in Chinese weapons is about more than just money, if one is to judge from a recent tweet by Abdul Khaleq Abdullah, an Emirati political scientist who is influential on social media. IDEX, he observes via his Twitter account, provides the UAE with an opportunity “to search for sources of weapons other than America.” The Emirati pivot toward Asia, he adds, should be based not only on investment opportunities but also on strategic considerations that “enhance the UAE’s future defense and deterrence capabilities.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“It is important that the turn toward Asia, the rising global center of gravity, be about strategic considerations as well as investment ...”***

**Source:** نظرة مستقبلية للعام الجديد من سفير الإمارات لدى الصين: عام الثور سيكون عاما مثمرا للعلاقة الصينية الإماراتية (Outlook for the new year from the UAE ambassador to China: The Year of the Ox will be a fruitful year for the Sino-Emirati relationship), *CGTN Arabic* (Arabic-language website of China Global Television Network), 9 February 2021 <https://arabic.cgtn.com/n/BfJEA-IA-CEA/FEIAAA/index.html>

*UAE-China relations have been deepened substantially in 2020 based on the strategic partnership between the two countries that was established in 2018, as well as diplomatic relations dating back to 1984... In the year 2020, in particular, it contributed to strengthening the friendship and interdependence between the two countries, which was represented in particular by the mutual support between the two countries to combat the Covid-19 epidemic... Additionally, there have been various developments in the ICT and Artificial Intelligence industries. The UAE has established a partnership with Huawei to create 5G networks to advance the UAE strategy to face the Fourth Industrial Revolution, making the UAE the fourth country in the world to introduce this technology. The Dubai Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) and the Huawei Consumer Group have announced the exclusive launch of the first digital “Nol cards” in the GCC and the “NolPay” mobile app on the Huawei app store.*



## Continued: 5G and Military Drones: Key Sectors of Growing Chinese-Emirati Collaboration

**Source:** “Chinese arms firm ready to deliver indigenous helicopter drones,” *Global Times* (English-language Chinese publication), 29 November 2020. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1208402.shtml>

*As a top Chinese arms firm was recently cleared to deliver its made-for-export multipurpose helicopter drone system, which can conduct missions including reconnaissance, communication relay and battle damage assessment at a long endurance, analysts referred to it on Sunday as a good partner for tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery. Developed by the state-owned China North Industries Group Corporation Limited (NORINCO), the CR500 Golden Eagle unmanned helicopter system recently passed final inspections for delivery, the company said in a statement released in its WeChat account on Friday...*

*The drone can carry a large payload, has a long endurance even when fully loaded, and a compact structure that can be easily stored and transported. It can also resist strong winds, carry different types of electro-optical pods and payloads, and act as a logistics support craft and deliver materials with pinpoint accuracy, the company said. When equipped with weapons like machine guns and anti-tank missiles, the helicopter drone could also conduct armed reconnaissance missions, the expert said.*

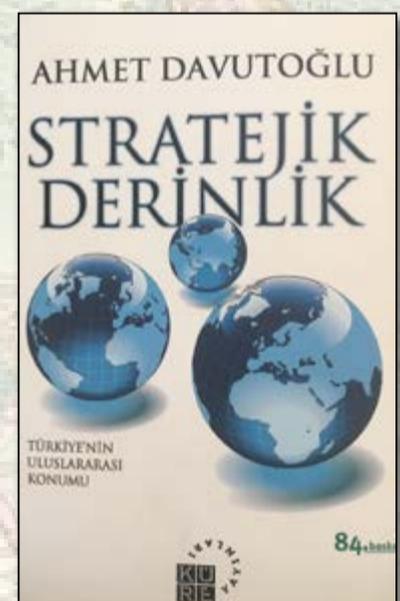
**Source:** Abdul Khaleq Abdullah, *Twitter*, 21 February 2020. [https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq\\_UAE/status/1363541395676352517](https://twitter.com/Abdulkhaleq_UAE/status/1363541395676352517)

*The IDEX 2021 exhibition in Abu Dhabi is an opportunity to search for sources of weapons other than America to enhance the UAE’s future defense and deterrence capabilities, such as the Chinese J20 aircraft that employ fifth-generation technology and are comparable to the F35 aircraft. It is important that the turn toward Asia, the rising global center of gravity, be about strategic considerations as well as investment.*

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

Karen Kaya  
February 2020

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



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



## China and Russia Back Myanmar Military's Coup

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 1 February, Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, deposed the country's ruling political party and later detained party leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. The publication, *irrawaddy.com*, which is run by exiled Myanmar citizens and covers Myanmar news from a pro-democracy perspective, released the subsequent excerpted 13 February article discussing Chinese and Russian support for the coup, despite opposition to the coup from international organizations and Myanmar citizens in multiple cities of the country.



*Demonstrators denounce the military coup in Myanmar.*

Source: Unknown Author, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Demonstrators\\_denounce\\_the\\_military\\_coup\\_in\\_Myanmar.webp](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Demonstrators_denounce_the_military_coup_in_Myanmar.webp), Attribution: CC x 2.0

According to the article, China and Russia both asserted that Myanmar's coup was an internal affair and the detaining of civilian leaders and cutting off the internet are not concerns for international organizations. A majority of the UN Human Rights Council, in contrast, criticized the coup and, according to the article, called for the military to lift the State of Emergency. The article acknowledged China's and Russia's position was consistent with their longstanding support of Myanmar's military.

Since China and Russia are among the few backers of Myanmar's military in the international community, the article discusses how Myanmar citizens opposed to the coup have been protesting at both countries' embassies in Yangon. Citizens have also sought to win support for their protests from other countries, which they have received, including, according to the article, from Japan and South Korea. The article also notes that Japan and South Korea, like other countries, called for the release of detained political leaders, but did not go so far as to call for the undoing of the coup. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

***“Myanmar’s giant neighbor China distanced itself from the country’s human rights issues, with China’s representative to UNHRC saying, ‘What happens in Myanmar is essentially Myanmar’s internal affairs.’”***

**Source:** “At UNHRC, Russia and China Still Dismiss Myanmar’s Military Coup as an Internal Affair.” *irrawaddy.com* (pro-democracy news outlet based outside of Myanmar), 13 February 2021. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/unhrc-russia-china-still-dismiss-myanmars-military-coup-internal-affair.html>

*China and Russia continue to defend Myanmar’s military, insisting that the armed forces’ seizure of power from the democratically-elected government is Myanmar’s internal affair. Meanwhile a majority of United Nations members deplored the military’s actions during a special session of the UN Human Rights Council. The military detained civilian leaders, including the State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint and others.*

*But the UNHRC passed a resolution, put forward by the UK and European Union representatives. Protesters gathered in front of the Chinese embassy in Yangon on Friday, urging the Chinese government to stop helping the military. However, Myanmar’s giant neighbor China distanced itself from the country’s human rights issues, with China’s representative to UNHRC saying, “What happens in Myanmar is essentially Myanmar’s internal affairs.”*

*Both China and Russia have long histories of good relations with the Myanmar military. Both now face Myanmar citizens’ denouncing them via an online campaign for supporting the military. Myanmar protesters continued the demonstrations in front of both countries’ embassies this week, urging them not to support the military regime.*



## Iran: Supreme Leader Affirms Ability to Build Nuclear Bomb

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 22 February 2021, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei gave one of his semi-regular addresses to the Assembly of Experts. The Assembly of Experts is an 88-member Iranian clerical body that meets periodically and whose major function is selection of a new supreme leader following the death of the sitting one. As it was reported on the Supreme Leader's personal website *Khamenei.ir*, Khamenei focused his remarks on current controversies over Iran's nuclear program. Khamenei's general tone was both defiant and self-contradictory on one hand, and xenophobic and conspiratorial on the other. Khamenei also accused the United States of hypocrisy given its own use of nuclear weapons against Japan in the Second World War and, of course, accused the United States and European states of acting in bad faith vis-à-vis the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

There are many inconsistencies inherent in Khamenei's thinking. He said, for example, that Islamic jurisprudence prohibits nuclear weapons, but still argues that no one can stop Iran from doing what it wants with its nuclear program. Another logical loophole is Khamenei's insistence that utilizing such weapons is illegal against civilians and ordinary people while he and senior members of the Iranian regime have elsewhere categorized Israelis of all ages and occupations as legitimate targets for terrorists. As such, it is likely that Khamenei considers Israelis non-civilians and not "ordinary" people for targeting purposes.

Khamenei continues to address concerns about Iran's motivation in pursuing nuclear energy by suggesting that nuclear power is quickly becoming one of the world's most important sources of energy. He is wrong, however, to suggest that nuclear power would be cheaper for Iran than oil or gas given the differential in supplies. Iran has enough natural uranium to enrich to low-enriched fuel to power eight plants (the number of nuclear plants Iranian authorities say they need) for 15 years, but has enough oil to power itself for three centuries at far less cost in new infrastructure. Nor does Khamenei's concern about environmental cleanliness seem sincere given his government's arrests of environmental activists who have protested Iran's pollution problem.

The broader issue that should be of concern was Khamenei's statement suggesting that Iran could enrich uranium to 60 percent. There is no industrial reason why Iran should need to do so; the enriched uranium that powers nuclear plants has a less than six-percent enrichment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



The Assembly of Experts meets with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, 22 February 2021.  
Source: Khamenei.ir, [https://idc0-cdn0.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/47388/C/13991204\\_0647388.jpg](https://idc0-cdn0.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/47388/C/13991204_0647388.jpg)

**“Who are you to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon?”**

**Source:** “‘Biyanat dar Didar ‘Aza-ye Majlis-e Khabargan Rahbari (Statement in the Meeting of the Assembly of Experts),’ Khamenei.ir (Supreme leader's personal website), 22 February 2021. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=47396>

*Statement in the Meeting of the Assembly of Experts*

*Well, some people—including that international Zionist clown – constantly say that they will not let us build a nuclear weapon. Who are you to prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon? If we decided to build a nuclear weapon, then you and powers greater than you would not be able to stop us, but we decided not to do so because this is our Islamic thinking. Our Islamic thinking says that a weapon which is used for killing civilians, non-military people and ordinary people is forbidden. It is forbidden, be it nuclear or chemical. Such weapons are forbidden. It is because of the Islamic viewpoint that we do not want to build a nuclear weapon. However, if we wanted to do so, who are you to prevent us...? Our enrichment is not limited to 20 percent. If need be, we might bring it to 60 percent for our nuclear cycle or other things....*

*Undoubtedly, in a few years, nuclear power plants will be one of the most important sources of energy in the world. The day when we run out of oil or the day when there are other functions for it, nuclear power plants will become common practice in all countries because they provide a healthier, cleaner and cheaper energy. On that day, we will be needing that energy, but we cannot start enrichment on that day, rather we should start it today in order to prepare ourselves, but they do not want this. Arrogant westerners do not want this. They want Iran to be dependent on them the day when it needs the nuclear energy so that they will be able to impose their demands and to bully and blackmail us. This is what they are looking for.*



## Iran: New Indigenous Rifles Unveiled

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Iranian government prides itself on its indigenous defense industries, both as a matter of national prestige and for the perceived security independence it provides from outside suppliers. Often, Iranian officials brag about large platforms—the Karrar tank, for example, or the Makran helicopter carrier. However, Defense Minister Amir Hatami recently announced production of several new guns and rifles, according to the excerpted article from Iran’s main economic daily and politically centrist *Donya-e-Eqtasad*.

The excerpted portion of the article focuses on the Masaf assault rifle that appears to be a copy of the Heckler & Koch HK416 used by the Norwegian and French militaries. The fact that the Masaf is essentially a copy of other weaponry highlights Iranian military industries’ ability to reverse engineer relatively simple equipment. At the same time the Masaf suggests that, despite its rhetoric, Iranian military engineers focus on stealing intellectual property rather than creating it for themselves.

Regardless, if the Masaf operates as Hatami advertises, it provides a versatility that will benefit not only Iran in the field, but its many proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, especially given the willingness of the Iranian military to transfer not only weaponry but also the capability to manufacture it to its proxies. The Masaf could also become a moneymaker for Iran should it choose to export it to various African, Southeast Asian, or Latin American countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



The Masaf Assault Rifle, unveiled by Iranian Defense Ministry on 6 March 2021.

Source: Mehr News Agency, <https://media.mehrnews.com/d/2021/03/07/3/3712307.jpg>

**“The effective range is 600 meters with a thermal camera.”**

**Source:** “Moshakhsat-e Monaser beh Fard Yek Saleh Pihtar Fateh Tamam Irani (Unique Specifications of an Advanced Indigenous Iranian Rifle),” *Donya-e-Eqtasad* (Iran’s politically centrist and primary economic daily), 7 March 2021. <https://donya-e-eqtasad.com/تی‌اس‌ش‌خ‌ب/ین‌اری‌ام‌م‌ت‌ه‌ت‌ف‌ر‌ش‌ی‌پ‌ح‌ال‌س‌ک‌ی‌د‌ر‌ف‌ه‌ب‌ر‌ص‌ح‌ن‌م‌ت‌ا‌ص‌خ‌ش‌م-62/3746742-ن‌ا‌و‌خ>

### *Unique Specifications of an Advanced Indigenous Iranian Rifle*

Simultaneously with the 13th Annual Armed Service Soldiers Festival, held by the Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Support, Brigadier General Amir Hatami unveiled the “Masaf,” an advanced Iranian-made assault rifle. The effective range is 800 meters during the day and 600 meters with a thermal camera [at night].

### *What are the characteristics of the Masaf Assault Rifle?*

The Masaf takes a 7.62×51 mm round, and it is a light-weight, air-cooled weapon with a short-piston and is armed by indirect pressure of gunpowder gas and fed by ammunition which increases the reliability and lifespan of the weapon and its parts. It has three modes: sniper, short burst, and automatic. The weapon also has a standard Picatinny rail that allows for the installation of peripherals such as cameras, laser sights, grenade launchers, tripods, etc. The Masaf also has an automatic reload feature. The telescopic scope can be adjusted... and the presence of a repellant in the arming mechanism reduces the kick of the weapon, which in turn increases its operational capability.

*Ergonomic considerations were factored into weapon design.*

*This weapon is configured in such a way that, without special tools, can be converted into a sniper or carbine version. This weapon can fire all 7.62 x 51 mm bullets.*



## Iran Unveils New Bahman Radar System

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Iranian military increasingly worries about its air defenses, especially against the near impunity with which Israel often launches airstrikes on Syrian government, Iranian military, or Iranian proxy targets inside Syria. After all, if Israeli jets can penetrate Syrian airspace without detection or triggering air defense countermeasures, could they do the same against targets inside Iran? As the Iranian government ratchets up its nuclear program, the possibility of an Israeli airstrike on Iran also increases. That the Iranian government made the Air Defense Force a separate service in 2008 rather than a subordinate part of the Air Force shows its importance within the Iranian military hierarchy.



Iran's New Bahman Radar System.

Source: Roozanehnews.ir, [https://roozanehnews.ir/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/13990703000701\\_Test\\_PhotoN.jpg](https://roozanehnews.ir/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/13990703000701_Test_PhotoN.jpg)

In the excerpted article from *Etemad*, a reformist daily, Alireza Sabahifard, commander of the Air Defense Force,

announces the operation of a new passive radar system named Bahman [Avalanche]. If the Bahman performs as Sabahifard states, then it provides an advantage over more active radar both because a passive array is more difficult to jam and because such a system is less vulnerable to anti-radiation missiles. Sabahifard claimed that the radar could detect ordinary fighters and drones when they were close to 100 miles away and track stealth targets at slightly over half that distance. He also said that an associated missile defense system could intercept ordinary aircraft at 80 miles and stealth aircraft at 30 miles, engaging six targets simultaneously.

While the Iranian military leadership often exaggerates its capabilities, it has shown itself successful against American drones. And while Iranian leaders brag about the indigenous nature of their systems, the growing Iranian military alliance with Russia and perhaps China raises the possibility that one or both countries would help Iran enhance its systems to better defend itself against the United States or its allies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

***“It can detect and identify all sorts of conventional aircraft and small objects such as UAVs”***

**Source:** “Samaneh Radari Bahman Cheh Khasusiyati Darad? (What are the Features of the Bahman Radar System?).” *Etemad* (Iranian reformist daily news outlet), 20 February 2021. <https://etemadonline.com/content/466127>

### ***What are the Features of the New Bahman Radar System?***

*Amir Alireza Sabahifard, commander of the Air Defense Forces of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran, said this morning, Saturday 20 February, at the unveiling ceremony of the new achievements of the Army Air Defense Self-Sufficiency Research and Jihad Organization: In a year that the Supreme Leader has named ‘the year of leaping ahead in production’ The army air defense force has been able to design and operate more than 20 projects with its internal strength and its young scientists. The projects that we could have publicized have been introduced to the people and the media, and a number of them that could not be publicized have been provided to the Air Defense Force. He continued: “One of the projects that was unveiled today is called Bahman Radar System, and there has been nothing else like it seen anywhere in the world.” One of the characteristics of the Bahman radar system is that it is passive, and it can detect and identify all sorts of conventional aircraft and small objects such as UAVs and small birds.*

*The commander of the Army Air Defense Force said, “We can put this system into operation from today.” This project has been carried out with the support of Sorena Sattari, vice president for Science and Technology, who is the son of the martyred Major General Mansour Sattari. He continued: “The next project is a mobile operating room, which is present in all battlefields and critical situations such as floods and earthquakes....”*



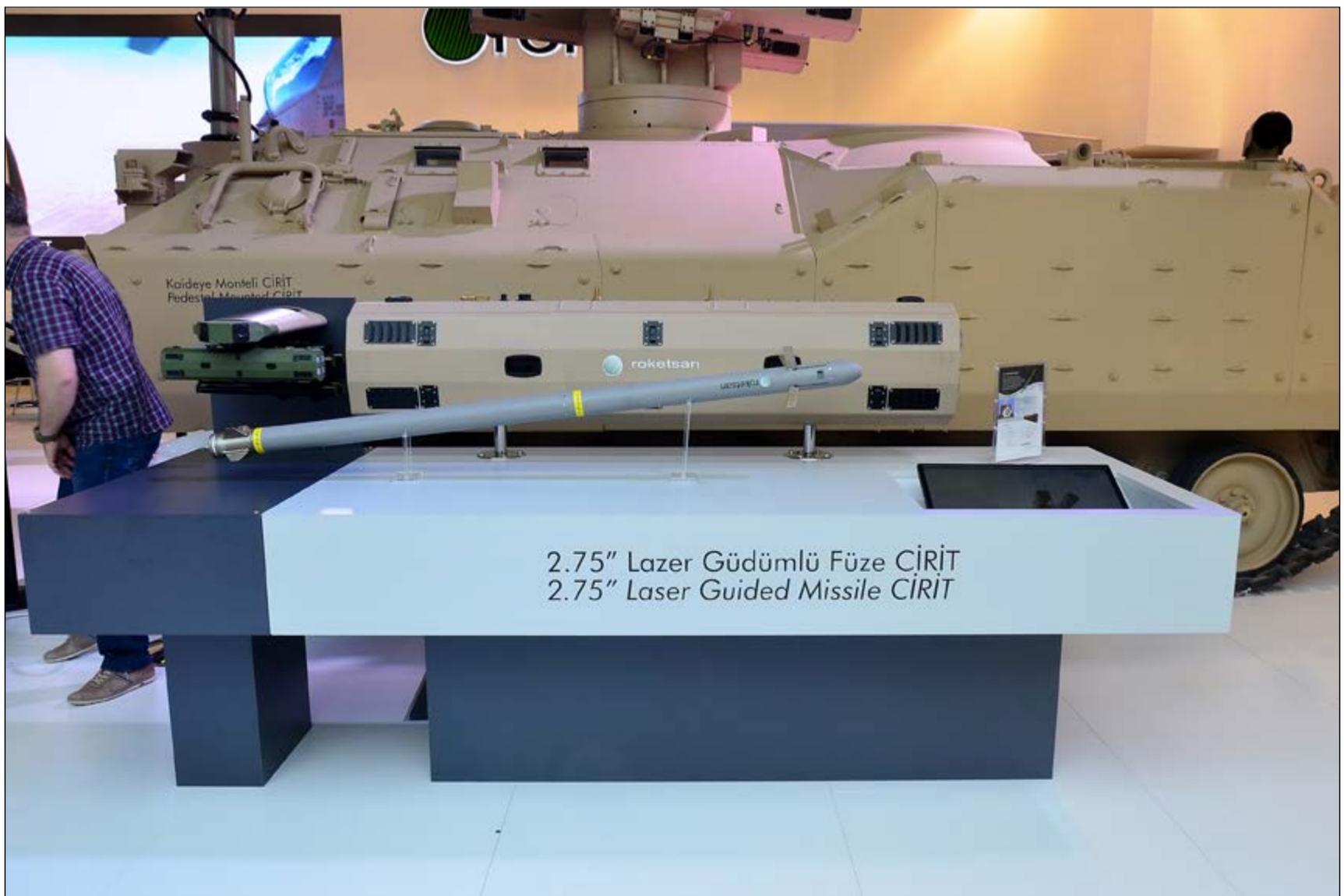
## Turkey's New Armed Unmanned Surface Vessel

**OE Watch Commentary:** In February, the prototype of Turkey's first indigenous armed unmanned surface vehicle (AUSV), called "ULAQ," was announced. Developed by Ares Shipyard and Meteksan Defense, ULAQ expands Turkey's unmanned vehicle development to the maritime domain and is currently in sea trials. Initial testing will likely focus on maneuverability and other navigational matters. The accompanying articles analyze the development of ULAQ and what it means for the capabilities of the Turkish Navy.

According to the first article in *Anadolu Ajansı*, Turkey's state-owned news agency, ULAQ has the potential to truly boost the offensive posture of the Turkish Navy. The author states these new platforms' capabilities to carry out various missions could be a game-changer. However, the author notes Turkey will need to pass two critical thresholds before ULAQ adds game-changing capabilities to Turkish naval forces. First, the Turkish defense industry will need to acquire artificial intelligence and better decision-making algorithms to be able to operate ULAQ autonomously. These technological advancements can also be utilized for swarming concepts for robotic naval warfare. Second, Turkish naval modernization should include cross-domain and robotic air-sea battle concepts, which will enable the navy to operate unmanned surface vessels as carriers and launch platforms for some unmanned aerial systems. The US-imposed sanctions on Turkey's defense industry over procurement of Russian S-400s will likely exacerbate Turkey's challenge with critical technology for its defense industry.

The second article, also published by *Anadolu Ajansı*, provides information on the specifications of ULAQ. It has a cruising range of approximately 250 miles and a speed of slightly over 40 miles per hour with night vision capability and national encrypted communication infrastructure. This unmanned surface vessel will be armed with Turkey's national missile systems manufacturer ROKETSAN's four Cirit and two L-UMTAS systems. Cirit is a 70mm laser-guided missile with a maximum range of up to five miles. L-UMTAS is a long-range, laser-guided anti-tank precision missile system. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

*“Being the nation's first USV, ULAQ has a long way to go before reaching its final operational capability.”*



Laser guided missile CİRİT of Roketsan at IDEF 2015.

Source: CeeGee, own work, via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RoketsanIDEF2015\\_\(8\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RoketsanIDEF2015_(8).JPG), Attribution: CC-BY-SA-4.0 | Self-published work



## Continued: Turkey's New Armed Unmanned Surface Vessel

**Source:** Dr. Can Kasapoğlu, "Turkey's robotic warfare efforts set sail to high-seas," *Anadolu Ajansı* (Turkey's state-owned news agency) 2 March 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-turkey-s-robotic-warfare-efforts-set-sail-to-high-seas/2161762>

*ULAQ, Turkey's first platform in kind, enjoys a promising potential that can mean a true boost for the Turkish Navy. The prototype was first advertised with Roketsan-made Cirit and UMTAS missiles, hinting at the possibilities of generating an unmanned strike platform baseline. Open-source information suggests that the platform can also offer modular configurations, including electronic warfare, intelligence-gathering, and mine countermeasures.*

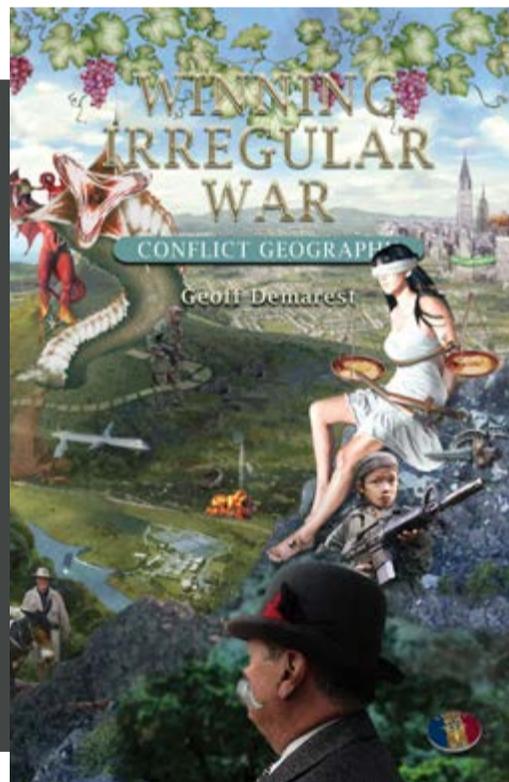
...

*Being the nation's first USV, ULAQ has a long way to go before reaching its final operational capability.*

*From now on, Turkey's unmanned naval systems development program will have to pass two critical thresholds before being considered as a true game-changer capability.*

*First, at some point, ULAQ, and similar systems, should be able to operate semi-autonomously and autonomously to keep up with the military zeitgeist. Turkish defense technological and industrial base (DTIB) has to focus on fostering autonomy of its new capabilities. To do so, the defense eco-system, in a holistic sense, will have to come up with a thorough understanding of artificial intelligence (AI) and better decision-making algorithms. In addition, capitalizing on the autonomy features, Turkish military planners, in close cooperation with the defense sector, will have to work on swarming concepts for robotic naval warfare.*

*Second, Turkish military planners should work on cross-domain and robotic air-sea battle concepts for the navy's modernization. A cross-domain conceptual framework would be tantamount to operating USVs as carriers and launch platforms for suitable unmanned aerial systems.*



**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>



## Turkey and Iran Compete for Influence in Iraq



President Hassan Rouhani welcomes Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Saadabad Palace.

Source: Mohammad Hassanzadeh, Tashimnews.com, via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President\\_Hassan\\_Rouhani\\_welcomes\\_Turkish\\_President\\_Recep\\_Tayyip\\_Erdo%C4%9Fan\\_in\\_Saadabad\\_Palace\\_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Hassan_Rouhani_welcomes_Turkish_President_Recep_Tayyip_Erdo%C4%9Fan_in_Saadabad_Palace_02.jpg), Attribution: CC-BY-4.0

**OE Watch Commentary:** High-level Iranian officials recently condemned Turkish threats to launch a military operation to confront Kurdish militants in Iraq’s Sinjar District. As the accompanying articles report, the rivalry between Iran and Turkey for influence in Iraq is growing, potentially having an impact on US interests.

*Rudaw*, a Kurdish news network funded by the Kurdistan Regional Government, recently featured an interview with the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, a former member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The ambassador called on Turkey not to violate the sovereignty of Iraq. Similarly, the article from Washington, DC-based independent regional news network, *Al-Monitor*, states that on February 21, the Iranian Foreign Minister condemned Turkish military presence in both Syria and Iraq. The author notes this high-level condemnation from Iran is an indicator of increasing tension with Turkey. The author continues to say that while Turkey has tried to assert its influence through military posts and training Sunni militias, Iran has already gained significant influence through its allies in the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU). The PMU have already deployed three brigades to Sinjar. In the past the PMU collaborated with the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), a Yazidi militia with close links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), to liberate Sinjar from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Turkey considers this alliance a clear link between Iran and the PKK, while Iran sees Turkey’s desire to launch an operation on the YBS in Sinjar as a pretense to increase its influence over Mosul—Iraq’s second largest city. Stronger Iranian influence in Iraq will likely pose a threat to U.S. interests there as well.

Finally, the article from Turkey’s state-owned news agency, *Anadolu Ajansı*, states that Iran maintains its influence in the Sinjar region through support for PMU and YBS. Therefore, these groups will likely form an alliance to confront Turkish military operations with support from Iran. The article concludes that the Turkish

military will be able to drive both groups out of Sinjar despite Iran’s support. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

***“Turkey’s quest for a military campaign to drive Kurdish militants out of the northern Iraqi region of Sinjar has refueled the Turkish-Iranian rivalry for influence in oil-rich Mosul...”***

**Source:** “İranlı Büyükelçi’den Rûdaw’a: Türkiye uluslararası sınırlara geri dönmeli (Iranian Ambassador to Rudaw: Turkey must return to the international borders),” *Rudaw* (A news network broadcasting from Erbil and funded by the Kurdistan Regional Government), 27 February 2021. <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/interview/27022021>

*Turkish Armed Forces should not be a threat to Iraqi territory and should not invade...*

...

*...We reject military intervention in Iraq and Turkish forces should not pose a threat or violate Iraqi sovereignty... The security of the Iraqi area should be maintained by Iraqi forces and the [Kurdistan] Regional forces in their area.*

...

*We will not accept at all, be it Turkey or any other country, a military presence, advance or intervention in Iraq...*

*Therefore, we believe Turks must return to their international position and be stationed there, and the security of Iraq should be maintained by Iraqis.*



## Continued: Turkey and Iran Compete for Influence in Iraq

**Source:** Fehim Taştekin, “Turkish-Iranian rivalry heats up over Mosul,” *Al-Monitor* (Washington DC based independent regional news network with analysts from the Middle East), 26 February 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/02/turkey-iran-iraq-sinjar-heats-up-turkish-iranian-rivalry.html>

*Turkey’s quest for a military campaign to drive Kurdish militants out of the northern Iraqi region of Sinjar has refueled the Turkish-Iranian rivalry for influence in oil-rich Mosul, which many Turks see as a lost Ottoman legacy.*

*... Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif was quoted as saying that Tehran “reject[s] the Turkish military presence in Syria and Iraq and consider[s] Ankara’s policies toward Damascus and Baghdad to be wrong.”*

*...the Popular Mobilization Units — an Iranian-backed Iraqi militia known also as Hashd al-Shabi — deployed three brigades to Sinjar, which lies to the west of Mosul along the Syrian border. Militia commanders made it clear the deployment was meant to counter Turkey’s “threat” in the region.*

*Turkey cites the PKK presence in Sinjar as the cause for its concern, but its calculations go farther to Mosul. Iran, for its part, highlights the need to prevent the revival of the Islamic State, but it, too, has a broader calculus.*

*... the Turkmens, whom Ankara saw as a natural ally due to ethnic kinship, fragmented. Looking for protection, Shiite Turkmens strengthened their ties with Shiite Arabs, shifting to the Iranian axis.*

*In a bid to return to the play in Mosul, Turkish troops stationed at the Bashiqa camp near Mosul trained Nujaifi’s Hashd al-Watani militia in the hope that the faction would take part in the liberation of the city.*

*At present, Turkey is trying to return to Mosul via public entities involved in humanitarian work, but has yet to reopen its consulate, though it has rented a new building and named a consul-general...*

*In contrast, Iran has gained considerable influence in Mosul via its PMU allies, which have stayed in the city after its liberation. PMU forces, involving local Christian and Sunni groups, collaborated with the Shingal Resistance Units (YBS), a Yazidi militia created by the PKK, in the liberation of Sinjar.*

*For many in Turkey, the PMU-YBS link translates to an Iran-PKK link. Similarly, it nourishes concern in Erbil that Baghdad and Tehran are acquiescing to the PKK presence in Sinjar to prevent the peshmerga forces’ return to disputed territories.*

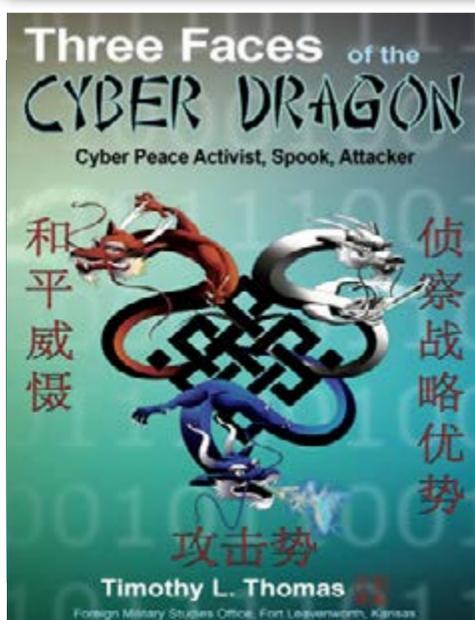
*From Iran’s perspective, local support lines increase the value of the Mosul-Sinjar route to the Iraqi-Syrian border. The Rabia border crossing to the north of Sinjar as well as a nearby unofficial one that IS used to cross to Syria are now controlled jointly by the PMU and the Iraqi military...*

*The Mosul equilibrium is in Iran’s favor for now.*

**Source:** Çağatay Balcı, “Sincar operasyonu, PKK/YBŞ ve İran destekli milisler (Operation Sinjar, PKK/YBŞ and Iran-backed militias),” *Anadolu Ajansı* (Turkey’s state-owned news agency), 19 February 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/sincar-operasyonu-pkk-ybs-ve-iran-destekli-milisler/2150293>

*The expectations and perception around a Turkish operation on Sinjar has found the most serious opposition in PKK/ YBŞ and Iran-backed militias. For those actors who control the Sinjar region, a Turkish military operation against them would mean an end to their presence in this region. This situation has led the actors in question to form an alliance.*

*For Iran, the presence of the PKK and militia groups throughout Iraq, especially in the Sinjar region is very critical. Iran, which can maintain its influence in Iraq through militia groups, can also use the PKK as a tool in this regard.*



**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>



## Increased Algerian Focus on “New Generation Warfare”



Algerian People's National Armed Forces.

Source: Lamraoui.lamin, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Algerian\\_army.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Algerian_army.jpg), Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

**OE Watch Commentary:** In late February, the Algerian People's National Army (ANP) organized a two-day conference titled “New Generation Warfare: Challenges and Methods of Confrontation.” The keynote speech was given by General Saïd Chengriha, the ANP's septuagenarian chief of staff. As reported in *El Djeich*, the Algerian military's official monthly publication, he described a deteriorating regional security environment and intimated that foreign entities are seeking to fracture Algerian national cohesion. Chengriha's speech and the broader conference agenda focused on how “New Generation Warfare” is conducted and what Algeria can do to confront it.

The conference came amidst statements and insinuations by high-level Algerian officials that foreign countries, specifically Morocco, are behind a cybercampaign targeting the Algerian population. The excerpt from *Independent Arabia*, a Saudi-financed

news source, reports that several government websites were hacked late last year and cites an academic who holds Israel and Morocco responsible, a view that appears to be widespread in Algeria. The two excerpts from *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, a prominent Saudi daily, detail some examples of increasing Algerian government concern and focus on what it considers misinformation aimed at deliberately harming national cohesion.

Algeria remains politically fragile in the wake of the April 2019 overthrow of longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The decentralized popular movement (the “Hirak”) that forced Bouteflika's resignation remains mobilized, though COVID-19 has slowed its momentum. While government claims that foreigners are meddling in Algerian affairs may be a pretense to dismantle the movement and further crack down on information that contradicts the official narrative, General Chengriha's comments nonetheless convey Algerian concerns that the regional security situation is becoming increasingly complex and potentially volatile. From the perspective of many in Algeria this is more than a mere digital information age authoritarian crackdown.

Morocco-Algeria relations have been cold for decades, stemming in part from disagreements on the status of the Western Sahara. The Western Sahara issue has flared since late 2020, threatening to drive Moroccan-Algerian competition into a state of crisis. Official Algerian references to mounting regional tensions have increased in recent months, and the country is presumably gearing up for a potential “New Generation Warfare” clash with its neighbors and other countries in the region. The Algerian military ordinarily guards its military capabilities closely but has recently begun displaying some of its advanced equipment in propaganda videos. Over the past two decades, Morocco and Algeria have both made substantial investments in military equipment, with Morocco's hardware largely of NATO origin while Algeria's is predominantly from Russia and, more recently, China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

**“... several parties complained of hacking attempts... confirming that the country is being exposed to cyber-attacks as part of a cyber war...”**



## Continued: Increased Algerian Focus on “New Generation Warfare”

**Source:** “Monsieur le chef d’état-major de l’ANP préside un séminaire national intitulé: ‘Les guerres de la nouvelle génération : défis et méthodes de confrontation’ (The chief of staff of the ANP presides over a national seminar titled: ‘New Generation Warfare: challenges and methods of confrontation),” *El Djeich*, the Algerian military’s official monthly publication, March 2021 (pp. 12-13). [https://www.mdn.dz/site\\_principal/sommaire/revues/images/eldjeich\\_fr.pdf](https://www.mdn.dz/site_principal/sommaire/revues/images/eldjeich_fr.pdf)

*The work of this seminar was led by university teachers and Algerian civil and military experts. The aim of the seminar is to highlight the main aspects of this important theme... “New generation wars, or hybrid wars as some call them, are wars that have their own pattern, in that they target societies and are based on propaganda and counter-propaganda, through a strategy of influencing collective perceptions, manipulating public opinion, which is to say the population of the targeted state, and guiding its behavior and visions. These wars do not announce themselves,” he said. The Army Lieutenant-General then demonstrated that the objective of these wars is “to overwhelm the system in place and to dislocate the country from the inside, looking at the long term and employing different means, including informational, economic, social and military”...*

*During the first day, this scientific event was marked by presentations by university teachers and experts, relating to three main axes, namely “The epistemological study of new generation wars,” “Soft Power in new generation wars: media, psychological warfare and information warfare” and “Strategies for dealing with new generation wars and the specifics of the Algerian state.” The second day of the seminar was devoted to bringing together thoughts and opinions relating to the concept of “hybrid wars” through the organization of two workshops, the first intended for case studies on “modes of activating the principles of new generation wars by enemy forces,” while the second workshop was devoted to “The nature of new generation warfare threats and strategies employed to deal with them”...*

*The seminar concluded with the presentation of a report which includes a series of mechanisms in various fields (political, economic, social, military and media as well as information) that function like a preliminary roadmap to thwart current challenges and inquire into possible scenarios, with the aim of protecting our country from various threats...*

**Source:** “الجزائر تتعرض لهجمات إلكترونية تنذر بإشعال فتيل الفتنة مع الجوار” (Algeria is exposed to cyber-attacks that threaten to ignite discord with the ‘neighborhood’),” *Independent Arabia* (Saudi financed news outlet), 19 December 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/3mzeubnj>

*A statement by the Algerian Ministry of Energy said that its website “was attacked by hackers” and called for “avoiding access to the site until things return to normal,” triggering a state of alert in official and popular circles, which called for recruitment to confront these attacks. The Ministry assured that “all necessary measures have been taken to stop the attack immediately, and the site will return to work within the next hours.” Despite the absence of any statements from official political authorities, several parties complained of hacking attempts... confirming that the country is being exposed to cyber-attacks as part of a cyber war.*

*Political science professor Radwan Bouhidel considers that “what is happening is not a war between Algeria and Morocco as much as it is a Zionist attack with a Moroccan front, as a gift from Tel Aviv to the Moroccan regime in exchange for mobilizing support for the latter to establish its occupation of the Saharan lands”...*

**Source:** “حكومة الجزائر تؤكد استهدافها بحرب إلكترونية أجنبية” (Algerian Government Asserts Being Targeted by a ‘Foreign Electronic War’),” *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (prominent Saudi daily), 10 February 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/rr5hn4sz>

*The Algerian government said that it had become “targeted by an electronic war led by foreign parties that are wagering on the failure of the democratic path.” Meanwhile, in a review of their legislation, authorities have tightened penalties against those suspected of insulting state symbols, especially the army and its leadership, whether by writing or drawing on social media platforms. Yesterday, an army facility in the capital hosted a conference on “Cybercrime and its repercussions on the homeland and the citizen,” in which the Minister of Information and government spokesman, Ammar Belhimer... praised “the efforts of the National Army in dealing with this type of crime,” referring to departments and laboratories specialized in confronting cybercrime, which have equipment belonging to the army, especially the National Gendarmerie, which has launched judicial prosecutions against thousands of people, building many charges based on social media activity, especially Facebook.*

**Source:** “الجزائر تهاجم بشدة المغرب والصهيونية” (Algeria strongly attacks Morocco and Zionism),” *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (prominent Saudi daily), 21 February 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/8xc2hprp>

*Yesterday, the Algerian Ministry of Defense sharply denied the contents of social media posts according to which Algerian army forces “intend to participate in a war against terrorism under the supervision of the French forces.” In a strongly worded statement, the Ministry of Defense said, “Some parties and the mouths of sedition circulated unfounded news through their inflammatory web pages, claiming that the military establishment relies for its internal and external activities and operations on agendas and orders issued by foreign parties”...*

*Observers believe that the Ministry of Defense’s accusations are related to the publications of activists on Facebook who interacted with French President Emmanuel Macron, after he declared last Tuesday that Algeria and Morocco “are involved in efforts to fight terrorism.” Their comments claimed that the Algerian army “will conduct operations abroad under the French flag.” Among the most prominent promoters of this proposition was Muhammad Tajdit, an active member in the Hirak who is also called the “poet of the movement.”*



## Video Games in the Operational Environment in Egypt and Beyond

**OE Watch Commentary:** As in other parts of the world, young men in Arabic-speaking countries have been spending more and more hours playing online video games during the pandemic. Especially popular are free-to-play multiplayer mobile games. Not only are they portable and addictive, but also a form of social media and a source of livelihood to many, especially with the growth of eSports tournaments and for-profit livestreaming. One of last year's most popular and highest-grossing games, at the global level, was the mobile version of Player Unknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG), a multi-player shooter game with a kill-or-be-killed premise in which up to 100 players are parachuted onto a confined area and forced to survive by scavenging for and using weapons and other equipment. The game can be played either as an individual, a team of two, or a squad of four, either with friends or randomly paired strangers. It is similar in premise to Fortnite, another popular game of the same genre, with the difference that most Fortnite players are in the United States, while PUBG's popularity is more evenly distributed across the globe.



PUBG Sanhok.

Source: Whelsko ([www.flickr.com/photos/whelsko/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/whelsko/)), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/whelsko/27412985737>, Attribution: CC 2.0

Last summer, a new PUBG mode called Mysterious Jungle brought the game unwanted attention in Muslim countries. In it, players could regenerate their health and obtain new weapons and equipment by prostrating before a totem. Muslim players protested on social media and within the game itself, as detailed in the accompanying excerpt from the English-language Emirati daily *Gulf News*. In addition, as the accompanying report from the Egyptian news website *masrawy.com* describes, Egypt's al-Azhar, one of the Arab world's most prominent Sunni juridical authorities, issued a *fatwa* condemning the game. PUBG has received additional bad press in Egypt since then, with the death of several young Egyptians attributed to the game in one way or another, as noted in the accompanying reports from the Emirati news website *emaratalyoum.com*.

Despite the negative press, PUBG and similar games continue to grow in popularity. Lockdown boredom and increased accessibility play a role, as does the monetization of video game playing, particularly in countries with limited job prospects for young men. The accompanying excerpt from *al-Ghad*, a Jordanian daily, profiles several young people who make a good living playing video games. Local video game producers and eSports federations are popping up across the Arab world, seeking to capitalize on and formalize the profitable new segment. While most parents likely still see video games as a waste of time for their children, the pandemic and the money to be made may be shifting these perceptions.

The controversy surrounding PUBG's Mysterious Jungle was partially resolved after the company behind the game, the Chinese conglomerate Tencent, agreed to remove the offending totem. The growing business of videogame "localization" or "culturalization" is a testament to the reach of games that effectively play to their audience. Armed militant organizations in the Middle East, including both Hezbollah and ISIS, have tweaked and/or developed video games of their own, turning them into effective recruitment, training and indoctrination tools (see: "'Holy Defense': Hezbollah's New First-Person Shooter Video Game," *OE Watch*, April 2018). The power and importance of video games seems poised to grow as they become more accessible, realistic and engaging. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

***“It has a great impact on the souls of our young men and women who represent the majority of the masses who play this game ...”***

**Source:** “‘Idol worship’ in famous PUBG video game sparks fury in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia,” *Gulf News* (English language Emirati daily), 4 June 2020. <https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/kuwait/idol-worship-in-famous-pubg-video-game-sparks-fury-in-kuwait-and-saudi-arabia-1.71863771>

*The Mysterious Jungle Mode is exclusive to the Sanhok map that introduced a lot of new features, like jungle food, hot air balloons, and more. However, there's one thing about this game mode that has angered Muslim players, totems. In the game, totems are powerful idols and by praying to them, players can restore their health, and get consumables like energy drinks, health kit, etc. However, the fact that you have to worship these idols in the game has offended Muslim players all over the world. As a result, many PUBG Mobile players who follow Islam are ditching the Mysterious Jungle mode. Some are even showing their discontent by burning the totems in the game.*



## Continued: Video Games in the Operational Environment in Egypt and Beyond

**Source:** (First response by 'PUBG' team after al-Azhar's statement and its warnings)," *masrawy.com* (Egyptian news website), 4 June 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/225fh3bm> أول إجراء من فريق لعبة "بيجي" بعد بيان "الأزهر" وتحذيراته

*The PUBG MOBILE statement came after a statement from the al-Azhar International Fatwa Center, which warned about the game after repeated incidents of hate, violence, murder and suicide because of it - and other similar games - earlier... the PUBG Mobile team statement added: "We would like to express our deep regret about the new features in the game causing discontent among some of our players... We appreciate and respect the values, traditions and practices of our players and we feel sorry for causing us any harm or resentment. Thus we began taking the necessary measures to remove the feature that caused annoyance and the visual content related to it"...*

*The al-Azhar Fatwa Center had issued a warning about the game with the statement saying: "The danger of this game has increased in recent times to our children after issuing an update to it that contains the player's prostration and kneeling to an idol in it, with the aim of obtaining privileges within the game .. Undoubtedly it is a very dangerous matter. It has a great impact on the souls of our young men and women who represent the majority of the masses who play this game..."*

**Source:** (Due to the game 'PUBG'... Two Egyptian children killed by a train)," *emaratalyoum.com* (Emirati news website), 31 October 2020. <https://www.emaratalyoum.com/politics/international/2020-10-31-1.1416327> بسبب "لعبة بيجي" .. مصرع طفلين مصريين تحت عجلات قطار

*Two children were killed in the Egyptian governorate of Ismailia, under the wheels of a train due to their being distracted by the game of PUBG. They wore headphones while sitting on the railroad tracks, which caused them to not hear the sound of the train as it approached them... At the end of last September, a 12-year-old boy died of cardiac arrest while playing the game PUBG inside his home in the Egyptian governorate of Port Said... About a week after the Port Said accident, a child himself in his bedroom in the Egyptian Governorate of Sharkia, because of his family's demand that he stop playing PUBG.*

**Source:** (E-Sports: The story of an Egyptian young man who won \$60,000 in one competition)," *al-Ghad* (Jordanian Daily), 28 May 2020. <https://tinyurl.com/5etvks> الرياضات الإلكترونية: قصة شاب مصري ربح 60 ألف دولار في مسابقة واحدة

*Electronic games have become a job in the Arab world. They are no longer just a pastime, and have followed games such as football, basketball and tennis. They have gained international renown and their own name, e-Sports, especially in light of the coronavirus pandemic lockdowns... This is exactly what those parents who are not convinced of the potential for electronic multiplayer combat games – such as PUBG, League of Legends and Fortnite – want to know about it being a job from which you can receive salaries, money and benefits, as if you were a full-time employee, says Ali Barakat, 21, who specializes in the game Overwatch... In Tunisia, Nourchin, 20, has emerged as one of the most famous PUBG streamers in the Arab world. For her income she relies on subscriptions and donations from followers on her Twitch channel, as well as by promoting her gaming skills on her Facebook account.*

### Fangs of the Lone Wolf

Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars 1994-2009

Dodge Billingsley with Lester Grau

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

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



## African Autocrats Using COVID to Consolidate Power

**OE Watch Commentary:** In those African countries led by autocrats, COVID-19 has cost not just lives but an erosion of civil liberties as well. According to the excerpted accompanying article from Germany-based *Deutsche Welle*, these autocrats use the disease as an excuse to exercise sweeping measures, including unlawful detentions of political dissenters, which appear to have little if any relationship to disease control. Information regarding such actions can be limited as some governments slow down or cut off the internet completely.

Uganda's Yoweri Museveni, who has been in power for 35 years, is a prime example of using COVID-19 as a pretext for stifling dissent. His implementation of lockdown measures—including shutting down the internet for several weeks, violence against dissenters by security personnel, and other harsh actions—made any chance of the opposition unseating him during the recent presidential reelection extremely unlikely.

Another example of an autocrat using COVID-19 as a pretext to stifle the free flow of information is Cameroon's President Paul Biya, who has been in power for approximately 40 years. As the article notes, his blanket restrictions appear to reflect a total lack of leadership. However, these restrictions might help shield his citizens from discovering that he spends about a third of his time outside of Cameroon, with the most recent trip during the pandemic to a luxury hotel in Geneva where he could avoid the political and health crises back home. The irony of his actions and those of other African autocrats that restrict the internet and press during the pandemic is that the free flow of information is one of the most important tools to combat the spread of the disease. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Cameroon's President has used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to prevent the flow of information regarding the Anglophone crisis. Pictured here, Cameroonien Gendarmes arriving in an English speaking town.

Source: Moki Edwin Kindzeka, VOA/Wikimedia  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cameroon\\_gendarmes\\_arrive\\_in\\_the\\_English\\_speaking\\_town\\_of\\_Buea,\\_Cameroon,\\_January\\_9,\\_2020.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cameroon_gendarmes_arrive_in_the_English_speaking_town_of_Buea,_Cameroon,_January_9,_2020.jpg)  
 Attribution: Public Domain

***“The COVID-19 pandemic has provided African autocrats with the perfect set of circumstances to restrict civil liberties, rights activists say.”***

**Source:** Mimi Mefo Takambou, “COVID restrictions chipping away at Africa’s civil liberties,” *Deutsche Welle* (an international, purportedly unbiased news organization based in Germany), 4 March 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/covid-restrictions-chipping-away-at-africas-civil-liberties/a-56767699>

*The COVID-19 pandemic has provided African autocrats with the perfect set of circumstances to restrict civil liberties, rights activists say. China’s growing influence on the continent may play a role, a report warns.*

*The absence of an international mechanism to check on abuses of power is only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic: The gradual erosion of civil liberties in certain sub-Saharan nations has demonstrably sped up in the past 12 months, with autocrats using COVID-19 restrictions as a front to justify their actions, rights groups say. The pandemic is providing autocrats with opportunities to exercise sweeping powers, curtailing civil liberties in new ways.*

*This gradual erosion of civil liberties has hit sub-Saharan Africa particularly hard, as many post-colonial countries suffer from bad governance to this day.*

*“The state of the respect for the rule of law and civil liberties, in particular, appears to be in steep decline in East Africa,” Nicholas Opiyo, a top Ugandan human rights lawyer told DW. Opiyo himself became a victim of arrest in December 2020.*



## Qatar and UAE's Underreported Role in Somalia's Political Impasse

**OE Watch Commentary:** Much of the attention regarding Somalia's political impasse has been on strong disagreements between the federal government and two of the country's five federal states, Jubaland and Puntland. Also frequently mentioned as contributing to the problem are interclan tensions. While all of these are important obstacles preventing the country from holding elections, far less reported on is another factor. According to the accompanying excerpted article from Kenya-based *The East African*, a proxy war between two Gulf nations playing out in Somalia is a major, though often overlooked, contributor to the country's political gridlock.

The two Gulf nations are Qatar and the UAE. Qatar backs the federal government while the UAE backs Puntland and Jubaland. As the article notes, with its financial assistance and political influence, the UAE is believed to be urging the two Somali states to reject a deal with Somalia's federal government, headed by a president popularly known as Farmaajo. There have been several attempts to reach an agreement between the states and federal government in order to allow elections to proceed, but so far these have all failed, with the result that Farmaajo continues to serve past his expired term.



Somali elections such as this one in 2017 are on hold over disagreements between the federal government and two federal states, Jubaland and Puntland.

Source: AMISOM, Wikimedia [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2017\\_02\\_08\\_Election\\_1-1-2\\_\(31973422893\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2017_02_08_Election_1-1-2_(31973422893).jpg), Attribution: Public Domain

The UAE and several other Gulf nations cut ties with Qatar approximately three years ago after accusing it of supporting terrorism, a charge it denied. Recently there has been some progress in restoring relations between the two countries, though it is too soon to tell if those improvements will spill over into Somalia and help end the political stalemate. Meanwhile, sensing a void created by the country's squabbling leadership, al-Shabaab has stepped up its terrorist operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“The current impasse is not isolated from the proxy wars between Qatar and the United Arab Republic (UAE).”***

**Source:** “Gulf powers hold the key to lasting peace in Somali,” *The East African* (a large, independent media company headquartered in Kenya), 15 February 2021, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/oped/editorial/gulf-powers-hold-the-key-to-lasting-peace-in-somali-3291906>

*The only reason Somalia has not exploded is because there is little appetite for war among the local community. War-weary Somalis simply want peace.*

*The clans want peace so that commerce can thrive. That should be a cue for the international community to bring pressure to bear where it matters. Qatar and the UAE must not be allowed to turn Somalia into another Yemen.*

*Considering the fragile situation in the country, the fears are not unfounded. But focusing attention exclusively on interclan tensions, the international and regional community might be missing a point. Somalia is in peril, but the solution is not in Mogadishu.*

*The current impasse is not isolated from the proxy wars between Qatar and the United Arab Republic (UAE). While Qatar backs the federal government, the UAE is the real political and financial behind Jubaland and Puntland. The UAE is suspected of influencing Puntland and Jubaland, urging them to reject a deal with Farmaajo.*



## Armed Groups in the DRC: An Ambassador's Murder Highlights Eastern Congo Violence

**OE Watch Commentary:** Why the Italian ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), his bodyguard, and their driver were killed as their convoy traveled on the border of the Virunga Park remains unclear. It is also uncertain who was behind the murder of the diplomat and his fellow travelers. What is known, as the accompanying excerpted article from *The Conversation Africa*, an independent source of news and views from the academic and research community, notes, is that the eastern DRC, in which the park is located, is home to approximately 120 armed groups, many of them criminal in nature and including some headed by rogue military commanders.



People fleeing the violence in the eastern part of the DRC.

Source: Oxfam International, Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/oxfam/8328853653/>, Attribution: CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Reportedly, the origins of these armed groups can be traced back to the 1990s when villagers began defending their land from foreign-backed militias who were looting the country's rich natural resources. Over the years the local, armed mobilization to protect the land began to take on new, different goals of expressing political power or making money. It is perhaps the latter, making money, which was behind the death of the ambassador and his two companions, as some suspect it was a kidnapping for ransom that went wrong in this area known for its criminal activity.

The murders have drawn attention to how actions by some DRC politicians possibly contribute to the region's insecurity. For Virunga Park, besides having enormous mineral wealth readily exploited by many different armed groups, also possesses significant oil deposits. Those deposits have attracted significant interest from, and possibly questionable activities by, some of the country's politicians. Additionally, as the article notes, local people with ties to the rebel groups also have a strong stake as to what happens in the park. Thus, just as the exact details of the murders remain murky, the insecurity in the region is tied to the murkiness and mix of locals, criminals, and politicians struggling over the park's enormously valuable economic resources. Further complicating the story, approximately two weeks after the accompanying article was published, the attorney investigating the murders was also murdered in an ambush. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

***“The death of the Italian ambassador highlights the insecurity in eastern Congo – and how kidnappings and politics drive this. It’s a stark reminder of the millions of Congolese people who are at the mercy of violent crime every day.”***

**Source:** Peer Schouten, “Violence is endemic in eastern Congo: what drives it,” *The Conversation Africa* (an independent source of news and views from the academic and research community), 25 February 2021. <https://theconversation.com/violence-is-endemic-in-eastern-congo-what-drives-it-156039>

*The death of the Italian ambassador highlights the insecurity in eastern Congo – and how kidnappings and politics drive this. It’s a stark reminder of the millions of Congolese people who are at the mercy of violent crime every day.*

*For nearly three decades, eastern Congo has been characterised by insecurity, with frequent outbreaks of violence between armed groups and attacks on civilians. Millions have been forced to flee this violence.*

*According to the Kivu Security Tracker, over the past few years, more than 5,000 civilians in the region have been victims of kidnappings and abductions. Kidnapping targets range from school children to women and businessmen. Rape and torture are common techniques of extortionists, and it often ends up deadly.*

*The Congolese government quickly blamed the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda for the deaths. But the group is often used as a scapegoat because they’re partly composed of people involved in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Blaming a group hated by many people can place other issues out of view.*



# Malian Jihadist Leader Expands Al-Qaeda's Reach Toward Senegal

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 6 February, *dakaractu.com*, which publishes on current events in Senegal, reported in the excerpted French-language article about Malian jihadist leader Hamadou Kouffa's plans to expand his forces from Mali into Senegal. The article began by referencing a leaked video depicting Kouffa meeting with al-Qaeda's Malian affiliate leader Iyad ag Ghali and late al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) leader Abdelmalek Droukdel. It then quoted the United Nations' finding that these three jihadist leaders had set their sights on Côte d'Ivoire and Benin, which neighbor Mali.

However, the article's main emphasis is Kouffa's plans to target Senegal, which it alleges Kouffa has kept under wraps. It asserts that Kouffa deployed fighters to the Senegal-Mali border in a way resembling his previous strategy to do the same along the Mali-Burkina Faso border, where his fighters have operated near gold mines to raise funds. As evidence that Kouffa's fighters are setting up bases near Senegal's borders, the article cites statistics showing that attacks doubled in the Senegal-Mali border area in 2020.

According to the article, the existence of gold mines near the Senegal-Mali border is one motivation for Kouffa's expansion there that replicates the previous expansion toward the Mali-Burkina Faso border. In addition, the article notes that the reason why Kouffa may be successful is that the people of the Senegal-Mali border region live on subsistence, which makes them vulnerable to recruitment, especially if Kouffa's group seeks to exploit wealth from gold mining activities to recruit. Suspicions about recruitment in the border region have, according to the article, also resulted in Senegal's increasing arrests of suspected jihadists and conducting military exercises in the border area to prepare for any potential jihadist incursion, which another Senegalese French-language publication, *lequotidien.sn*, covered in a 30 November 2020 article.

In conclusion, the article notes Kouffa's expansion to Senegal is obvious, but also states that Senegal is prepared. Time will tell whether Kouffa or the Senegalese military succeeds in this impending confrontation. The article quotes the Senegalese army chief of staff, who states that the country cannot afford to be caught off guard. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Senegal rel89.

Source: CIA, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Senegal\\_rel89.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Senegal_rel89.jpg), Attribution: CC.x 2.0

***“Kouffa headed a project to extend the Salafist-jihadist ideology to the far west of Mali, and in the long term, to infiltrate Senegal.”***



## Continued: Malian Jihadist Leader Expands Al-Qaeda's Reach Toward Senegal

**Source:** "Terrorisme au Sahel: Des éléments du GSIM se sont implantés au Sénégal (Terrorism in the Sahel: Elements of JNIM have established themselves in Senegal)," *dakaractu.com* (current events news outlet), 6 February 2021. [https://www.dakaractu.com/Terrorisme-au-Sahel-Des-elements-du-GSIM-se-sont-implantes-au-Senegal-ONU\\_a199573.html](https://www.dakaractu.com/Terrorisme-au-Sahel-Des-elements-du-GSIM-se-sont-implantes-au-Senegal-ONU_a199573.html)

**Source:** "Manœuvres militaires de grande envergure: Boundou, Qg de l'Armée (Large-scale military maneuvers: Boundou, Army HQ)," *lequotidien.sn* (Senegalese French language news outlet), 30 November 2020. <https://lequotidien.sn/goudiry-manoeuvres-militaires-de-grande-envergure-boundou-qg-de-larmee/>

*From a video-recorded meeting that was convened in February 2020 the main leaders of the jihadist movement linked to al-Qaeda in central Mali were Iyad Ag Ghali, head of the Group of Support for Islam and Muslims, his number two, Amadou Kouffá, and the late Abdelmalek Droukdel, who was until his elimination by the French army, the emir of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. According to the head of the General Directorate of External Security of France, Côte d'Ivoire and Benin have become the main targets of this jihadist alliance, which has already sent operatives to these countries. But this project hid another. Referring to the twenty-seventh report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team report to which Dakaractu had access, "elements of JNIM, supported by radical Islamist influencers, have established themselves in Senegal in the Ferlo reserve and in the Saraya gold mining area.*

*According to UN experts, this strategy extends to at least three regions and can be compared to the destabilizing actions of the Katiba Macina in Burkina Faso. "Similar phenomena could occur in the areas of Kayes, near the Mali-Senegal border, where the number of attacks doubled in 2020" read the report. From verified information, Dakaractu shed light on how Katiba Macina led by the Fulani jihadist Amadou Kouffá headed a project to extend the Salafist jihadist ideology to the far west of Mali, and in the long term, to infiltrate Senegal. It is useful to note that the project is based on exploiting the misery of the population sometimes abandoned to their fate and deprived of the subsistence minimum.*

*On the Senegalese side, the machine is set in motion to contain this threat, which is becoming more and more obvious. In the gold-bearing areas of the department of Saraya, arrests have increased in recent days. For the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Birame Diop, one must anticipate that a threat will arise.*

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## Nigerian Bandit Leaders Threaten Government, Draw Comparisons to Boko Haram

**OE Watch Commentary:** Although insecurity in Nigeria is often associated with Boko Haram's violence in the country's northeast, banditry in the country's northwest is an increasing concern. In one notable case, for example, Nigeria's popular publication *Vanguard*, reported on 21 December 2020 about bandits who kidnapped more than 300 schoolboys. The bandits claimed the operation in the name of Boko Haram, whose leader, Abubakar Shekau, released the hostage video of the boys before the bandits exchanged the boys for an unspecified ransom. However, the excerpted 4 February article in another mainstream Nigerian publication, *Dailypost.ng*, detailed efforts to reconcile with northwestern Nigerian bandit leaders, which provides reason for optimism but also reveals indications of threats ahead.

The article notes that bandit leaders met with Nigerian Islamic clerics and told the clerics that the Nigerian government was underestimating the bandits' strength. One of the bandit leaders, Kachalla Turji, noted that the government once believed Boko Haram was finished only to see the group become stronger than ever before. Turji, who is from Zamfara State, meanwhile, also accused the government of failing to protect Fulanis in Zamfara and neighboring states from other ethnic groups during disputes over cattle herding and land use.

At the same time, Turji stated that the only hope for peace was continued dialogue with the bandits. If that dialogue fails, however, Turji warned the bandit groups have large stashes of weapons that they are willing to use against the government. Another reason to be concerned about Turji is that he claimed to have been trained by Buharin Daji, who, according to a 9 November 2018 *premiumtimes.ng* article, terrorized northwestern Nigeria more than any other bandit leader. Finally, Turji threatened that if he is killed, then other bandits would replace him just as he replaced Buharin Daji upon Daji's death. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



Seal of Zamfara State Government.

Source: Buike20, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seal\\_of\\_Zamfara\\_State\\_Government.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Seal_of_Zamfara_State_Government.jpg), Attribution: CC x 4.0

***“This is how Boko Haram started; Nigeria has underestimated us and the problem.”***

**Source:** We were told to say Boko Haram kidnapped us—Released Kankara schoolboy,” *Vanguard* (centrist albeit Southern Nigerian perspective, Nigerian and international stories and perspectives, strong on politics and security), 21 December 2020. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/12/they-told-us-to-say-boko-haram-kidnapped-us-says-released-kankara-schoolboy/>

**Source:** “‘This is how Boko Haram started’ – Bandit leaders dare Nigerian authorities,” *Dailypost.ng* (fairly centrist but southern Nigerian perspective, covers Nigerian affairs exclusively, breaking news/sensational), 4 February 2021. <https://dailypost.ng/2021/02/04/this-is-how-boko-haram-started-bandit-leaders-dare-nigerian-authorities/>

**Source:** “Notorious bandit, Buharin Daji, terrorising Zamfara killed,” *Premiumtimes.ng* (based in the capital, considered centrist, but not a “northern” Nigerian perspective, leans to pro-democracy and human rights focus), 9 March 2018. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/261302-notorious-bandit-buharin-daji-terrorising-zamfara-killed%E2%80%8E-officials.html>

*Bandit leaders in Nigeria have accused the federal and state governments of underrating them. “This is how Boko Haram started; Nigeria has underestimated us and the problem,” one of them, Kachalla Turji, said at a meeting with Islamic clerics.*

*In attendance were other Islamic clerics, another bandit leader, Kachalla Muhammadu Bello, and several foot soldiers. In his remarks, Turji, who controls Shinkafi/Sokoto Road in Zamfara State, said Nigerian and Zamfara authorities failed to fulfil their promises. Declaring that the fighters were not afraid of death, he expressed anger that Fulani were usually attacked by indigenes of Zamfara and elsewhere.*

*Turji hinted that the problem may linger except dialogue. He boasted about the volume of weapons they had and suggested gangs could bring the state to its knees. The bandit head, trained by late Buharin Daji, added that if he is killed, there would be hundreds of other fighters capable of replacing him.*



## Argentina Offered Major Weapons Package by Russia

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Russian Federation maintains a robust trade in weapons systems with several countries in Latin America, including Argentina. Recently, the Russian Federation offered Argentina a package comprised of MiG-35 fighters and Mi-171 helicopters among other weapons systems, according to *Full Aviación*, an aeronautical website that tracks general and military aviation news. The author notes that these aircraft are the latest in an existing line of Russian military aircraft with greater technical capabilities than previous generations. An article for *Info Defensa*, another website that monitors defense updates throughout the Americas, notes that Russia has tried, largely unsuccessfully, to establish deeper ties with Argentina's military, including local production and maintenance agreements. The proposed sale could auger change for three principal reasons. First, it follows the sale of hundreds of thousands of doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine to Argentina, demonstrating how "vaccine diplomacy" could precede greater strategic cooperation in other domains. Second, the sale of military aircraft could well invite a larger Russian footprint in Argentina with the arrival of technicians to service them. Third, the potential sale has implications for the balance of power in Argentina's unresolved claim over the Falklands Islands (known as the Malvinas in Argentina).  
**End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)**



A Russian MiG-35 fighter jet on display in Moscow.  
Source: [https://www.flickr.com/photos/peer\\_gynt/8551802193/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/peer_gynt/8551802193/), Attribution: Andrey Korzhagin, Flickr

***“For some time the Russian Federation has been trying to establish ties of military cooperation with Argentina, among which the possibility of partial transfer of technology and the establishment of centers of production and maintenance stands out.”***

**Source:** “Federación Rusa ofrece cazas MiG-35 y helicópteros Mi-171 a la República Argentina (Russian Federation offers MiG-35 fighters and Mi-171 helicopters to the Argentine Republic),” *Full Aviación* (an aeronautical website that tracks general and military aviation news), 22 February 2021. <http://www.fullaviacion.com.ar/2021/02/22/federacion-rusa-ofrece-cazas-mig-35-y-helicopteros-mi-171-a-la-republica-argentina/>

*Regarding the MiG-35, the Russian Federation proposes a government-to-government operation together with an agreement for the logistics provision during the entire life cycle of the system, and unrestricted access for intelligent weapons.*

**Source:** “La Fuerza Aérea Argentina se acerca a Rusia ante el ofrecimiento de cazas MiG-29 y Su-30 (The Argentine Air Force Gets Closer to Russia before the offer of MiG-29 and Su-30 fighters),” *Info Defensa* (a website that monitors defense updates throughout the Americas), 24 January 2021. <https://www.infodefensa.com/latam/2021/01/24/noticia-fuerza-aerea-argentina-acerca-rusia-ofrecimiento-aviones-mig29-ysu30.html>

*For some time the Russian Federation has been trying to establish ties of military cooperation with Argentina, among which the possibility of partial transfer of technology and the establishment of centers of production and maintenance stands out. Among the Russian offers to Argentina in recent years is the 8x8 vehicle for the armored personnel carrier BTR-80...In addition, the Mi-171 helicopters have been offered with the establishment of their respective maintenance and logistics centers.*



## Colombian Navy Baptizes New Amphibious Landing Ship Built In-House

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Colombian Navy recently celebrated the building of its sixth amphibious landing ship, the *ARC Bahía Solano*. The construction of this vessel demonstrates great progress for the Science and Technology Corporation for Maritime and River Development (Cotecmar), notes *El Espectador*, a Colombian daily generally considered to be center-left in its political orientation. The author of the article says that Cotecmar's predecessor, the Colombian Shipyard Company, was beset with corruption scandals and inefficiencies. According to *La Libertad*, a Colombian daily headquartered in the coastal city of Barranquilla, the *ARC Bahía Solano* advances Colombia's efforts to leverage its status as a "bi-oceanic" country. The author says that the ship's principal missions will be humanitarian and logistical in nature, although its design allows for multi-purpose use. The *ARC Bahía Solano* affects the operational environment in several critical ways. First, it represents a major feat of engineering for the Colombian Navy, signaling emerging capabilities in indigenous defense production. Second, the *Bahía Solano* will contribute to Colombia's ongoing maritime efforts to interdict drug traffickers in both the Pacific and Caribbean theaters of operation. The ship's amphibious design also permits Colombian troops access to difficult-to-reach coastal areas. **End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)**



A Colombian Naval ship patrols the country's maritime borders.

Source: <https://cimsec.org/the-colombian-navy-south-americas-powerhouse/>, Attribution: Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC)

***“For the Colombian Navy this corporation is fundamental. There is even talk in the future of being able to have a fleet built entirely in the country.”***

**Source:** “Cotecmar: 20 años de diseñar, construir y hasta exportar barcos colombianos (Cotecmar: 20 years of designing, building and even exporting Colombian ships),” *El Espectador* (a major Colombian daily considered to be center-left politically), 24 January 2021. <https://www.infodefensa.com/latam/2021/01/24/noticia-fuerza-aerea-argentina-acerca-rusia-ofrecimiento-aviones-mig29-ysu30.html>

*The challenge was very big: demonstrate the importance of a shipyard, put aside the terrible image of corruption and inefficiency on the part of the defunct Colombian Shipyard Company (Conastil), and finish the job... For the Colombian Navy this corporation is fundamental. There is even talk in the future of being able to have a fleet built entirely in the country.*

**Source:** “Armada Nacional fortalece operaciones humanitarias y de seguridad con el Buque ‘Bahía Solano’ (National Navy strengthens humanitarian and security operations with the ship ‘Bahía Solano’),” *La Libertad* (a Colombian daily headquartered in the coastal city of Barranquilla), 11 March 2021. <https://diariolalibertad.com/sitio/2021/03/11/armada-nacional-fortalece-operaciones-humanitarias-y-de-seguridad-con-el-buque-bahia-solano/>

*The vessel...will also provide support for disaster response operations, logistical support, and comprehensive action activities, which will allow it to consolidate and strengthen ties of friendship with the civilian population in the Colombian Caribbean...[officials] highlighted the inter-institutional work that the government has been developing to achieve greater economic use of what it means to be one of the 21 bi-oceanic countries in the world.*



## Maduro's Venezuela Continues Its Campaign of Regional Destabilization

**OE Watch Commentary:** President Nicolás Maduro engages in frequent provocations with Venezuela's neighbors. In an effort to rattle Guyana, the Venezuelan Air Force recently flew sorties over a disputed border region shared by the two countries, notes *Infobae*, an Argentine outlet that leans slightly left with excellent reporting from around the Americas. These flights come on the heels of an earlier incident in which the Venezuelan Navy detained two Guyanese ships and spuriously accused them of fishing in Venezuela's Exclusive Economic Zone, as reported by *France 24*, the state-owned media company based in Paris with solid presence throughout Latin America. Both incidents received a strong rebuke from Guyana's president and regional organizations, such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization for American States (OAS). Maduro's aggressive actions continue to sabotage both the region's economic development and the rule of law, including by stymieing Guyana's attempt to profit from recent offshore oil discoveries to transform the nation's economy and undermining efforts by the International Court of Justice to arbitrate the border dispute. **End OE Watch Commentary (Berg)**



The Venezuelan Air Force has been used in the country's escalating campaign for the disputed Essequibo region, on the border between Venezuela and Guyana.  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mirage\\_50DV\\_Venezuela\\_\(16126726323\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mirage_50DV_Venezuela_(16126726323).jpg), Attribution: Wikimedia Commons

***“The overflight occurred after the Lady Nayera and Sea Wolf vessels returned to port together with the 12 Guyanese fishermen arrested on January 21 by Venezuela, accused by the government of that country of allegedly fishing in its jurisdictional waters.”***

**Source:** “Guyana denunció el sobrevuelo de aviones militares de Venezuela sobre la zona en disputa entre ambos países (Guyana denounced the overflight of Venezuelan military aircraft over the area in dispute between the two countries),” *Infobae* (an Argentine outlet that leans slightly left with excellent reporting from around the Americas), 3 March 2021. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/03/04/guyana-condeno-el-sobrevuelo-de-aviones-militares-de-venezuela-sobre-la-zona-en-reclamacion-de-ambos-paises/>

*The overflight occurred after the Lady Nayera and Sea Wolf vessels returned to port together with the 12 Guyanese fishermen arrested on January 21 by Venezuela, accused by the government of that country of allegedly fishing in its jurisdictional waters, which caused new friction between the two countries.*

**Source:** “Guyana denuncia que Venezuela detuvo a dos de sus barcos pesqueros (Guyana denounces that Venezuela detained two of its fishing boats),” *France24* (the state owned media company based in Paris with robust reporting throughout the region), 24 January 2021. <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20210124-guyana-venezuela-disputa-maritima-detencion-barcos-pesqueros>

*Two vessels registered in Guyana were detained...by the Venezuelan military in a maritime enclave of Guyanese sovereignty, according to the government of the former British colony. Through a statement, the Guyanese authorities classified the action as “a flagrant violation of their sovereignty and the fundamental norms of international law.”...There are links between what happened and the desire of the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, to establish a maritime demarcation that he would call ‘Territory for the development of the Atlantic Façade.’ This project would cover the waters belonging to Guyana and the territory west of the Essequibo River.*