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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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OEWATCH

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ON THE COVER:

Commissioning of new Iranian naval vessel in the port city of Bandar Abbas.
Source: Mehr News Agency, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:New_vessels_join_Iranian_Navy_Dec_2019_-_2.jpg

China's Marine Corps Adds Improved Light Tank with Capabilities in Varied Geographies

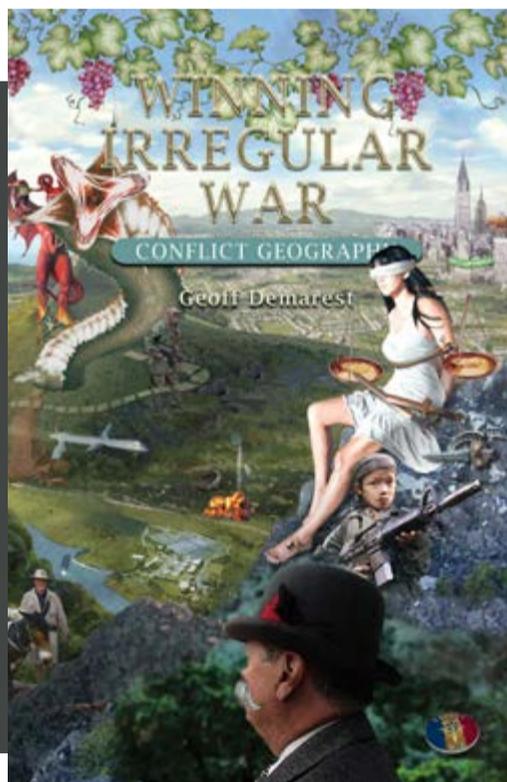
By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

According to a recent announcement, China's ZTQ-15 new light tank has now made its way into the hands of the Marine Corps of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy. The ZTQ-15, which is touted as China's most capable light tank, first entered service in 2018 with the PLA Ground Forces. According to an article published by *China Daily*, website of China's official English-language newspaper, the ZTQ-15 will significantly "boost the Marine Corps' operational mobility and amphibious fighting capability." The article describes the Marine Corps' tank as more capable than other systems, such as the ZTD-05A amphibious assault vehicle and ZBD-05 amphibious fighting vehicle, with thicker armor, stronger firepower, and an improved propulsion system. Its engines are specially designed to handle less oxygen and a hydropneumatics suspension allows better maneuverability and survivability, including in mountainous conditions. The main weapon on the tank is a 105-millimeter caliber gun, "capable of firing shells and guided missiles powerful enough to destroy all kinds of tanks likely to confront the Chinese tank on plateaus." The highlighting of the mountains and plateaus is interesting given that these are not the amphibious conditions normally associated with the Marines primary mission, but do describe a great deal of Chinese geography internally and in bordering regions.

“Deployment of the ZTQ-15 will substantially boost the Marine Corps' operational mobility and amphibious fighting capability.”

Source: Zhao Lei, "New Light-Duty Tank Delivered to PLA Navy's Amphibious Force," *China Daily* (China's official English-language newspaper), 9 July 2021. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202107/09/WS60e7a425a310efa1bd660b96.html>

The main land weapons of the Marine Corps' armored force are currently the ZTD-05A amphibious assault vehicle and ZBD-05 amphibious fighting vehicle. Deployment of the ZTQ-15 will substantially boost the Marine Corps' operational mobility and amphibious fighting capability, said Wu Peixin, a military equipment observer in Beijing. "Compared with other ground-based weapons in the Marine Corps, the new tank has thicker armor, stronger firepower and an improved propulsion system, which means it is able to confront heavily armed enemies and can move through many kinds of tough terrain that other vehicles can't," he said. Yu Shuo, an industry observer of land weapons, said that despite its light weight, the highly mobile ZTQ-15 has good self-protection measures. The tank is equipped with specially designed engines that can handle the shortage of oxygen on plateaus and also features a hydropneumatic suspension system that ensures good maneuverability and survivability in mountainous regions. Its main weapon—a 105-millimeter-caliber gun—is able to fire shells and guided missiles powerful enough to destroy all kinds of tanks likely to confront the Chinese tank on plateaus, he said. the Marine Corps is an elite amphibious fighting force that shoulders significant responsibilities for safeguarding national sovereignty, territorial integrity, marine rights and overseas interests.



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>

Chinese Media Analysis Suggests Chinese Military Closing the Gap on United States

By Cindy Hurst
OE Watch Commentary

South China Morning Post (SCMP), Hong Kong’s prominent online English-language daily, recently published an article comparing China’s military might to that of the United States. The article, which derived its data from various international sources, also examined some of the steps China is taking to become a modern fighting force within the next six years. In all, for many of the comparisons, *SCMP* analysis suggests that China’s current military weakness in certain areas can potentially be overcome.

In some cases, the article argues, China appears to be stronger but may not be. For example, with 360 ships, China is said to have the world’s largest navy. However, smaller coastal patrol ships weigh heavily in the count and the country has fewer large warships than the United States. On the other hand, according to the article, China plans to launch two dozen large warships, including corvettes, destroyers, and huge amphibious landing docks. It is also planning to launch a third aircraft carrier equipped “with the most advanced electromagnetic launch catapults” and to start working on a fourth carrier this year.

Additionally, international treaties could pave the way for China to gain the advantage. According to the article, China is believed to currently have fewer nuclear warheads than the United States. However, the article’s analysis argues that the U.S.-Russia agreement to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty to 2026 and restrict Russian and U.S. deployed strategic nuclear warheads could help China to close the gap. Meanwhile, “while the US has far more nuclear warheads, China has a virtual monopoly in one area: ground-based ballistic missiles that can carry out both nuclear and conventional strikes.”

Finally, the article points out that China is making strides in other areas. For example, it currently lags behind in military spending. However, the country has been steadily increasing its defense funding each year over the past two decades and announced a 6.8 percent increase for this year. In another example, the J-20, China’s indigenous stealth fighter, has limited speed and combat ability compared to others, but due to “a high-thrust turbofan engine,” they likely can be more easily mass produced.

“China is pushing ahead with plans to turn the People’s Liberation Army into a modern fighting force by 2027 – the centenary of its founding – as tensions with the US build.”

Comparing China and U.S. Military Strengths	China	United States
Total Manpower	2 million active (2019)	1.35 million active & 800,000 reserve
Budget	\$252 billion (2020)	\$778 billion (2020)
Number of Ground Forces	915,000 (however updated equipment or ability to operate are still lacking)	486,000
Number of Tanks/Global Rank	5,800/3	6,333/2
Number of Aircraft/Global Rank	2,500/3	13,000/1
Navy Fleet	360 Ships	297 Ship
Aircraft Carriers/Aircraft	2/36	11/60
Nuclear Arsenal Estimate	1,000 (100 active)	5,800 (3,000 ready and 1,400 on alert)

Snapshot comparing military strengths between China and the United States.

Source: Chart created by the author and based on information derived from the article. Attribution: Public Domain

Continued: Chinese Media Analysis Suggests Chinese Military Closing the Gap on United States

Source: Ziyu Zhang, “US China Rivalry: Who Has the Stronger Military?” *South China Morning Post*, (Hong Kong’s most prominent online English-language daily), 12 July 2021. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3140681/us-china-rivalry-who-has-stronger-military>

China is pushing ahead with plans to turn the People’s Liberation Army into a modern fighting force by 2027 – the centenary of its founding – as tensions with the US build.

The US is by far the world’s biggest spender, with a budget estimated at US\$778 billion last year, accounting for 39 per cent of total global military expenditure, according to data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. China was a distant second with an estimated expenditure of US\$252 billion. However...China announced a 6.8 per cent increase in defence funding this year following more than two decades of steady increases.

China’s most advanced stealth fighter jet is the independently developed J-20, also known as the Mighty Dragon. While designed to compete with the US F-22s, these have been using stopgap engines that limit their speed and combat abilities. But work on a high-thrust turbofan engine which could speed up mass production of the planes is ongoing.

The two countries are also working on new bombers, with China developing its Xian H-20 strategic bomber.

China now has the world’s largest navy, with about 360 ships compared with the US fleet of 297, according to a US Congressional report.

But China’s numerical advantage is down to smaller vessels, such as coastal patrol ships... China has just two carriers – the Liaoning and Shandong. Both are based on the Soviet-designed Kuznetsov-class carrier of the 1980s and are powered by conventional oil-fired boilers and carry 24 to 36 J-15 fighter jets. However, China has an ambitious plan to equal US naval strength in the Pacific region, launching two dozen large warships – from corvettes and destroyers to huge amphibious landing docks – in 2019 alone. It plans to launch a third aircraft carrier equipped with the most advanced electromagnetic launch catapults and start work on a fourth this year.

China has not disclosed how many warheads it has, but the US Defence Department’s most recent report on the Chinese military stated that China’s warhead stockpile was “currently estimated to be in the low-200s”, while the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute put the number at 350 this year.

A source close to the Chinese military told (SCMP) in January that its stockpile of nuclear warheads had risen to 1,000 over recent years, but fewer than 100 of them were active.

China may have the chance to close the nuclear gap after the United States and Russia agreed earlier this year to extend their New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty to 2026. The treaty restricts both Washington and Moscow to no more than 1,550 deployed strategic warheads each.

While the US has far more nuclear warheads, China has a virtual monopoly in one area: ground-based ballistic missiles that can carry out both nuclear and conventional strikes.

The US was banned from deploying ground-based intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles under the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with the Soviet Union, which it only withdrew from in August 2019.

Source: Kristin Huang, “China’s Mysterious H-20 Strategic Bomber ‘May Be Able to Strike Second Island Chain,’” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong’s most prominent online English-language daily), 25 May 2021.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3134609/chinas-mysterious-h-20-strategic-bomber-may-be-able-to-strike>

China’s next-generation Xian H-20 strategic bomber may have adopted a stealthy flying wing design that can help it strike targets in the second island chain and beyond...The bomber has been under development for years...

...four pictures suggested that the aircraft has a weapon bay, two adjustable tail wings, and airborne radar at the front and two stealth air intakes on both sides, all covered in a dark grey radar-absorbent material.

Previous reports had said that the H-20 would be equipped with nuclear and conventional missiles, have a maximum take-off weight of at least 200 tonnes and a payload of up to 45 tonnes, and was expected to fly at subsonic speeds and potentially fire four powerful hypersonic stealth cruise missiles.

...the strategic kind of advantage of (the H-20) aircraft is that it would be able to strike as what they call a strategic bomber, so it will be able to strike targets a long distance away, perhaps in the second island chain and beyond...

“Armed with nuclear and conventional stand-off missiles, the H-20 would represent a major break from previous [People’s Liberation Army Air Force] doctrine and equipment development practice,” the report (by the London-based Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies) said.

China Involved in Developing Pakistan's Main Battle Tank

By Matt Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Pakistan's defense industry has experience developing and producing a main battle tank (MBT) for the country's army, specifically the Al-Khalid, a third generation MBT jointly developed with China and which entered service in Pakistan in 2001. A few hundred Al-Khalids are currently in service in Pakistan's army with deliveries of additional tanks taking place annually. While the Al-Khalids appeared to be the foundation of Pakistan's armored units for the foreseeable future, Pakistan's army announced this past year that it would acquire up to 300 VT4s, a third generation MBT from China. The accompanying excerpted article from Pakistani news website *Quwa.org*, which focuses on defense issues in Pakistan, provides an update on deliveries of the VT4s and how China continues to be involved in production of the Al-Khalid.

The article reports that in "May 2021, Pakistan took delivery of both additional VT4 main battle tanks (MBT) and subassemblies or components for the al-Khalid Improved (al-Khalid I) from China's Norinco Group." The article also mentions how the army "evaluated the VT4 as part of its Haider MBT program" and that officials "planned the Haider program as an off-the-shelf solution to accelerate its tank modernization efforts (alongside the al-Khalid-series)." Army officials are planning to use the VT4s alongside the Al-Khalids and to eventually replace the aging inventory of T-59s (Chinese origin). The article goes



Kiribati Island.

Source: Vladimir Lysenko (l.), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kiribati\(003\).JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kiribati(003).JPG), Attribution: CC x 4.0

on to note that the army "has a \$859 million U.S. contract in place for 176 VT4 tanks" and that "in terms of the al-Khalid I, the army currently has an order for 110 units in place with Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT)." HIT is the state-owned defense company that developed and produced the al-Khalid with China.

Lastly, the article mentions how the Chinese-owned "Norinco Group has been delivering components for the al-Khalid I through 2020 and 2021" and that "based on these deliveries, it is possible that the P[akistan] A[rmy] will induct another batch of al-Khalid I MBTs in late 2021 or early 2022."

“In May 2021, Pakistan took delivery of both additional VT4 main battle tanks (MBT) and subassemblies or components for the al-Khalid Improved (al-Khalid I) from China's Norinco Group.”

Source: "Pakistan Receives Additional VT4 and Al-Khalid-I Parts," *Quwa.org* (news website focusing on Pakistan defense issues), 20 June 2021. <https://quwa.org/2021/06/20/pakistan-receives-additional-vt4-and-al-khalid-i-parts-3/>

In May 2021, Pakistan took delivery of both additional VT4 main battle tanks (MBT) and subassemblies or components for the al-Khalid Improved (al-Khalid I) from China's Norinco Group...The Pakistan Army (PA) had evaluated the VT4 as part of its Haider MBT program. The PA planned the Haider program as an off-the-shelf solution to accelerate its tank modernization efforts (alongside the al-Khalid-series).

...According to sources, the PA has a \$859 million U.S contract in place for 176 VT-4 tanks...In terms of the al-Khalid I, the PA currently has an order for 110 units in place with Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT). HIT delivered its most recent al-Khalid I batch to the PA in August 2020...

Norinco Group has been delivering components for the al-Khalid I through 2020 and 2021. Based on these deliveries, it is possible that the PA will induct another batch of al-Khalid I MBTs in late 2021 or early 2022. Likewise, one can expect another VT4 induction announcement around that timeframe as well...

China's Overtures in Syria Show Concern Over Turkistan Islamic Party Fighters

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

In mid-July, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Syria in what was the highest-level Chinese government visit since the start of the Syrian conflict, timed to coincide with the swearing-in of Bashar al-Assad following his most recent election. Amidst widespread speculation regarding the visit's meaning to the future of Sino-Syrian relations and China's role in the Middle East, several local media analyses have linked China's new focus on Syria to concerns over the future of Syria-based Uyghur jihadists from the "Turkistan Islamic Party" (TIP) (for more on the TIP see: "The Knotted Future of the Turkistan Islamic Party in Syria," *OE Watch*, January 2019).

According to the first accompanying excerpt, from Egypt's semi-official *al-Ahram*, China is concerned that the Syria-based Uyghur jihadists from the TIP may seek refuge in Afghanistan, leaving China with the difficult choice of either doing nothing or becoming more deeply involved in Afghanistan. The opinion piece from the prominent pro-Qatari *al-Araby al-Jadid* agrees that China is increasingly concerned about the TIP, specifically about the potential for the United States to use the group against Chinese interests. Beyond the symbolism and diplomatic platitudes in Foreign Minister Wang's visit to Syria, the author argues, unless the TIP was a central topic of discussion, the Chinese visit to Damascus does not add anything new to China's Syria policy.

Last June, a TIP official was killed by an IED in the Syrian town of Salqin, near the border with Turkey. As noted in the accompanying article from the pro-Syrian opposition news website *al-Modon*, the killing may have been part of a broader campaign against the TIP, launched by the Syrian government with encouragement and support from China. According to the article, in early 2021 a Chinese "military-

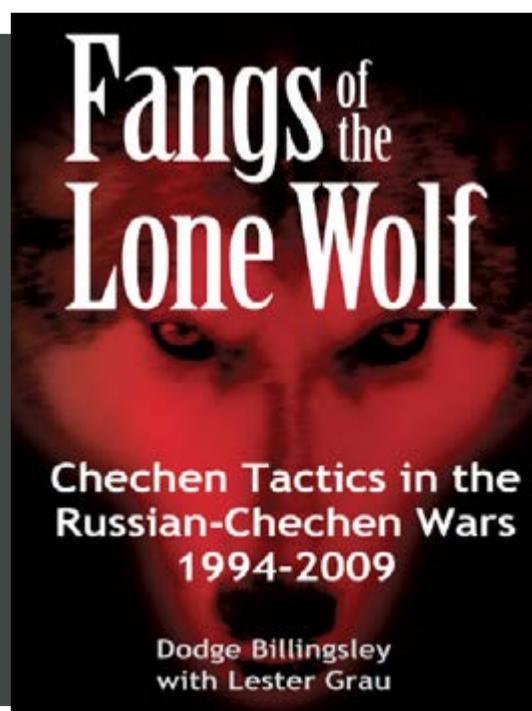


Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister, addresses the jobs and economic development pledging session at the Supporting Syria conference (2016).

Source: Adam Brown/Crown Copyright, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dfid/24789378436> Attribution: Public Domain

commercial" delegation visited Syrian government positions in Idlib Province, possibly laying the foundations for supporting an anti-TIP campaign. The article adds that China has supplied the Syrian military with JY-27 radars and unspecified "jamming and communication devices and equipment for night combat" to help its efforts in Idlib. The second excerpt from *al-Modon* sees the TIP as a valuable card that many parties will seek to play, including the Syrian government, which may use the TIP's presence in Syria to gain concessions and support from China. The article's author surmises that the TIP is likely to gain in prominence as various parties seek to use it to their advantage, whether in Syria, Central Asia, or both.

“... If the Uyghur military organization was not a central topic in the Chinese minister's visit, the visit does not add anything new to the existing situation...”



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

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

Continued: China's Overtures in Syria Show Concern Over Turkistan Islamic Party Fighters

Source:

(China's new predicament)," *al-Ahram* (semi-official Egyptian daily), 22 July 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/4j34f66w>

مأزق الصين الجديد

China is supposed to feel comfortable with the withdrawal of US forces from neighboring Afghanistan, but the Chinese statements related to this withdrawal are deeply concerned about the negative repercussions of this on China's national security... The source of Chinese concern is that the Taliban, when it ruled Afghanistan before the attacks of September 11, 2001, provided a safe haven for some Uyghur fighters. Beijing fears this will repeat on a larger scale in the next stage. If Beijing remains silent and does not act, it will face problems immediately upon the return of the Uyghur fighters from Syria. If it does move in advance and intervenes in Afghanistan, it will face even greater problems, as happened to the Soviet Union in the 1980s.

Source:

(Syria and China's calculus)," *al-Araby al-Jadid* (pro-Qatari daily), 23 July 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/n6rdah6z>

سورية والحسابات الصينية

Lots of hollow propaganda accompanied the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Damascus... China fears America's intentions to employ the Turkistan Islamic Party and its fighters, who have gained extensive experience from fighting in Syria, to carry out military operations on Chinese soil, starting from Afghanistan, after the withdrawal of American forces. This is especially true given that the Uyghur party receives support and backing from Afghan Islamic organizations. It was originally established in Kabul in 1993 after the Islamic parties took control of it after the long war with the Soviet occupation. If the Uyghur military organization was not a central topic in the Chinese minister's visit, the visit does not add anything new to the existing situation. Certainly, China is smarter than raising this sensitive issue publicly, through the visit of its foreign minister.

Source:

(Idlib: China supports eliminating the Turkistan Islamic Party)," *al-Modon* (pro-Syrian opposition news website), 25 June 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/vxzudxe8>

إدلب: الصين تدعم تصفية الحزب التركستاني

Over the past few days, opposition media websites have circulated information about China providing military equipment to the regime to support a military campaign against the Turkistan Party fighters in Idlib. The websites said that a number of military formations affiliated with the regime forces and militias obtained advanced Chinese weapons, including JY27 radars, which have a range of 400 km, as well as jamming and communication devices and equipment for night combat. A Chinese delegation comprising commercial and military figures had previously visited the regime headquarters in Idlib province, in the city of Khan Sheikhoun, south of Idlib. During its visit, which took place in early 2021, the delegation met with Governor Muhammad Natouf. The delegation also toured the area of operations close to the lines of engagement with the opposition, south of Idlib. A military source in the National Liberation Front told al-Modon, "Since the Chinese delegation's visit at the beginning of the year to areas south of Idlib, it is believed that the Chinese are trying to secretly support some military or security move against the Uyghur fighters in the Turkistan Party. I do not rule out that Air Force Intelligence assassination cells receive financial and logistical support, to adapt operations against the fighters of the party that opposes the government of China."

Source:

(Turkistan Islamic Party as a golden ticket in Syria)," *al-Modon* (pro-Syrian opposition news website), 13 July 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/4zca78m2>

التركستاني "كورقة ذهبية في سوريا"

The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) is a valuable card for Turkey (to bargain with Washington and Beijing and by proxy with Russia as well), as well as for the Syrian regime and Moscow behind it... Last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping promised to boost Sino-Syrian cooperation "to a new level" in the context of a telegram congratulating President Bashar al-Assad on his "election." This promise and reports of aid coming in last month coincided with the assassination of "Sheikh Jawdat," the director of the TIP's Economic Office, in a car bomb explosion in the city of Salqin. The Syrian regime seizes opportunities, and sees them as a way to attract the support it needs to survive. There must be a connection between the strikes against the TIP and the Chinese "aid" ... It is difficult to imagine a quick end to this confrontation. The TIP's moment in Syria has not yet arrived. It may attract many interventions, even though Afghanistan, where the organization has a limited presence, appears to be a more attractive arena that also borders China. This is a battle that has just begun and will not end soon.

The Russian General Staff’s “Foreseeable Future”: Destructive Fires to Destructive Influence

By Tom Wilhelm
OE Watch Commentary

In a valedictory article in the Russian Ministry of Defense’s *Military Thought* journal, the head of the Russian General Staff’s Military Academy, General-Colonel V.B. Zarudnitsky, gave guidance to his researchers regarding their work on conflicts in the foreseeable future. In particular, he noted that Russian military theoreticians need to expand the notion of victory by destroying an enemy with fires to destroying an enemy with influence.

Zarudnitsky’s article is a complete work in the General Staff’s terms. It is a forecast based on trends with historical analysis and reference to the categories of the “forms and methods” to be worked out in military theory. Russian military leadership adheres to this framework when testing and advancing ideas. It provides them a kind of reliability and accountability in doctrine. Zarudnitsky’s article notes five trends. First, he highlights the expansion of non-military measures in conflict and hints at an almost secondary role for conventional forces. Related to this, the second trend describes the importance of psychological warfare “aimed at manipulating society, the cultural environment, national mentality, and algorithms of population behavior using the methods of reflexive control.”

A third trend is the spatial and functional scope of armed confrontation. Writing for a military muscular with conventional firepower, Zarudnitsky warns that such a conventional outlook will require modification: “The scale of so-called non-contact wars will expand” and direct contact “combat operations...will acquire a short-lived character...” in a framework of “multi-domain capabilities in a single combat space.” Zarudnitsky’s “conventional military actions, strictly distributed across physical domains, are replaced by multidimensional ones, conducted simultaneously in all spheres of confrontation.” The fourth trend is the importance of outer space. Zarudnitsky exhorts a “proactive study” of military operations there, claiming that space is a critically vulnerable area for the United States and NATO. His fifth trend is the expansion of the kinds of weapons systems in development, theoretical or otherwise. He catalogs hypersonic, precision-guided, laser, infrasonic, and cyber weapons; command information systems, unmanned aerial and autonomous marine vehicles, military robotics, and artificial intelligence for decision support and command and control. He notes that all this is leading to a transition from considering victory to be the “physical destruction of an enemy only by fires, towards a functional influence-based” approach.

Based on this forecast from the head of the Russian General Staff’s Military Academy, this article can be seen as a document to organize research for current Russian military doctrine and an accelerant to drive those military forms and methods off the doctrinal drawing boards and into the operational environment within, as Zarudnitsky says, the “foreseeable future.”

“This comprehensive approach toward influencing the adversary is becoming an objective necessity in modern warfare, unlike in wars past when defeat was achieved exclusively by fires.”



Emblem of the Russian General Staff.

Source: Public Domain

Source: V.B. Zarudnitsky, “Характер и содержание военных конфликтов в современных условиях и обозримой перспективе (The Nature and Content of Military Conflicts in Today’s World and in the Foreseeable Future),” *Military Thought* (The Russian Ministry of Defense’s journal of military theory), No.1 2021

In our view, complex information-influence activities in military conflicts of the future will acquire paramount importance in the interests of creating the most favorable conditions for the achievement of the objectives. The trend in the development of information warfare is manifested not so much in the information technology aspect as in the improvement of the forms and methods of information and psychological influence on both the personnel of the armed forces as well as the population of the adversary country. Its intensity, scale, and duration are increasing. In the interests of researching potential methods of information influence on the social strata of a state adversary in the militarily advanced countries, scientific research is being carried out to develop the foundations of conducting “behavioral-type” warfare.

The Russian Ground Forces' New Command-and-Control Vehicles

By Charles Bartles
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted articles from *Armystandart.ru*, a Russian website featuring military news, describe the Russian Ground Forces' new command-and-control vehicles for the battalion and brigade/division. The R-149MA1 command-staff vehicle is for the battalion staff, having 2 crewman and 4 workstations. The APE-5 mobile command post vehicle is for brigade or division staffs, having three crewman and 9-11 workstations supporting up to 18 staff members. Aside from describing the improved capabilities of these systems from their predecessors, the articles are also interesting because they describe the number of staff members in a motorized rifle battalion or brigade/division, making it apparent that these staffs are far smaller than the staffs of their U.S./NATO equivalents.



R-149MA1 Command-Staff Vehicle.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/Engineering-Technologies-2012/i-qzsv2MC/0/61b5e97e/X3/TVM2012ch2p4photo039-X3.jpg> Attribution: CC BY 4.0

“Compared to earlier (non-automated) systems, the use of the standardized R-149MA1 command-staff vehicle as a component of a tactical level automated troop command and control system reduces the troop and weapons command and control cycle time by three-fold, and it provides a five-fold improvement in the relevance of enemy information. In general, it takes no more than 10 minutes to collect data and plot it on a map, while setting up combat missions for subordinates to commanders takes up to 5 minutes.”

Source: Peter Nikolaev, “Компьютер, карта, решение: Управление боем в тактическом звене вышло на новый уровень с современными мобильными (КП А Computer, a Map, and a Decision: Tactical Combat Command and Control Reaches New Level with Modern Mobile Command Posts),” *Armystandart.ru* (Russian website featuring military news), 18 June 2021.

<https://armystandard.ru/news/2021617935-kXQ2B.html>

The following stereotype has evolved over many decades: the commander of a company, battalion, or occasionally a regiment, is directing the battle next to a radio operator with a portable radio. What has changed today? Today the main role in providing command and control of combat operations at the tactical level is played by modern command-staff vehicles. They were used in the past, but their present kit (and consequently their capabilities) have fundamentally changed. This fully applies to the R-149MA1 standardized command staff vehicle. In recent years this system has been sent to the troops.

In essence, this is an advanced command post, which was developed as part of the fulfillment of an edict of the President of the Russian Federation to create a unified, tactical level command and control system (ESUTZ) [единая система управления тактического звена (ЕСУТЗ)] for Russia's Armed Forces.

The equipment of the R-149MA1 allows the military situation to be rapidly updated on electronic maps that annotate the locations of one's own subordinate units and those of [known] enemy forces into consideration. With its support, one can produce essential calculations and establish missions for subordinates in extremely short periods of time.

The R-149MA1 is mainly used at the battalion-level, as an element of the unified tactical level command and control system, this command-staff vehicle communicates with higher headquarters (regiment and brigade), and subordinate units (companies and platoons)...It has a six-man crew with four automated work stations.

The standardized R-149MA1 command staff vehicle is equipped with the following VHF radio stations: R-168-100UE-2, R-168-5UNE-2, R-168-0.IU(M)IE and the “Prima-DMV.” It also has two HF radios, the R-168-100KBE and the “Prima-KV.” This equipment allows operational and command communications to be provided to up to 25 kilometers in the VHF range while in motion and up to 55 kilometers while stationary. If it is needed to “reach” further, the HF radio stations are used to communicate up to 50 kilometers while in motion and up to 350 kilometers while stationary (using masts). Moreover, the reception and transmission of secure data is provided over cable and VHF/HF radio channels using a speech and data encryption device.

Compared to earlier (non-automated) systems, the use of the standardized R-149MA1 command-staff vehicle as a component of a tactical level automated troop command and control system reduces the troop and weapons command and control cycle time by three-fold, and it provides a five-fold improvement in the relevance of enemy information. In general, it takes no more than 10 minutes to collect data and plot it on a map, while setting up combat missions for subordinates to commanders takes up to 5 minutes.

Continued: The Russian Ground Forces' New Command-and-Control Vehicles



APE-5 Mobile Command Post.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/ARMY-2020-Static-part-3/i-PpRmrJF/0/2524cb95/X3/Army2020-Static-Part3-017-X3.jpg> Attribution: CC BY 4.0

“the APE-5 [mobile command post] substantially increases the effectiveness of the work of the command staff in field conditions. As a rule, the chief of staff, deputy commanders, and the chiefs of other troops and services are in a brigade or division command and control post. There is the capability to work on the move - the process is not interrupted, which is especially important in conditions of a rapidly changing tactical situation and the receipt of reconnaissance data.”

Source: Peter Nikolaev, Слышит, видит, управляет! Автоматизированные подвижные пункты управления АПЕ-5 выводят на новый уровень работу КП в полевых условиях Hears, See, Controls! The APE-5 Automated Mobile Command Post Raises Work of the Command Post to a New Level, *Armystandard.ru* (Russian website featuring military news), 12 February 2021.

<https://armystandard.ru/news/2021211943-1GHk6.html>

Fixed command and control posts, from the separate unit [отдельной частии] through the 'brigade-division' echelon - are one of the adversary's main targets for reconnaissance and strikes. Camouflage and the latest electronic warfare systems only partially provide defense and, in the event of a threat, the command and control post must immediately change its position

Hence the State Order from the RF Ministry of Defense, which one can briefly word as follows: Develop and set up the production and deliveries of automated mobile units (APE) [автоматизированных подвижных единиц (АПЕ)] for field mobile command and control posts to the Armed Forces, beginning from the tactical level to the operational-strategic level...

The Western and Southern Military District troops received 64 sets of APE complexes in 2018 and deliveries have continued within the State Defense Order. The designers and manufacturing personnel took into account the comments and desires expressed in the APE-5 complexes, which are arriving in the Armed Forces right now...It is particularly important that it has the technical capability to redeploy the APE-5 long distances via rail, military transport aviation aircraft, and landing ships. The complex's deployment while bringing it up to the full operating state takes half an hour and tear down - 15 minutes. For comparison: previously, twice as much time went for deployment and tear down.

What about the "internals"? The APE-5 accommodates 9-11 automated workstations, which are connected to a single local area network and that provide the command and control of subordinate formations, units, and subunits, including via a secure communications channel in the videoconference mode. The complex is equipped with GLONASS satellite navigation equipment and cartographic information processing hardware.

The information that arrives via secure channels is collected, processed, and disseminated as soon as possible, and the software permits the automation of the accomplishment of a series of tasks and to conduct the needed calculations and modeling of the situation in the process of the accomplishment of current orders. The documents, maps, and photo images - one can send all of this to higher headquarters or to subordinate units and subunits in a matter of minutes. The data transmission speed via satellite communications is up to 10 Megabits per second. The HF radio supports communications with 300 subscribers in a radius of up to 30 kilometers.

... the APE-5 substantially increases the effectiveness of the work of the command staff in field conditions. As a rule, the chief of staff, deputy commanders, and the chiefs of other troops and services are in a brigade or division command and control post. There is the capability to work on the move - the process is not interrupted, which is especially important in conditions of a rapidly changing tactical situation and the receipt of reconnaissance data.

New Russian Radar Deployed in Arctic To Detect UAVs

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

According to Russian daily broadsheet newspaper *Izvestia*, the Russian Arctic is now protected against unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) thanks in large part to the Sopka-2 S-band Arctic radar. The Sopka-2 S-band radar is designed to detect stealth and small aircraft. It consists of a primary phased array radar with two secondary radar whose antennae are mounted on the back of the primary radar plus a monopulse secondary surveillance radar. It can be remotely operated by one technician. The *Izvestia* article also reports that while most of

the Russian Arctic Ocean is the responsibility of the Northern Fleet, the Pacific Fleet has responsibility for the Chukotka Peninsula. The Pacific Fleet and Eastern Military District have become more active in the region during the past two years. As the military officer quoted in the article states, "We are not reclaiming the Arctic, but are returning to it...". The deployment of this Arctic radar greatly helps Russian make that perspective a reality.

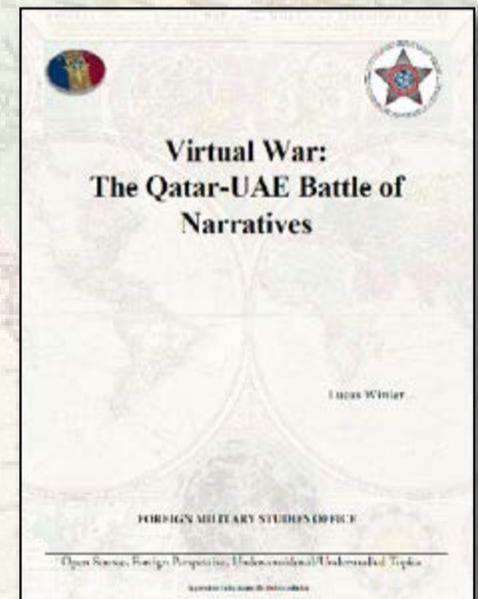
“The Russian Arctic has received protection from stealth and unmanned aerial vehicles. Exercises on the detection of drones occurred under adverse polar conditions in the country’s northeast - on Chukotka and Kamchatka Peninsulas.”

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>

Continued: New Russian Radar Deployed in Arctic To Detect UAVs

Source: Anton Lavrov and Anna Cherepanova, “Полярный друг: как в Арктике учились защищаться от беспилотников (Polar friend: How the Arctic force learned to track UAVs),” *Izvestia* (pro Kremlin daily newspaper), 16 June 2021. <https://iz.ru/1179073/anton-lavrov-anna-cherepanova/poliarnyi-drug-kak-v-arktike-uchilis-zashchishchatsia-ot-bespilotnikov>

The Russian Arctic has received protection from stealth and unmanned aerial vehicles. Exercises on the detection of drones occurred under adverse polar conditions in the country’s northeast - on Chukotka and Kamchatka Peninsulas. A grouping, which is deployed both on the mainland, and also on the archipelagos and Wrangel Island, was utilized. Experts note that the U.S. and other countries are actively developing their presence in this portion of the Arctic Region at the present time. Therefore, an impenetrable radar screen - more state-of-the-art than in the times of the USSR - is being recreated on the country’s northeastern coast today...

Sources in the Military Department state that the unique arctic exercises occurred at the beginning of the summer. Their mission was verification of the capabilities of Russian radar systems, which cover Russia’s northeast. They successfully improved their capability of detecting groups of small unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which were flying at various altitudes. Joint training of air defense and radar subunits cooperated to accomplish this.

The Ministry of Defense reported that a “Sopka-2” radar station on Wrangel Island participated in the search for small targets, which simulated UAVs, at the beginning of July. According to the military, all of them were detected and identified. They collated and analyzed the information and then expeditiously transmitted it to the Eastern Military District Air Defense Command Post.

Military Expert Vasily Kashin stated that in the Soviet era, a continuous network of radar, permitting the surveillance of the air situation, was dispersed along the Far Eastern Arctic Coast. “Wrangel Island - is in the Arctic’s northeast, and now the Americans have published a number of strategic documents concerning the buildup of their military presence in this region. This will largely occur on Alaska, where they plan to deploy additional forces, and the redeployment of troops from other areas of the US on a rotational basis. The Americans are using several types of strategic reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles in support of both the Air Force and also of the Navy, which can also certainly be utilized over the arctic territories. The Russian Side is preparing to deal with this. The “Sopka-2” Radar was installed on Wrangel Island in 2016 and the Russian armed forces are incorporating modernized versions to conduct exercises to combat various types of high-tech threats.”

The “Sopka-2” dual-use radar is one of the elements of the restored airspace monitoring system. It monitors the situation in the sky in a radius of 450 kilometers around the clock. The characteristics permit its use to surveil both civilian traffic with special transponders and also military aircraft. The radar detects them at a distance of 350 kilometers. The radar has been installed in a special protective dome for operation in the harsh arctic climate. This provides the capability to employ it during cold weather of minus 40 degrees and a wind speed of up to 40 meters per second.

The radar are deployed on the mainland at Mys Shmidta [Cape Schmidt] and near the City of Tiksi. Self-sufficient modular garrisons have been built for their personnel. Bases on the Novosibirsk Island, Severnaya Zemlya, Novaya Zemlya, and Franz-Josef Land archipelagoes continue the chain of radar further to the west along the Northern Maritime Route and Russia’s arctic coast.

Russia’s military-political leadership is restoring the former glory of the northern radar of the times of the Soviet Union right now but with improved quality and combat capabilities, according to General-Lieutenant Aytech Bizhev, the former Air Force Deputy Commander-in-Chief for Commonwealth of Independent States Joint Air Defense System Issues. “We are not reclaiming the Arctic, but are returning to it. Our Air Defense is well familiar with the difficulties of the work there: the polar night, low temperatures, inaccessibility, the seasonal nature of the transport of petroleum and lubricants and equipment, and the organization of the servicemen’s shifts. But our capabilities for transportation and mobility have seriously improved with the appearance of the contemporary icebreaker fleet.” Air defense equipment has greatly improved as have our weapons. In the expert’s words, “the air defense equipment has become much better right now. We have weapons, which will successfully combat drones”.

Now there is the capability to react immediately to the detection of a UAV or aircraft-intruder. New air defense missile complexes and systems, including the long-range S-400s, are in the arctic zone. The presence of combat aircraft is also being restored. Fighter direction posts have been deployed on Wrangel Island and Mys Shmidta and in Tiksi. A group of MiG-31BM fighter aircraft from the 317th Composite Naval Aviation Regiment in Kamchatka have been continuously performing alert duty at Chukotka’s Anadyr Airfield since 1 December of last year.

MiG-31BM and Su-33 carrier-based fighter aircraft have also begun alert duty at the airfield of Novaya Zemlya Archipelago. They are also sometimes located at Nagurskaya Airbase on Franz-Josef Land. They plan that they will also be able to use the takeoff and landing strip at Mys Shmidta for the takeoff and landing of military aircraft after its restoration.

Regular deliveries of cargo, using super-heavy Mi-26 helicopters, have also been organized for Kotelnyy and Wrangel islands and also Mys Shmidta. The Mi-26s participated in the construction and reactivation of the arctic bases and radar infrastructure. The latest Mi-8AMTSh-VA helicopter arctic modification is also being used for these missions from the Chukotka airfields.

The Combined Command of the Troops and Forces in the Northeast, which is subordinate to the Pacific Fleet, coordinates the region’s defense. The ground forces, aviation, air defense systems, and the fleet on Kamchatka are under its command and control. One of Russia’s three very large arctic outposts - the “Polar Star” Base, which was built from scratch on Wrangel Island is part of this command.

Russian Northern Fleet Vessels Move into Area of NATO Baltic Sea Exercise

By Les Grau
OE Watch Commentary

According to the following articles from the Norway-based English- and Russian-language *Independent Barents Observer*, the Russian Navy is conducting numerous exercises and naval training operations in or near Arctic waters. The Russian Northern Sea Fleet recently conducted its shake-down training of its latest large landing ship, the “Pyotr Morgunov.” The ship joined the missile cruiser “Marshal Ustinov” and the anti-submarine ship “Vice-Admiral Kulakov” in a cruise from Arctic waters around Scandinavia to the

Baltic Sea. Presumably, the ships will continue on to St. Petersburg to participate in the annual Russian Navy Day parade of ships. The nuclear-powered battle cruiser *Pyotr Velikiy* is also in the Barents Sea, apparently in response to NATO and U.S. naval activities. The Russian big ships of the Pacific Fleet are out as well. The cruise will also provide an opportunity for both NATO and Russia to observe each other’s seamanship and responsiveness of the involved navies.

“Combat training will be conducted during the inter-fleet crossing from the Barents Sea around Scandinavia to the Baltic Sea. Russia’s navy move happens simultaneously as NATO kicks off its anti-submarine warfare exercise Dynamic Mongoose outside Norway”

Source: Thomas Nilsen “Northern Fleet moves large warships to Baltic Sea”, *Independent Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 29 June 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/06/northern-fleet-moves-large-warships-baltic-sea>

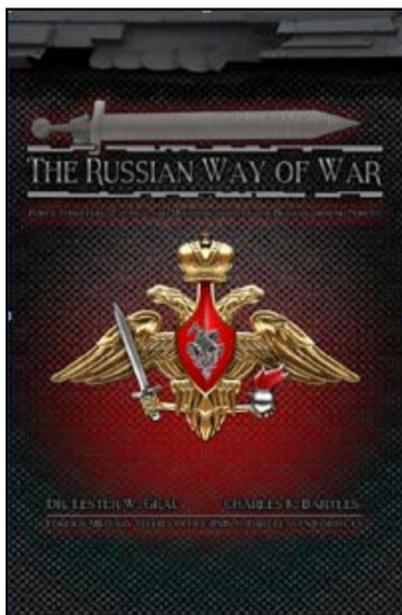
Three of the largest warships of Russia’s Northern Fleet sailed out from Severomorsk on the morning of 29 June on a westbound course in the Barents Sea. According to the Northern Fleet, the vessels are the missile cruiser “Marshal Ustinov”, the anti-submarine ship “Vice-Admiral Kulakov” and the brand new large landing ship “Pyotr Morgunov” along with the smaller rescue tugboat “Altai”.

The Northern Fleet announcement states that while sailing to the Baltic Sea, the navy ships will “conduct maneuvering training” and “several exercises” as part of the Russian navy’s “combat training for surface warships.” It does not state during which part of the voyage such combat exercises will take place, but the Northern Fleet has not issued any NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) warnings for any parts of international waters outside Norway.

Traditionally, in late June and early July, the Northern Fleet used to sail a warship and a nuclear submarine from the Kola Peninsula to the Navy Parade taking place in the waters outside St. Petersburg. Navy Day is on Sunday, July 25.

While the Russian warships sail the Barents Sea, the U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class destroyer “USS Roosevelt” sails into the waters outside northern Norway to maintain U.S. Navy readiness in the Arctic. The warship, which is part of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, stated on 28 June that it conducted a live-fire gunnery exercise in the Arctic, but did not specify the exact location of the exercise.

On Tuesday, June 29, NATO’s annual anti-submarine warfare exercise Dynamic Mongoose 2021 starts off the coast of Norway. Participating nations are Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Norway. Maritime surveillance aircraft from Germany, Norway, the U.S. and Canada are also participating from the airports at Keflavik, Andøya and Lossiemouth. The exercise will last until July 9.



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: Russian Northern Fleet Vessels Move into Area of NATO Baltic Sea Exercise

“Following the loading operation, the landing ship set out to the Barents Sea where it teamed up with missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov, anti-submarine vessel Vice-Admiral Kulakov and support ship Altay in an exercise.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Russia’s new landing ship sails into Pechenga Bay, takes on board a battalion of special operations troops”, *Independent Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 18 June 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/06/russias-new-landing-ship-sails-pechenga-bay-takes-board-30-armored-vehicles-and>

The Pyotr Morgunov this week cruised into the far northern bay on the Barents Sea coast few kilometers from Norway. The ship drifted onto the shore, whereupon armored personnel carriers, trucks and a big number of special operations soldiers got onboard. The landing vessel is the Russian Navy’s newest ship of the kind, incorporated in the Northern Fleet early this year.

According to the Northern Fleet press service, the loading of the Pyotr Morgunov was part of a rehearsal aimed at testing vessel capacity. Several dozen vehicles were taken onboard the ship, including more than 30 BTR-80 personnel carriers and trucks, as well as a battalion of Spetsnaz from the nearby base of Sputnik. Following the loading operation, the landing ship set out to the Barents Sea where it teamed up with missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov, anti-submarine vessel Vice-Admiral Kulakov and support ship Altay in an exercise.

The loading operation in the Pechenga Bay follows a similar operation by sister ship Ivan Gren few weeks ago. The 135 meter long Pyotr Morgunov is the newest vessel in the powerful Russian fleet, and the second large landing ship of Project 11711. It follows its sister ship Ivan Gren that was incorporated in the Northern Fleet in 2018. Both vessels are built at the Yantar yard in Baltiisk. The landing ships are able to carry up to 300 naval infantry, alternatively 13 tanks, 36 armored personnel carriers, or 30 trucks. They can also carry two Ka-29 transport and attack helicopters, alternatively one Ka-52K attack helicopter.

“On 1 July, the nuclear-powered battle cruiser Pyotr Velikiy set course for the Barents Sea. It follows several of the Russian Navy’s biggest ships.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Russia’s biggest naval vessels are out at sea”, *Independent Barents Observer* (independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English currently blocked in Russia), 2 July 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/07/russias-biggest-naval-vessels-are-out-sea>

On 1 July, the nuclear-powered battle cruiser Pyotr Velikiy set course for the Barents Sea. It follows several of the Russian Navy’s biggest ships. According to the Northern Fleet, the battle cruiser will engage in several days training in the far northern waters. That includes exercises on air defense and combat, as well as mapping of airspace and underwater situations. The 252 meter long Pyotr Velikiy is the Russian Navy’s biggest ship. It has a crew of more than 700 men and a wide range of armament.

The nuclear-powered Kirov-class vessel will be back in Severomorsk, the Northern Fleet headquarters, in due time for Russian Navy Day 25th of July, according to the Northern Fleet press service. The Pyotr Velikiy set out to sea only few days after missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov, anti-submarine ship Vice-Admiral Kulakov and the brand new large landing ship Pyotr Morgunov started an inter-fleet crossing from the Barents Sea around Scandinavia to the Baltic Sea.

Also the Russian Pacific Fleet now has its biggest ships at sea. According to the Navy, missile cruiser Varyag and frigate Marshal Shaposhnikov have engaged in missile and artillery firing in the Pacific. The corvettes Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov, Sovershenny and Gromkiy are also involved in training which included “elimination of enemy aircraft carrier groups.”

Russia Harasses Dutch Ship in the Black Sea To Send Message to NATO

By Dodge Billingsley
OE Watch Commentary

Thanks in part to a BBC news crew onboard the HMS Defender at the time, the world was aware of Russian shadowing and intimidation tactics towards the British warship operating in the Black Sea in late June. The story all but eclipsed a strikingly similar encounter between Russian forces in the Black Sea and the HNLMS Eversten. According to private Dutch naval news media outlet *Marineschepen*, the Dutch ship, which had sailed aside the HMS Defender days earlier, was also harassed. The article quoted the Dutch Ministry of Defence as stating “the frigate was repeatedly harassed between about 3:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. local time on Thursday (24 June).” And that “they flew dangerously low and close and carried out feint attacks...”. Also according to the Dutch Ministry of Defense, the HNLMS Evertsen was at the time sailing toward Romania for a port visit. The Dutch also claimed that the ship’s electronics were disrupted. No further explanation was given but days before this incident it was reported that both ships

were being electronically tracked within a couple miles of Russian positions on Crimea (See Russian Electronic Warfare in the Black Sea, *OE Watch*, June 2021). Russian actions like this, if they continue, demonstrate Russia’s willingness to ratchet up the tension in the Black Sea basin, at least in the vicinity of Crimea. Operationally, this

“The Russian actions violated the right to the free use of the sea. In addition, they go against mutual agreements, as laid down in the INCSEA treaty. The agreement is intended to prevent unsafe situations at sea.”

would affect freedom of navigation exercises and NATO naval visits to regional ally Georgia.

Source: “Zr.Ms. Evertsen urenlang lastiggevallen door Russische gevechtsvliegtuigen (HNLMS Evertsen harassed for hours by Russian fighter planes),” *Marineschepen.nl* (private Dutch naval news website), June 29, 2021. <https://marineschepen.nl/nieuws/Evertsen-urenlang-lastiggevallen-door-Russische-gevechtsvliegtuigen-260621.html>

The Dutch frigate Zr.Ms. Evertsen was harassed for hours by Russian planes in the Black Sea. According to Defense, the frigate was sailing in international waters, southeast of Crimea.

Last Wednesday, the British destroyer HMS Defender (Type 45) sailed past the Crimea. That passage did not go unnoticed because Russia said it fired warning shots. According to the Ministry of Defense, De Evertsen was on his way to Romania at that time for a port visit.

A day later, as appears from a statement from the Ministry of Defense, the Evertsen himself was targeted. The frigate was repeatedly harassed between about 3:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. local time on Thursday. “They flew dangerously low and close and carried out feint attacks. The fighters were armed with bombs and so-called air-to-surface missiles, intended to fire at a target from the air. After the hours of intimidation, there were also disruptions of electronic equipment of the Everts,” the Ministry of Defense reports.

“The Russian actions violated the right to the free use of the sea. In addition, they go against mutual agreements, as laid down in the INCSEA treaty. The agreement is intended to prevent unsafe situations at sea.”

Commander of Zr.Ms. Evertsen KLTZ George Pastoor finds the actions irresponsible and unsafe: “Sr.Ms. Evertsen sailed on the open sea in international waters. There was no reason for these aggressive actions. Despite this, the fake attacks continued for several hours. It was irresponsible and unsafe behavior. at sea.”

Minister of Defense Ank Bijleveld also reacts with irritation: “Hr. Ms. Evertsen has every right to sail there. There is no justification whatsoever for this type of aggressive action, which also unnecessarily increases the risk of accidents. The Netherlands will address Russia about this.”

Russian Military Publication Argues NATO No Longer a Threat



Motorized riflemen and tankers of the Baltic Fleet were tested for stress resistance, July 2021.

Source: https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12371560@egNews Attribution: CCA 4.0 Intl

By Ray Finch
OE Watch Commentary

A key Kremlin platform over the past decade has revolved around the assertion that the NATO alliance presents a grave and present danger to Russian security. According to the Kremlin narrative, the West remains intent upon using its robust military strength to prevent Russia from defending its legitimate interests. However, the accompanying excerpt from the popular military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* refutes the notion of a NATO threat, arguing instead that the alliance has “lost the ability to fight with an enemy of equal strength.”

The author begins by claiming that NATO’s weakness stems from “the fact that hedonism, pacifism, postmodernism, tolerance and political correctness increasingly dominate in the West.” He goes on to assert that “almost all European NATO members are losing the ability to fight,” and that “absolutely necessary things in battle such as heroism and readiness for self-sacrifice are now almost excluded.” Efforts to reinvigorate the alliance, for instance, via the “so-called 30-30-30-30 (or 4-30) initiative... are completely insufficient for a serious war.”

The author concludes on a bellicose note, stating that “today in Europe the RF [Russian Federation] Armed Forces in all components (except, perhaps, the Navy, which is not very important for a war on the continent) is stronger than the NATO Armed Forces.” Opposed to those NATO “countries with a high standard of living and a hedonistic and pacifist mentality... the servicemen of the RF Armed Forces are psychologically and in terms of combat training ready for any war, including a classic one with an equal enemy, which implies high losses.” Such a view among the Russian security establishment might encourage a more aggressive Russian foreign policy if it were to become widely held.

“...the servicemen of the RF Armed Forces are psychologically and in terms of combat training ready for any war, including a classic one with an equal enemy...”

Source: Alexander Khranchikhin, “Инвалиды пятой статьи: НАТО не сможет воевать с равным противником в силу коллективной безответственности (Disabled Article 5: NATO will not be able to fight an equal adversary due to collective irresponsibility),” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* (popular Russian military weekly), 22 June 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/62618>

NATO is going through a very serious crisis that affects all spheres of its activity - military, political, ideological. This process is a natural consequence of the fact that hedonism, pacifism, postmodernism, tolerance and political correctness increasingly dominate in the West....

...Combined with a significant decline in the birth rate, this makes it almost impossible to wage a war that implies any serious loss of life. Also, on the part of the military personnel of the armed forces of the NATO countries, manifestations of such absolutely necessary things in battle as heroism and readiness for self-sacrifice are now almost excluded. The transition of almost all NATO countries to the hired principle of manning the army further reduced the motivation of personnel - now people serve for money, and not defend their homeland, and led to a significant increase in the cost of maintaining it....

...Due to these circumstances, almost all European NATO members are losing the ability to fight, although their military spending is still very high....

...In general, after the end of the Cold War, NATO lost the ability to fight with an equal in strength of the enemy, this affected troops and command structures both in psychological and military aspects. Russia’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine in 2014 caused a tremendous shock in the bloc (especially in the Baltic countries and Poland) and an understanding that the alliance was not ready for a military confrontation....

The so-called 30-30-30-30 (or 4-30) initiative implied that NATO by 2020 should have 30 ground battalions (ranging from 600 to a thousand troops each), 30 squadrons of fighters and 30 warships ready for deployment within 30 days from the moment the command is sent. At the moment, it is at least not obvious that it has been implemented in practice, while such forces, as well as the speed of their deployment, are completely insufficient for a serious war....

...In fact, today in Europe the RF Armed Forces in all components (except, perhaps, the Navy, which is not very important for a war on the continent) is stronger than the NATO Armed Forces. This also applies to deployed equipment (the Russian one is at least as good as, while purely physically newer, especially ground-based), and to those in warehouses (the Russian one, again, is no worse, with more of it). In addition, which is fundamentally important, the servicemen of the RF Armed Forces are psychologically and in terms of combat training ready for any war, including a classic one with an equal enemy, which implies high losses. The servicemen of the NATO Armed Forces, both from a psychological point of view and from the point of view of combat training, are only ready for a ‘war-beating,’ when the enemy is many times weaker in quantity and quality, in fact is unable to respond. The possibility of waging war with an equal adversary has not been considered there for a long time. And no teachings can change this situation.

...In countries with a high standard of living and a hedonistic and pacifist mentality, it is possible to attract people to the army even in peacetime only with very high monetary allowances and significant social benefits.

Russia and Turkey Competing for Dominance of Black Sea

By Ihsan Gündüz
OE Watch Commentary

The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 impacted the balance of power in the Black Sea in Russia's favor and led to increasing tension between NATO and Russia, as evidenced by the faceoff between British and Russian ships in the Black Sea on 23 June 2021. In this context, NATO-member Turkey presents a challenge to Russia's ambitions in the Black Sea due to its control of the Straits and of the Black Sea's access to the Mediterranean. The accompanying articles from Turkish sources provide insight into Turkey's position in the face of Russian ambitions and rising tension in the Black Sea.

The first article from Turkey's state-owned news agency, *Anadolu Ajansı*, states that the Black Sea's strategic importance for Russia continues to increase because of Russia's energy routes, military fleets, military bases, regional security, and trade. As such, Russia's objective is to gain dominance in the Black Sea as well as create an opportunity to reach the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. This Russian ambition will continue to create friction between Russia and NATO allies. However, the article states that despite Russia's aggressive policies in this region, Turkey and Russia have established a working relationship by renewing their security policies in the Black Sea. The article also notes, without further explanation, that Russia has other reasons, besides countering NATO, to be aggressive in the Black Sea region, including regional cooperation with China, Syria, Iran, and Turkey.

The second article from independent Turkish news agency *Anka*



Russian Black Sea Fleet amphibious landing exercise as a part of the combined military exercises near the coast of the Crimean peninsula.

Source: Defense Ministry of Russian Federation, via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Black_Sea_Fleet_amphibious_landing_exercise_as_a_part_of_the_combined_military_exercises_near_the_coast_of_the_Crimean_peninsula,_2012.jpg Attribution: CC-BY-SA-4.0

Haber Ajansı, states that Turkey is in a delicate position amid rising tensions in the Black Sea. These tensions in Turkey's backyard means that Turkey has to walk a tightrope to balance its obligations as a NATO member and its relations with Russia. Second, despite Turkey's working relationship with Russia, the two countries are in a silent competition in a number of areas, including dominance of the Black Sea. Russia's Black Sea Fleet modernization is the centerpiece of Russian military strategy and Turkey recognizes this. The author states that while Turkey had naval superiority over Russia right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, this superiority has faded due to Russian technological advancements in the defense industry.

“Despite warming relations between Russia and Turkey, there is a tense but silent competition for dominance over the Black Sea.”

Source: Prof. Dr. Giray Saynur Derman, “Karadeniz’de artan stratejik rekabet ve sıcak savaş tehlikesi (Increasing strategic competition and danger of war in the Black Sea),” *Anadolu Ajansı* (Turkey’s state-owned news agency), 02 July 2021. <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz/karadenizde-artan-stratejik-rekabet-ve-sicak-savas-tehlikesi/2292228#!>

...

For Russia, the Black Sea basin has increasingly become important as a vital area of interest.

Issues such as routes for energy pipelines, military fleets, military bases, regional security, and trade make the Black Sea a strategic region for Moscow. On one hand, Russia aims to gain dominance in the Black Sea and, on the other, an opportunity to reach the Mediterranean via the Black Sea and establish control over the straits. The fact that Russia increased its presence in the Kerch Strait and Azov Sea completely changed the balance of power, both politically and militarily, in the Black Sea basin... Russia, with its historical imperial strategy, is trying to maintain control by displaying strength in the region, as it did when it wielded power in the past. Currently, Russia has 25,000 military personnel, 21 large warships, 7 submarines, and 200 support ships in its Black Sea fleet.

...

This fierce competition in the region has transformed the perception of security in the Black Sea and led to a quite delicate power balance in the region. However, Russia’s aggressive and expansionist policies have other reasons beyond NATO, mostly related to the regional cooperation areas it has established with countries such as China, Syria, Iran, and Turkey. The powerful states in the region, Turkey and Russia, have become allies by renewing their security policies in the Black Sea.

Continued: Russia and Turkey Competing for Dominance of Black Sea

Source: Arda Mevlütoğlu, “Standoff in the Black Sea: What Lies Beneath, and What Lies Beyond?” *Anka Haber Ajansı* (independent Turkish news agency based in Ankara), 02 July 2021. https://ankahaber.net/AnkaReview/Columnists/standoff_in_the_black_sea_what_lies_beneath_and_what_lies_beyond_44927

...Russia's relations with the West have been strained since the country annexed Crimea in 2014, while NATO leaders recently reiterated their alliance's stance against Moscow.

...

...Russia sees NATO's activities in and around its neighborhood – most of which was all once part of the Eastern bloc – as a direct threat to national security... From this perspective, Russia's 2008 war with Georgia, 2014 annexation of Crimea, support for separatists in eastern Ukraine and even its intervention into the Syrian Civil War from 2015 can also be considered to be counter-moves from Moscow.

Needless to say, all of these disputes, conflicts and maneuvers have been taking place around Turkey.

...

Despite warming relations between Russia and Turkey, there is a tense but silent competition for dominance over the Black Sea. Russia seems to be putting the modernization of its Black Sea Fleet at the center of its military strategy against NATO. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Turkey enjoyed superiority over Russia in the region, especially in the naval domain. This position, however, is now under threat due to naval and missile developments from Russia.

...

Turkey's relations with many major NATO allies, especially the United States, have deteriorated in recent years, as symbolized by the S-400 issue. Turkey's military relations and defense trade with Ukraine, on the other hand, have attracted harsh criticism from Russia.

Compendium of Central Asian Military and Security Activity

By Matthew Stein

Since Central Asian states gained independence in 1991, new regional military and security alliances have been created (some of which are Russian-led), new military partnerships with non-NATO countries have been established, a number of joint military exercises have been conducted, over a dozen high-profile incidents of violence and civil unrest have taken place, and military installations have been used by foreign militaries. While this activity gained attention, it has not been collectively compiled. A compilation of this activity can serve as a guide for current and future military and security involvement in Central Asia.



<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/194880>



S-300 PMU-2 air defense system in southern Algeria (2020).

Source: Jack Glodel, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:S-300PMU2_-_Algeria.jpg Attribution: CC BY-SA 4.0

Algeria Seeks More Active Regional Military Role, with Russian Assistance

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

In June 2021, the chief of staff of Algeria’s armed forces, Said Chengriha, attended the IX Conference on International Security in Moscow. Chengriha’s presence in Moscow appears to signal a further deepening of military cooperation between Russia and Algeria. While in Moscow, according to a scoop by the Paris-based news website *Africa Intelligence*, Chengriha signed a \$7 billion dollar deal for a squadron of Mig-29 M2s and other advanced Russian equipment.

“... I want to reiterate the Algerian people’s eternal gratitude to the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation for the support they provided to our national army in developing our defensive capabilities ...”

According to an analyst cited in the accompanying article from the Moroccan news website *Hespress*, Russian-Algerian military cooperation is likely to deepen. From the Russian perspective, the article argues, there is a desire to “join the club” of countries with military deployments in the western Mediterranean, most importantly Turkey and the United States. Citing anonymous sources, the article’s

author claims that Russia is exploring establishing a permanent military presence in the Algerian port of Oran. In turn, the author argues that Algerian interest in deeper military cooperation with Moscow stems from concerns over Morocco’s alliance with the United States as well as political instability and the presence of foreign troops in both Libya and the Sahel.

Since its independence in 1962, Algeria has followed a strict policy of non-intervention beyond its borders. Algeria’s new constitution, which was approved by voters in late 2020 and ratified earlier this year, includes a clause allowing the Algerian military to deploy abroad, as noted in the accompanying excerpt from the Qatar-aligned daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*. Foreign troop deployments in Libya and the Sahel, it is believed, are at least partially behind this potential change in Algerian military posture. In late June, the Algerian military carried out military maneuvers along the border with Libya. It may not be long before Algerian troops are deployed across the country’s vast desert borders.

Source: “Army chief Chengriha turns to the Sahel after mammoth Russian shopping trip,” *Africa Intelligence* (Paris-based news website), 7/1/2021. https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa_diplomacy/2021/07/01/army-chief-chengriha-turns-to-the-sahel-after-mammoth-russian-shopping-trip.109676958-art

Chief of staff Said Chengriha has travelled to Moscow to clinch an astronomical arms deal, worth up to \$7bn. In discussions with the Russian defence minister, he also outlined a possible Algerian intervention in the Sahel, starting with Mali...

Continued: Algeria Seeks More Active Regional Military Role, with Russian Assistance

Source:

(The success of the ‘African Lion’ exercises push Algeria to military cooperation with Russia),” *Hespress.com* (Moroccan news website), 25 June 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/3a4tnsd9>

نجاح مناورات “الأسد الإفريقي” يدفع الجزائر إلى التنسيق العسكري مع روسيا

In what appears to be a response to the American movements in the desert, Russia, Algeria’s strategic ally, is preparing to establish a military base on the outskirts of the Algerian-Moroccan border, according to sources from Morocco’s eastern neighbor. The sources claim that there are “Russian and Algerian movements to establish a permanent base for the Russian naval forces in Oran.” The Russian side seeks to forcefully join the club of countries in the western Mediterranean, where a number of international and regional powers are concentrated, especially with the Turkish and American deployments in North Africa. Moscow does not want to miss more opportunities in a region experiencing permanent and unstable ripples and changes... Regarding the implications of Chengriha’s visit to Moscow, political analyst Hicham Motad pointed out that... [it] “comes in the context of the escalation of the crisis in the south of the country, bordering Mali, and the border crisis with the eastern neighbor of Libya.” He added that from a strategic point of view, this visit indicates “the extent to which Algeria seeks to save the reputation of its army by renewing and strengthening the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the People’s National Army and the Russian Armed Forces, especially in light of Algeria’s regional isolation and its decline in the regional balance of military forces.” Politically, Chengriha’s rush to meet with Russian military officials falls within the framework of the Algerian military apparatus’s endeavor to respond to the strong alliance between [Morocco’s] Royal Armed Forces and the US Army, especially after the great success achieved by the African Lion maneuvers. This in addition to the great fear that dominates ideological thought in the Algerian military,” Motad added.

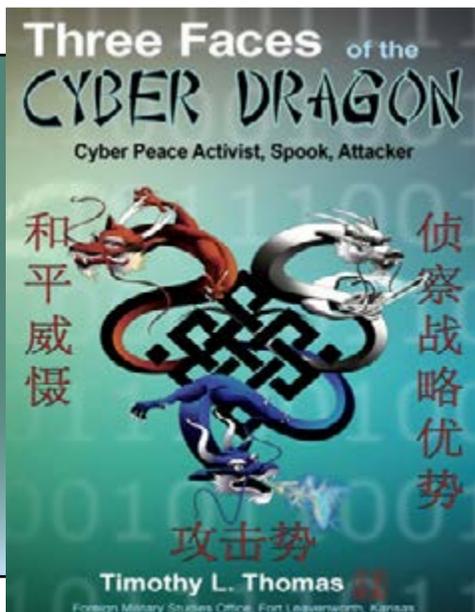
Source:

(Algerian military commander: We seek regional military supremacy),” *al-Araby al-Jadid* (Qatar-aligned daily), 23 June 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/ymt6hfhz>

قائد الجيش الجزائري: نسعى للتفوق العسكري في المنطقة

“I want to reiterate the Algerian people’s eternal gratitude to the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation for the support they provided to our national army in developing our defensive capabilities,” [Chengriha] said. The Algerian army has begun to consider the possibility of participating in foreign military operations, after the new constitution included an article that allows for this, based on national security considerations.

In recent years, Algeria has directed a large budget to be spent on the army, armament, and development of the military arsenal. In 2018, it amounted to about \$13 billion. It was used to finance deals for the purchase of aircraft, submarines, and defensive and offensive systems, in addition to developing technological means for monitoring and electronic warfare. Joint military manufacturing projects for tanks and vehicles were also funded.



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>

Blackouts in Bushehr Province Risk Unrest

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

According to the excerpted article from the provincial news section of the *Fars News Agency*, an outlet affiliated with more hardline elements in the Iranian regime, electricity shortfalls in Bushehr are increasingly consuming local government effort and sparking tension among Iranian officials. The Iranian government often seeks to blame deprivations on U.S. or international sanctions, but it is hard to make this case credibly to the Iranian public when it comes to energy. After all, Iran sits astride and partially owns the South Pars/North Dome field, the world's single largest gas field and, in 2020, was the world's ninth largest oil-producer. This is especially true in southern Iran. While many oil fields are in Khuzestan, its neighboring province Bushehr is the headquarters of Iran's operations in the South Pars Gas Field. Bushehr is also home to Iran's civilian nuclear reactor. With the southern provinces—Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan—disproportionately supplying Iran's electricity, there would be little understanding among the residents of the area about why they might suffer electricity shortfalls.

“No blackout in the household sectors is acceptable and is considered as a redline.”

Drought and cryptocurrency mining (See: “Iran Crypto-Mining Destabilizing Electrical Grid and Possibly Much More,” *OE Watch*, July 2021) have undercut both generation and available electricity.



Bushehr City and Port.

Source: Gamkhabar.ir <http://gamkhabar.ir/uploads/gamkhabarir/355762968477.jpg>

The result has been rolling blackouts across Iran. The article summarizes Deputy Governor Mehrdad Sotoudeh's position on efforts to scale back energy consumption in order to ensure homes have adequate electricity, presumably to power fans, air conditioners and refrigerators, during summer months when the temperature regularly exceeds 120 Fahrenheit. Of particular interest is the allusion to potential social unrest. For Iran, this would not only pose an immediate security issue, but also could represent an amplifying economic problem should labor actions undermine the oil and gas industries.

Source: “Khamooshi Khanjidar Astan-e Bushehr Khat Qermez Ast (Blackouts at Home in the Bushehr Province are a Red-Line),” *Fars News Agency* (media outlet affiliated with more hardline elements in the Iranian regime), 5 July 2021. www.farsnews.ir/bushehr/news/14000414000205

[Deputy Governor] Mehrdad Sotoudeh, in an interview with reporters, stressed that the province's authorities have done their best to manage electricity consumption. He said, “Household power outages at 50 degrees [Celsius, 122 Fahrenheit] these days are unbearable and are by no means acceptable. The deputy governor pointed out that, after the formation of a crisis team and the reduction of office hours to end the day at 1 pm, we were able to reduce electrical consumption by 30 megawatts from this hour. He added, “Also, cooperation in reducing and managing the consumption of small industries will certainly lead to a daily load reduction of 25 MW from 1 to 4 pm.... Given that Bushehr province has used all its capacities to reduce power consumption in non-domestic sectors, no blackout in the household sectors is acceptable and is considered a redline. He concluded by saying that the necessary warnings had been conveyed to Mr. Haeri, the managing director of Fars Regional Electricity. Under these circumstances, these people will be responsible for any social consequences of this issue.

Iran Faces Wildcat Strikes in Oil Industry

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Organized labor was a major catalyst during Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution. Job actions by workers catalyzed broader unrest that, ultimately, unseated the shah. It is for this reason that post-revolutionary Iranian officials have traditionally been sensitive to organized labor. Iran’s Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare in theory regulates labor and represents workers’ concerns. In reality, however, it faces two difficulties. First, grassroots labor organization in 2005 among first, Tehran bus drivers, and second, Khuzestan sugar cane workers, led to recognition of Iran’s first independent labor unions. Second, the widespread presence of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-owned companies in the civilian economy constrains ministry or parliamentary enforcement of rules and regulations relating to the economy.

The excerpted article from the hardline media outlet *Fars News Agency*, examines the cause of recent unrest and escalating wildcat strikes among Iran’s oil workers. It casts most blame on pay structure changes that caused not only wage stagnation but also reduction in many cases. In all likelihood, the scale of declining wages is more than the article reflects given the growing discrepancy between official exchange rates in Iran (42,500 Iranian rials to the US dollar) and black market rates (250,000 Iranian rials to the US dollar). Hence, the Oil Ministry can claim, for example, that it is paying workers \$1,000 per month when, in reality, they receive the equivalent of only \$170.

The excerpted article featured an interview with Ebrahim



Iranian oil workers in Khuzestan.

Source: Fars News Agency, https://media.farsnews.ir/Uploaded/Files/Images/1399/11/11/13991111000758_Test_PhotoN.jpg

Fouladvand, a former director-general in the administrative department of the Ministry of Oil, who attributed the decision to reorganize the ministry wage structure with the desire to bring the system into conformity with international standards. Fouladvand further noted that Iran is suffering a brain drain among some of its more capable oil workers because declining salaries make top experts ripe for poaching by other oil and gas producers in the region.

While Iranian officials often trumpet their own indigenous industry, the growing pay discrepancy between Iran and foreign oil industries is taking a toll on Iran’s recruitment pool. Growing discord in the industry can have an outsized ripple effect on Iran’s economy and potentially stability because of the disproportionate dependence Iran has on its hydrocarbon industry.

“What happened that suddenly led to such widespread protests in the country’s oil industry?”

Source: “Ramzgosha-ye az Eterazat-e Domino-ye Naft-e-ha (Deciphering Why Wildcat Strikes Spread Among the Oil Workers),” *Fars News Agency* (media outlet affiliated with more hardline elements in the Iranian regime), 30 June 2021. <https://www.farsnews.ir/news/14000408001048>

According to the economic correspondent of the Fars News Agency, without a doubt, the most important news subject of the last few days about the country’s oil industry has been the widespread and wildcat protests of the employees in different sectors of this industry. The protests, which initially stemmed from staff protests over salaries and benefits received this year, have spread to various contractors, with the parliamentary energy commission finally meeting with the oil minister to resolve the dispute.

In the meantime, the key question is: What happened that suddenly led to such widespread protests in the country’s oil industry? Certainly, in order to answer this question accurately, we must examine the developments in the field of human resources and the wage system in the oil industry, at least in the last eight years but, in this report, we will only focus what sparked these protests.

In fact, the issue is that in the budget law for 2021-22, the salary ceiling of direct employees of Oil Ministry and its subsidiaries has been reduced from 21 times the minimum wage to 15 times the minimum wage.... As a result, a large number of oil industry operatives working in exhausting conditions received lower salaries this year than in previous years....

Iran's Supreme Leader Explains Spoilt Ballots



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei offers his election analysis.

Source: [Khamenei.ir https://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/48194/B/14000407_2348194.jpg](https://farsi.khamenei.ir/ndata/news/48194/B/14000407_2348194.jpg)

By Michael Rubin
OE Watch Commentary

Iranians went to the polls on 18 June 2021 to elect a new president as Iranian law limits incumbent Hassan Rouhani to two consecutive terms. Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi won the polls in the first round in an election which most outside analysts label neither free nor fair. Raisi's rise appeared predetermined, especially after the Guardian Council that vets aspirants rejected any credible competitor. Within Iran, however, much of the focus was not on who won the most

“It is obvious that they have not cut off their relationship with the ballot box.”

votes, rather the process of voting itself. As Iranians grow apathetic about the revolution, Iranian leaders often interpret participation in elections as endorsement of the system. They often claim high voter participation, especially in provinces with long histories of animosity toward Teheran. To some, this appears to lack credibility. This year, the sensitivity among government officials was especially high as many Iranians in and outside the country actively promoted an election boycott.

Ten days after the election, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with senior judiciary officials to announce Raisi's successor as head of the Judiciary. During the course of his speech, excerpted here from his official website *Khamenei.ir*, Khamenei addressed the voting process and sought to explain the high numbers of invalid votes. He dismissed these as of no concern since, simply by going to the polling place, Iranians had endorsed the system. In this, however, he is wrong.

The Islamic Republic has a bloated state sector. In order to qualify for jobs—be they municipal sanitation worker, school teachers, or a clerk in a local office—Iranians often must show proof that they voted in recent elections. Many poll workers stamp the national identification cards of voters, especially in peripheral provinces with significant ethnic, linguistic, or sectarian minority presence, for example, in Kordestan or Baluchistan. Those who depend on a state salary, therefore, often go to the polls, but purposely spoil their ballots as a sign of protest. Top Iranian officials likely do not believe Khamenei's explanation and it is doubtful he does himself. Nor does Khamenei's logic explain growing numbers of spoiled ballots. For the regime, however, it is necessary to offer a public explanation to address an increasing frequent topic of conversation among Iranian diaspora groups and teahouse talk inside Iran. That said, no cover story can fully eliminate a growing belief inside Iran that the regime faces a legitimacy crisis.

Source: “Bianat dar Didar-e Rais va Mosa'ulan-e Qaveh Qazha'iyeh (Statements from the Meeting of the Leader with High Judicial Officials),” *Khamenei.ir* (Supreme Leader's official website), 28 June 2021. <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=48211>

Now, some people highlight the invalid votes, saying, “They are too many.” So, what does this show? Are they a sign of the disenchantment of those people with the governmental system? No, not at all. The opposite is true. Those who go to voting centers in order to cast their votes – those who do not cut off their relationship with the ballot boxes and who wish to vote – take a look, but do not find among the candidates the person whom they believe in. So, what do they do? They can sulk, saying, “Now that my favorite person is not among the candidates, I will not vote.” And they can leave. However, if they do not go into a sulk and if they cast their votes, writing the name of their favorite candidates – which is an invalid vote – or if they cast a blank vote, it is evident that they are interested in ballot boxes. It is obvious that they have not cut off their relationship with the ballot box. Evidently, they like the system. Some people focus too much on pointless matters and make wrong analyses. Thankfully, the election was held and I hope it will be a blessed one in the end. During the elections, certain things were witnessed that one should keep as experience and that one should learn from. Later on, the Iranian nation should draw on these lessons.

Iran Sails Naval Assets toward Venezuela for First Time

By Ryan Berg
OE Watch Commentary

For the first time Iran sailed naval vessels around the Horn of Africa and into the Atlantic Ocean. According to El Salvador based *El Diario de Hoy*, Venezuela is the likely destination. The ships, possibly in an effort to confuse regional security analysts, changed course several times. According to satellite imagery, the ships may intend to transfer arms to the Maduro regime. Specifically, one of the vessels may be carrying small fast attack boats of the type that Iran operates frequently in the Persian Gulf. The Spanish-language version of the well-known U.S. media outlet *CNN Español* noted the importance of fast attack boats to Iran's Persian Gulf operations, which include invading commercial and military ships. Further, the article notes that these boats are often equipped with anti-ship missiles and torpedoes. Iran has long sought to develop an open water navy, and uninterrupted passage from the Persian Gulf through the Atlantic to Venezuela could be considered significant progress toward that goal. Further, the transfer of fast attack boats to Venezuela, specifically, could alter the dynamics of naval deterrence and area denial capabilities in the southern Caribbean.



The formal commissioning of new Iranian naval vessels in 2019 in the port city of Bandar Abbas.

Source: Mehr News Agency, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:New_vessels_join_Iranian_Navy_Dec_2019_-_2.jpg

“One of the Iranian ships, a floating base called Makran, was seen in late April in satellite images from Maxar Technologies in the port of Bandar Abbas with seven small fast attack ships on its deck.”

Source: “Buques iraníes con armamento llegan a Venezuela por Maduro (Iranian ships with weapons to arrive in Venezuela for Maduro),” *El Diario de Hoy* (a morning newspaper in El Salvador with broad coverage of Latin America), 22 June 2021. <https://www.elsalvador.com/opinion/nota-del-dia/libre-expresion-venezuela-iran/851094/2021/>

Two ships sailing from Iran to Venezuela have been detected by U.S. satellites, which could carry high-speed ships on their deck and other packages that are presumably military weapons. This could further aggravate the situation in the region, especially in the face of the imbalance of military force...So far, the U.S. reaction to the boats has been one of ‘concern.’

Source: “Estados Unidos rastrea barcos iraníes que navegarían en dirección a Venezuela (The United States tracks Iranian ships that would sail in the direction of Venezuela),” *CNN Español* (the Spanish-language version of the well-known U.S. media outlet), 4 June 2021. <https://cnn.espanol.cnn.com/2021/06/04/estados-unidos-rastrea-barcos-iran-direccion-venezuela-trax/>

One of the Iranian ships, a floating base called Makran, was seen in late April in satellite images from Maxar Technologies in the port of Bandar Abbas with seven small fast attack ships on its deck...These fast and agile vessels are often used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in the Persian Gulf to invade commercial or military ships, including US Navy and Coast Guard ships operating there. They can be equipped with a variety of weapons ranging from small arms, anti-ship missiles, and torpedoes.

Turkey's Operations against ISIS Networks Found Lacking



Mourning after the 2015 Ankara bombings.

Source: Yildiz Yazicioğlu via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mourning_after_the_2015_Ankara_bombings_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mourning_after_the_2015_Ankara_bombings_(2).jpg), Attribution: CC-PD-Mark | PD VOA

By Ihsan Gündüz
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying article, written by a top Turkish analyst for *al-Monitor*, a globally read security news site with regionally based reporting, provides insight into militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) operating in Turkey and Turkey's efforts to combat them. The author argues that while Turkey's operations against ISIS members have substantially increased, the country still lacks a comprehensive national strategy to combat such elements within its borders. The extremist elements gaining ground inside Turkey have far-reaching consequences beyond Turkish borders.

The article states that suspected ISIS members inside Turkey are overwhelmingly from Iraq and Syria. Iraqi nationals in Turkey are most likely to be predisposed to ISIS activities, with Syrian nationals the next most likely. Turkish ISIS suspects who have been detained are generally recruiters, financial sponsors, and facilitate logistical necessities, including providing documents to ISIS members from other countries. The article also states that there are several Turkish Salafi groups involved in the operational cells of ISIS activities in Turkey, which likely pose a bigger threat than the foreign nationals.

“We can say without hesitation that IS has penetrated deep into Turkey,” A Turkish Security Expert.”

Most of these Salafi groups are composed of former Turkish sympathizers of al-Qaeda who later joined ISIS. The article continues to note that Turkish cells have connections to the ISIS leadership cadre through Turkish nationals who fought in Syria and Iraq. The article cites a Turkish security expert stating, “IS[IS] has penetrated deep into Turkey” and has more presence in larger urban centers like Ankara and Istanbul, posing a serious threat to Turkish national security.

The author infers a few points from his research regarding anti-ISIS operations in Turkey. First, they are either episodic or involve deliberate targeting to dismantle ISIS-affiliated groups. Second, Turkey does not have an inter-institutional strategy to combat the ISIS threat inside its borders. Third, Turkish officials have failed to track and identify about 2,000 ISIS members who received military training and were actively involved in armed conflict in Syria and Iraq. This is partially caused by the lack of intelligence sharing between Turkey and other countries. Finally, while Turkey's anti-ISIS operations may seem to be successful, a significant number of ISIS-affiliated militants continue to roam in Turkey without being detected.

Source continued: Metin Gürcan, “Turkey’s mixed record against Islamic State,” *al-Monitor* (a news site with analysts from the Middle East), 30 June 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/06/turkeys-mixed-record-against-islamic-state>

Turkish security operations against networks linked to the Islamic State (IS) appear on the rise, but how efficient they are remains open to question amid a number of shortcomings, including the lack of adequate cooperation with foreign counterparts.

A Turkish security expert who worked with the security forces until recently said the nationality of IS-affiliated foreigners apprehended in Turkey is often withheld because their home countries request so, citing two reasons — operational security and concerns to avoid negative publicity. “We have received files on nearly 5,000 IS suspects from various countries and caught about 2,300 of them in the past four years...

The data derived from the research show that the number of Syrians detained in anti-IS operations is not as high as one might expect. Iraqi nationals top the list...

...Turkish detainees stand out as recruiters, financial sponsors and providers of logistical help and documents to foreign militants. But there are also those involved in operational cells, mostly Salafi groups made up of former Turkish defectors from al-Qaeda who later gravitated to IS such as the Yamacli and Meydan groups in the southern province of Adana, the Amer Onay group in the eastern province of Van and the Bayancuk group in Istanbul. Most of those groups have links to the IS leadership through Turkish nationals who fought in IS ranks in Iraq and Syria.

According to a journalist who closely follows IS-affiliated networks in northern Syria, Turkish IS members are more dangerous than foreign ones, even though their number is smaller than those of Iraqis and Syrians. He explained that Turkish cells usually get into contact with the higher ranks of IS through Turkish IS militants who fought in Syria and Iraq.

TERRORISM, TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Turkey's Operations against ISIS Networks Found Lacking

Source continued: Metin Gürcan, "Turkey's mixed record against Islamic State," *al-Monitor* (a news site with analysts from the Middle East), 30 June 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/06/turkeys-mixed-record-against-islamic-state>

The findings of the research show how real the IS threat is in big urban centers in Turkey...

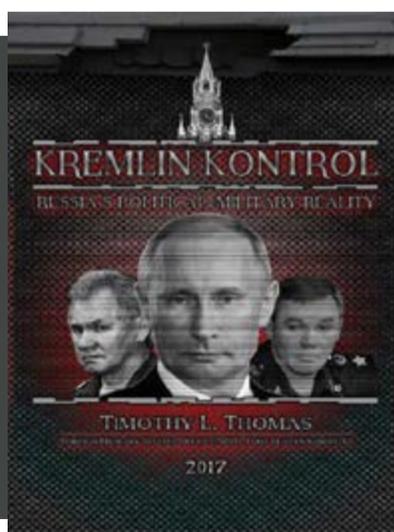
The security source said... "We can say without hesitation that IS has penetrated deep into Turkey," the expert said. He continued, "Most of the time, we are unable to tell which foreigner could be an IS member at first glance. During investigations, most of the details are blurred for us due to their ability to hide themselves and difficulties in accessing the background information of suspects... What we need is to build a comprehensive security approach with intelligence, home country cooperation, preemptive investigation and cyber capabilities."

...

...the research suggests that Turkey's operations against IS lack inter-institutional cooperation.

...the Turkish security forces estimate that about 2,000 IS members who were actively involved in IS operations in Syria and Iraq and received armed training have made it to Turkey. Yet they have failed to identify them all. "To do that, we need intelligence from Syria and Iraq, which has not been forthcoming," the security source said. "Furthermore, there is almost no intelligence sharing with Western countries. This lack of coordination and intelligence sharing means no intelligence for the Turkish police."

Finally, there is no benchmark to measure the efficiency of Turkey's anti-IS operations, although they may seem intense and successful. Turkey refrains from releasing ample data on the issue, but the picture emerging from the analysis of open-source data suggests that Turkey remains a place where a significant number of foreign IS militants continue to take shelter.



In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country's security forces and reestablished the nation's military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>

ISIS's Alliance with Congolese Militants Fueled by Ugandan Members

By Jacob Zenn
OE Watch Commentary

On 28 June, Quebec's French-language *lapresse.ca*, which covers national and international affairs from multiple ideological perspectives, reported in the excerpted article on bombings in Beni, Congo. The article noted on 27 June there was a bombing at a Catholic church and another suicide bombing at a bar near a mosque, both attributed to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)'s local affiliate. As a result, according to the article, people in Beni were psychologically affected and feared venturing into the streets, with children staying home from school and markets closing early. Meanwhile, Congolese security forces erected checkpoints to prevent any other potential attackers from entering Beni.

According to the article, the suicide bomber's identification documents, and prisoners who knew him, revealed he was Ugandan. Aware of the difficulty in intercepting potential future suicide bombers, the security forces asked citizens to report on any suspicious activities. This reflects the ongoing challenges Congo is having in quashing the rising insurgency around Beni.

The ISIS affiliate has also been analyzed elsewhere in African media,

“Currently we are a province, the Central African Province, which is one province among the many provinces that make up ISIS.”

including on 8 May by the Senegalese French-language website *dakaractu.com*, which covers Senegalese and Francophone African affairs from a neutral perspective. It showed that Ugandans have long been part of the affiliate, including former leader Jamiil Mukulu. He is a Uganda-born Christian who converted to Islam, opposed the Ugandan government, and established the Allied Defense Forces (ADF)'s international links in exile in Congo, while recruiting along the Congo-Uganda border.

The ADF evolved into the Beni-based ISIS affiliate now called Islamic State in Central Africa Province in 2019, which was three years after Mukulu's arrest in Tanzania and the succession of Musa Baluku. After Baluka took power, according to the article, a Kenyan named Waleed Zbu Zein, who had lived in Uganda, formalized the ADF's pledge of loyalty to ISIS.

Source: “Les ADF : la très méconnue branche de l'État Islamique en RDC (The ADF: the little-known branch of the Islamic State in the DRC.),” *dakaractu.com* (Senegalese French language news source), 8 May 2021. https://www.dakaractu.com/Les-ADF-la-tres-meconnue-branche-de-l-Etat-Islamique-en-RDC_a203170.html

Far from renouncing his religious convictions against the backdrop of the establishment of an Islamic State in Uganda, Jamil Mukulu, Hussein Mohammed as his Islamic name, set up the Salaf Foundation with an armed wing called the Movement of Ugandan Freedom Fighters (UMFF).

At the same time, a local recruitment strategy was activated through marriages. This was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that two communities belong to the same ethnic group. The majority in the region of Beni, the Nandé ethnic group, is also present in Uganda under the name of Kondjo.

Mukulu's arrest did not put an end to the activities of the ADF. Musa Baluku took control of the Ugandan Islamist militia. Under his leadership, the group set more ambitious goals. For Musa Baluku, the ADF must belong to a larger global movement. Also mentioned has been financial support mobilized by ISIS for the ADF through a Kenyan citizen named Waleed Ahmed Zein. To the ADF, the amounts sent by the Kenyan financier would be between \$500 and \$7,000. Still, the ADF were not recognized as an integral part of ISIS until 2019. Obviously, ISIS tried to benefit from these external branches. Its leader, Musa Baluku, said “there is no more ADF...we are a province, the Central African Province, which is one province among the many provinces that make up ISIS.”

Source: “Beni sous le choc au lendemain des attaques à la bombe (Beni in shock in aftermath of bomb attacks),” *lapresse.ca* (Quebec based French language news outlet), 28 June 2021. <https://www.lapresse.ca/international/afrique/2021-06-28/attaque-islamiste-dans-une-eglise/beni-sous-le-choc-au-lendemain-des-attaques-a-la-bombe.php>

In the morning, motorcycle taxis and several private cars circulated timidly on the streets of Beni while the doors of shops, boutiques, markets, and restaurants remained closed until early afternoon. Schoolchildren in blue and white uniforms who are usually ubiquitous did not come out all day, per orders by the authorities. The authorities have increased the number of checkpoints on access to the city of Beni, demanding to verify identity documents.

On Sunday evening, a bomb-carrier was killed when his device exploded near a bar and not far from a mosque. Earlier in the day, a bomb explosion in a Catholic church injured two women. A similar device exploded on Saturday night, near a gas station on the outskirts of town, without causing damage.

The army indicated that “the suicide bomber who blew himself up is a subject of Ugandan origin. ADF prisoners corroborated information about his identity.

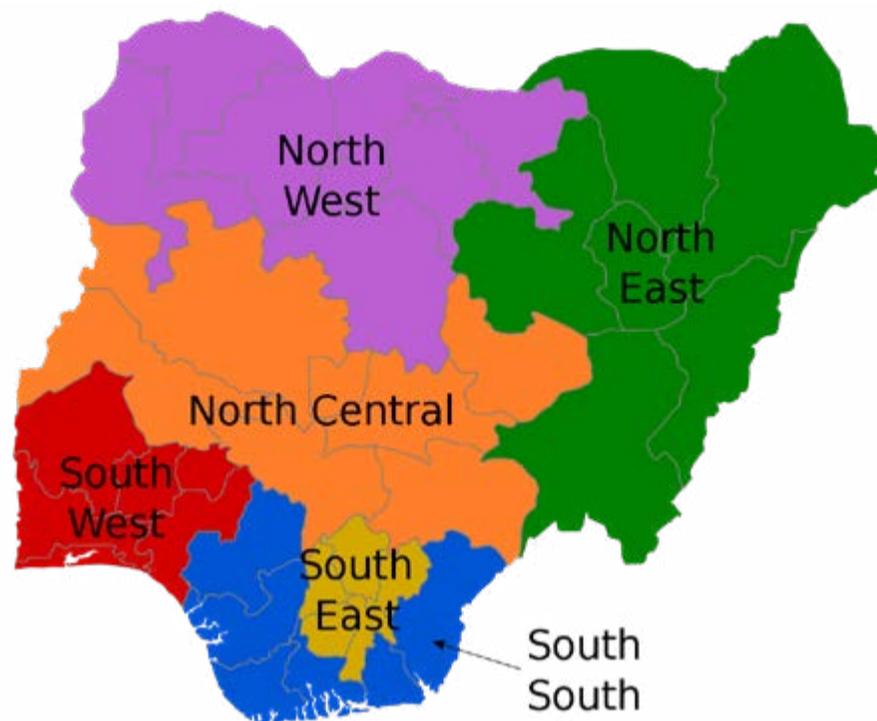
Conflict Drivers in North Central Nigeria

By Robert Feldman
OE Watch Commentary

Of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, its North East Zone is the one most often in the news as Boko Haram, which is situated there, periodically launches attacks that garner large amounts of publicity. Far less reported on is the North Central Zone. As the accompanying excerpted article from the Africa-based independent news source *The Conversation Africa* reports, violence has been significantly rising in the North Central Zone, which includes the Nigerian capital, Abuja, and several surrounding states. Conflict, especially over ethnic divisions and between farmers and pastoralists, has long plagued that impoverished region, but not to the recent extent. Interviews of household heads, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders by the article's author revealed some of the drivers behind the escalating violence. These include: the rise of criminal groups, increasing population pressure, open grazing, the proliferation of small arms, over-militarization of the public space, and intimidation of political opponents.

The over-militarization of public spaces is particularly interesting. Six military operations were launched in the North Central Zone between 2005 and 2020. Their intention was to deal with cattle rustling, armed banditry, and clashes between farmers and pastoralists. However, because of some soldiers' conduct, including alleged human rights abuses of civilians, the security situation worsened and civil-military relations were poisoned. The article does not state or imply any recent improvements between the local populace and soldiers.

Looking at the broader picture, the article describes over-militarization of public spaces, along with many of the other conflict drivers, as a failure of governance, especially as it relates to protecting the public. Therefore, recommendations to stem the rising violence



Nigeria's North Central Zone is experiencing increasing violence.

Source: Leviavery/Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Geopolitical_Zones_of_Nigeria.svg

Attribution: Public Domain

largely center on measures to improve governance. These include better community policing, tighter controls on ammunition, building community resilience to violence, and increased collaboration among the various levels of government. Thus, violence and its concomitant crises will likely continue to rise there unless steps are taken to counter the conflict drivers in the North Central Zone.

“Previous studies on violence in Nigeria have mostly examined what drives it in urban centers. Few have included rural communities.”

Source: Oluwole Ojewale, “What’s driving violence in Nigeria’s north central region,” *The Conversation Africa* (an African based independent news source), 7 July 2021. <https://theconversation.com/whats-driving-violence-in-nigerias-north-central-region-163532>

The escalating violence has deeply unsettled the local economy. Agriculture, the mainstay of the region’s economy, has been badly hit. Many farmers in the affected areas have abandoned their farms for fear of attack. And as a result of the herder-farmer conflict, the Nigerian government loses an estimated \$13.7 billion in revenue annually.

Previous studies on violence in Nigeria have mostly examined what drives it in urban centers. Few have included rural communities.

Added to this is a proliferation of small arms and light weapons, particularly locally manufactured ones. Nigeria has over 6 million small arms in circulation. In Benue and Plateau states, locally made weapons were used in about 50% of crimes committed. Also, reports show that ammunition from at least 21 different nations has been used in the herder farmer conflicts in north central Nigeria.

During election cycles, politicians have been known to provide youth with ammunition to intimidate political opponents. Youth gangs were hired and armed by politicians to fight their political opponents, steal ballot boxes, and generally rig the vote. After elections, the gangs kept the weapons and used them to develop criminal enterprises.

Since it will never be possible to prevent all conflicts from leading to violence, building and strengthening community resilience to violent conflict must become a policy objective of all tiers of government in Nigeria. This means the government must support and strengthen communities’ efforts to build bridges between warring groups, fostering peace and security.

Egypt-led Arab Economic Pact May Challenge Rise of Iran and Turkey



President Abdel Fattah Sisi of Egypt (2014).

Source: Russian Presidential Press and Information Office, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Президент_Республики_Египет_Абдельфаттах_Сиси.jpeg Attribution: CC BY-SA 3.0

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

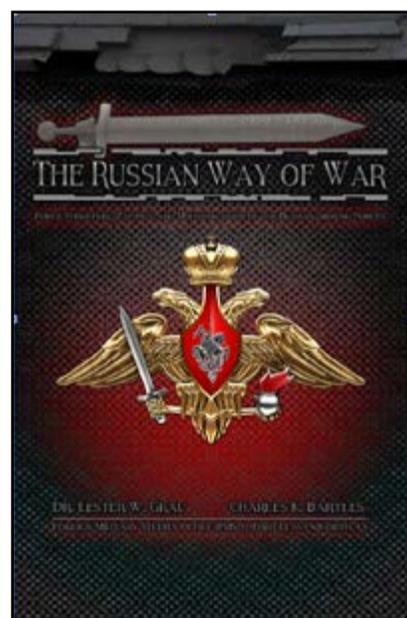
Since 2019, the heads of state of Egypt, Iraq and Jordan have met several times to discuss a new economic cooperation framework that is being dubbed the “New Levant” Alliance. Although built on economic foundations, this new “Arab” alliance could jolt the region’s strategic map, according to local media analysis and reporting. Over the last decade, the region’s two Muslim non-Arab countries (Iran and Turkey) have greatly expanded their influence in Arab-majority countries, particularly Syria and Iraq. A coalition of countries centered around Saudi Arabia and the UAE has at times sought to portray itself as the representative of Arab interests, but normalization with Israel has complicated the consistency of that narrative. The “New Levant” alliance marks Egypt’s attempt to “formulate a new security architecture,” according to the accompanying excerpt from an independent think tank called the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies. Arabism was central to Egyptian foreign policy in the Nasser era, and it appears ready to make a comeback, especially if the New

Levant alliance develops strategic dimensions. Indeed, many local analyses portray it as the foundations of an Arab political front to curb Turkish and Iranian influence. The accompanying excerpt from the Emirati think-tank Emirates Policy Center, published in September 2020, considers the new alliance a challenge to Iran because it “brings Iraq directly closer to the Arab system” and to Turkey because Turkish interests would be harmed by “a strong Arab bloc, with a strong economy and army.”

Egypt’s key national security concern at present involves the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) and its potential to affect downstream Nile River water flows. The other two countries of the New Levant alliance have water concerns of their own: Jordan, already highly water-deficient, has been facing a severe drought and buys desalinated water from neighboring Israel, while Iraq has upstream concerns given Turkish control over the headwaters of both the Tigris and Euphrates. President Sisi of Egypt has repeatedly argued that the GERD threatens Egyptian national security and consequently is a threat to Arab national security. Were it to coalesce into a unified front in disputes involving water security, the new alliance could indeed acquire a strategic dimension.

It is too early to know if and how the New Levant alliance will alter the region’s balance of power. As initially conceived in a 2014 World Bank report, the economic alliance was to include all Arab countries in the Levant, as well as Turkey. According to the excerpt from the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, though, Turkey has been engaged in an “international expansionist project based on the dismantling and decomposition of the Arab regional security system.” While these strong sentiments would seem to preclude Turkish inclusion in the alliance, there are indications that Egypt has been mending relations with Qatar, which as the article from the semi-official Egyptian daily al-Ahram notes, could foreshadow and pave the way for greater Turkish-Egyptian rapprochement.

“... The project includes a geopolitical dimension that would change the existing regional balances...”



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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<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/199251/download>

Continued: Egypt-led Arab Economic Pact May Challenge Rise of Iran and Turkey

Source:

الرحلة الرابعة... ماذا تخبرنا "الزيارة التاريخية" للرئيس السيسي إلى بغداد؟

(‘The Fourth Round’... What does the ‘historic visit’ of President Sisi to Baghdad tell us?),” *Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies* (independent think tank), 27 June 2021. <https://marsad.ecsstudies.com/58127/>

Al-Sisi’s visit to Iraq represents a historic event, being the first for an Egyptian president in 30 years, in addition to the great relative importance of Egypt and Iraq in the Middle East’s Arab power equation... the [2014] World Bank proposal put 7 likely countries to launch this integrated “regional” linkage, namely (Egypt - Iraq - Jordan - Syria - Palestine - Lebanon - Turkey) with a geographical area of more than two million kms. But the fundamental differences in the overall policies of the matrix countries, especially Turkey, which has an international expansionist project based on the dismantling and decomposition of the Arab regional security system from northern Iraq and Syria to southern Yemen to western Libya, prevented the World Bank from coming close to the realism needed to implement the project... The axes of the Egyptian move include Libya, Sudan, the eastern Mediterranean, and the eastern Arab regions of Iraq. It seeks to formulate a new security architecture for the region in a way that achieves sustained stability and slows the rotation of the mill of destruction and war in the vital field of Egyptian national security.

Source:

مشروع "المشرق الجديد": الفرص والتحديات والمسارات المحتملة

(The ‘New Levant’ Project: Likely Opportunities, Challenges and Trajectories),” *Emirates Policy Center* (Emirati think tank), 7 September 2020. <https://epc.ae/ar/topic/the-new-levant-project-likely-opportunities-challenges-and-trajectories> (English version: <https://epc.ae/topic/the-new-levant-project-likely-opportunities-challenges-and-trajectories>)

...The losers

- *Iran is at the forefront of the losers because the alliance brings Iraq directly closer to the Arab system and the attempt to find a new Arab bloc through which Iraq could be more effective within the Arab system...*
- *Turkey does not want a strong Arab bloc, with a strong economy and army, as this would affect its direct interests...*
- *The project includes a geopolitical dimension that would change the existing regional balances and impose new equations contrary to the context followed by the region since the beginning of the current century which marks the beginning of the history of the collapse of the Arab system and the decline of its status and influence in the ongoing interactions in the region... However, there are many indications of an Egyptian unwillingness to give the project a political dimension, limiting it to its economic dimensions because Egypt is not interested in counting on a specific party, and wants to manoeuvre between the various alliances and groupings. Moreover, Egypt’s current matrix of preferences does not give importance to reviving the Arab Mashreq region and reshaping the regional balance of power, even as its focus is largely on the issues of the Renaissance Dam and the Libyan conflict. Thus, Egypt is currently interested in the economic returns that may accrue to it from Iraq.*

Source: Dina Ezzat. “Baghdad Summit: A new pan-Arabism,” *al-Ahram* (semi-official Egyptian daily), 30 June 2021.

<https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/416251.aspx>

Al-Sisi’s participation in the three-way summit in Baghdad this week, according to Mohamed Ibrahim, deputy director of the influential Egyptian Centre for Strategic Studies, “sends a significant message about Egypt’s commitment to be there for Arab countries.” According to government sources, the message is not directed exclusively to the region’s non-Arab neighbours, but is also being sent to those Arab capitals pushing for Israel to get a free ride across the Arab region despite the absence of a fair and sustainable political settlement to the Palestinian cause... Egyptian officials argue the new rapport with Doha is an extension of Cairo’s approach towards Baghdad: it is designed to serve economic and security objectives...

The rapprochement with Doha could help push forward slowly improving Egyptian-Turkish relations. According to a concerned official, “Qatar’s close alliance with Turkey, and improving relations with Egypt, will help improve relations between Cairo and Ankara.”

Iraqi Government Seeks to Prevent Sabotage of Electric Transmission Lines

By Lucas Winter
OE Watch Commentary

Throughout July temperatures across parts of Iraq have consistently hovered near 122 Fahrenheit and coincided with nation-wide electricity cuts. As happened last summer, southern Iraq was especially hard hit, and protesters took to the streets. Some of the reasons behind the power cuts are familiar, including Iran’s withholding of the fuel needed to run electrical stations, inefficiencies and corruption in the Ministry of Electricity, and the creaky infrastructure’s difficulty in keeping up with demand. Yet there are several new elements that make Iraq’s 2021 power crisis unique.

This year, the electricity crisis has been compounded by sabotage attacks on electric transmission towers (pylons) across the country, particularly in the governorates of Diyala, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din. The Iraqi government has blamed ISIS for the attacks, and there is good reason to think the group is involved in attacks where it is otherwise active. However, as the accompanying article from the UAE-based news outlet *SkyNews Arabia* notes, local analysts also consider a variety of actors to be involved in the sabotage, from political factions positioning themselves for elections later this year to owners of private generators and contractors tasked with repairing electric infrastructure. The Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah militia, for its part, blames Saudi intelligence—without evidence—for the attacks, as reported in the accompanying excerpt from the Russian news website *Sputnik Arabic*.

In response, as reported by the Saudi daily *Elaph*, the Iraqi military’s Joint Operations Command has deployed forces from the army, police, Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), and tribal fighters to protect electric infrastructure. Since then, local media outlets have reported several cases in which IEDs placed at the base of towers were discovered and dismantled. Yet as the article from *SkyNews Arabia* explains, electricity towers are often in remote areas that are difficult to monitor; hence, the Iraqi government has contracted with



Rehabilitation and expansion of a 400kV/132kV substation along with the five feeders in the Diyala Province (2004).

Source: Photo by Polli Keller, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Gulf Region North, <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/35213/iraq-electrical-grid-gets-boost> Attribution: Public Domain

an unspecified Chinese company to obtain surveillance drones to monitor transmission lines.

In addition to the usual calls for upgrading infrastructure and curbing ministerial waste, Iraq’s current electricity crisis has yielded two new important developments. The first are calls for concrete measures to limit dependence on Iran, including the idea of linking Iraq’s grid with that of Saudi Arabia or Egypt (via Jordan). The second are calls from Iraqi politicians to invest in nuclear energy, restarting a program that was crippled by Israeli airstrikes three decades ago. According to the article from the Saudi-funded *Independent Arabia*, there are security concerns with Iraq pursuing nuclear power; furthermore, the economics of nuclear-generated electricity do not quite add up for Iraq. The article’s author makes the case that if Iraq indeed pursues a civilian nuclear program, it will likely be in collaboration with Russia’s Rosatom.

“... an ‘unprecedented’ wave of operations targeting electricity transmission towers between cities, especially those located in remote, uninhabited areas ...”

Source:

(Who is targeting Iraqi electricity?),” *SkyNews Arabia* (UAE-based news channel), 26 June 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/789bzy2m>

الكهرباء في العراق.. من يقف خلف استهدافها؟

Iraqi governorates have recently witnessed an “unprecedented” wave of operations targeting electricity transmission towers between cities, especially those located in remote, uninhabited areas... The governorates of Salah al-Din, Kirkuk, and parts of Diyala have borne the brunt of this targeting. The attacks are often carried out with improvised explosive devices and detonated from a distance. As a result, security forces and local communities believe that the terrorist organization ISIS is involved in these actions, especially since they are located in areas where the extremist organization is often active. Security sources and parliamentarians have recently talked about influential parties and personalities being behind these events in order to achieve financial gain, specifically those in charge of replacing damaged towers or providing fuel for private generators, which are sometimes a substitute for national energy supplies throughout the country... These hidden incidents prompted the Iraqi Ministry of Interior to recently contract with a Chinese company for the purchase of drones, in order to protect power lines. These attacks have exacerbated the country’s severe electricity problem, especially in the summer, when electricity is cut off in large parts of the country...

Continued: Iraqi Government Seeks to Prevent Sabotage of Electric Transmission Lines

Source:

تخريب لقطع الماء عن بغداد مع بدء خطة حماية أبراج الكهرباء

(Sabotage to cut off water from Baghdad with the start of the plan to protect electricity towers),” *Elaph* (Saudi daily), 6 July 2021.

<https://elaph.com/Web/News/2021/07/1445802.html>

... the Iraqi Joint Operations Command announced today the formation of a joint force to secure electric power transmission lines. The spokesman for the Joint Operations Command, Major General Tahsin al-Khafaji, said in a press statement to Iraqi media that “there are dozens of energy transmission towers that have been targeted by terrorists during the past days.” He added, “ISIS seeks to create security concerns by targeting the energy towers.” He revealed the formation of a joint operations room between the security forces and the Ministry of Electricity, whose mission will be to develop security plans to monitor and secure the energy towers and prosecute those who target them. He pointed out that joint forces were formed from the army, the police, the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and the tribal mobilization, to secure energy transmission lines throughout the governorates, with the support of drones and Iraqi army aircraft. This comes as the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Mustafa Al-Kazemi, appointed the former Basra Governorate Police Commander, Lieutenant-General Rashid Falih, to head the Electric Power Towers Protection Cell in the country.

Source:

تتهم الاستخبارات السعودية بالوقوف وراء تخريب أبراج الكهرباء في العراق اكتائب حزب الله

(Kataib Hezbollah suspects Saudi intelligence of being behind sabotage of electrical towers in Iraq),” *Sputnik Arabic* (Russian news website),

7 July 2021. <https://tinyurl.com/89x8r2ek/>

In a statement, Kataib Hezbollah said that it had confirmed “with conclusive evidence that Saudi intelligence was behind the sabotage of the electricity towers in Iraq,” noting that government investigations “will be subject to significant influences in order to not reveal the real culprit in sabotaging the towers.” It added that “By sabotaging electricity towers, Saudi Arabia aims to create chaos and cycle ISIS into the country,” accusing Riyadh of “striving to enter the crisis as a savior to restore its criminal image in front of Iraqis.”

Source:

العراق يتجه نحو بناء مفاعلات نووية و خبراء يقللون من جدواها

(Iraq moves toward building nuclear reactor as experts underestimate its feasibility),” *Independent Arabia* (Saudi-funded daily), 23 June 2021.

<https://tinyurl.com/33wn6r68aspx>

But what is new in the matter of the nuclear reactors is Iraq’s turning to Russia, after information received through government sources indicated that France was the closest in this regard, but Moscow announced its willingness to sell them with long-term loans... On September 24, 2020, al-Kazemi decided to form a government committee to start building nuclear reactors for research purposes, as the first official step to bring nuclear energy back to Iraq... “after Israel destroyed the reactor in July 1981, the idea of establishing a nuclear power plant was brought back in the 1990s with Russian help, but it was halted due to the 1991 Gulf War” ... Kovind Sherwani, a researcher in the field of energy, pointed out that... “the easiest thing for Iraq is to build large gas-powered plants, and invest in natural gas, especially since it has large reserves of 130 trillion [cubic] feet. That is better than importing technologies that carry risks, such as pollution or explosions, not to mention that it does not have the infrastructure for these technologies” ... Perhaps the unstable security situation and the spread of armed groups that are not under the control of the Iraqi state are the most important reasons preventing the construction of nuclear reactors in Iraq at present. The head of the Republican Center for Strategic Studies, Moataz Abdel Hamid, said that “the security environment does not allow the presence of a nuclear reactor in Iraq because of the uncontrolled weapons, militants and ISIS.”

The Growth and Challenge of Kazakhstan's Defense Industry

By Matt Stein
OE Watch Commentary

Kazakhstan's defense industry is not a giant in the global arms market. However, it sets Central Asia's largest state apart from others in the region and its history has been a case study of the larger growth of smaller arms industries worldwide. Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced in 2020 that it had no plans to purchase any new weapons or equipment from the country's own defense industry for the fiscal year 2021. While the Kazakh defense industry has shown signs of development and growth over the past several years, it still largely depends on purchases from the country's armed forces and no acquisitions in 2021 could deal a significant blow to the industry. The accompanying excerpted articles provide a look at how the industry continues to operate.

The article from Russian-language independent newspaper *Vremya*, reports on the recent launch of "a small patrol ship of the Aybar class." It notes a few of the ship's characteristics and that overall it is "the 27th ship launched from the shipyard of Zenit." The Zenit shipyard has been one of the more successful enterprises in the defense industry. Around half of Zenit's production has been for Caspian Sea detachments of the Kazakh border guards, which is subordinate to the National Security Committee, not the MoD. The Aybar class ships are also for Kazakhstan's border guards and it appears that Zenit continues to produce despite the MoD's announcement. In any case, the new ship "will undergo tests and then be put into service in the

Caspian Sea" soon.

The article from independent news website *Vox Populi*, looks at another enterprise in the country's defense industry. Government officials have said in the past that one of the obstacles facing the development of the defense industry was a lack of specialists with technical expertise. The article reports how "in 2018, Kazakhstan launched the first and so far only factory in the republic for the development and production of unmanned aerial vehicles" and that the company has already been working for a couple years with a team of specialists, including "physicists, electrical engineers and production workers."

The article goes on to note how engineers at the company have been working "with military specialists from the National Defense University" and that they have designed "a classic airframe construction for a military model" of a new unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV). Additionally, the article mentions that the new UAV is equipped with "thermal imaging cameras" and that it "is about three times cheaper than its foreign counterparts." Officials in the Kazakh defense industry have stated that sales to other countries is a long-term goal of the industry. Ultimately, the Kazakh MoD may not purchase this UAV for some time, but it appears that the company will be in a position to offer a serviceable system at a competitive price.

“In 2018, Kazakhstan launched the first and so far only factory in the republic for the development and production of unmanned aerial vehicles.”

Source: Zlata Udovichenko, "“Туркестан” уходит в путь (“Turkestan” goes out to sea),” *Vremya* (Russian-language independent newspaper in Kazakhstan), 5 May 2021. <https://time.kz/articles/zloba/2021/05/05/turkestan-uhodit-v-put>

A small patrol ship of the Aybar class was launched in the River Chagan. The displacement of the ship is 70 tons, the cruising range is up to a thousand kilometers and its speed is up to 37 knots...The latest “Aybar” is the 27th ship launched from the shipyard of Zenit...The ship is named “Turkestan”...it will undergo tests and then be put into service in the Caspian Sea.

Source: Oleg Boldyrev, “Казахстанские беспилотники на службе армии и бизнеса (Kazakhstan unmanned aerial vehicles in service of the army and of business),” *Vox Populi* (independent news website in Kazakhstan), 15 February 2021. <https://voxpathuli.kz/kazahstanskije-bespilotniki-na-sluzhbe-armii-i-biznesa/>

...In 2018, Kazakhstan launched the first and so far only factory in the republic for the development and production of unmanned aerial vehicles...The factory is located 20 kilometers from Almaty...This place was not chosen by chance: tax preferences are in effect here, which allowed KazTechInnovations to create and launch the production of innovative products in the shortest amount of time – just two years. “...We have our own team, which is made up of top specialists – physicists, electrical engineers and production workers...” says Tair Balbayev, the general director of the company...

The most popular commercial drones used in Kazakhstan today are produced in Russia and China. Most of them are in the shape of a flying wing...According to Balbayev, this form is too unstable for difficult conditions in Kazakhstan: gusts of wind can cause critical breakdowns...That is why Kazakh engineers, together with military specialists from the National Defense University, have chosen a classic airframe construction for a military model, which is made up of a fuselage, wing and a tail unit...

Along this path a reconnaissance UAV, called “Shagala” (seagull) was created. The device got its name because of its bent wing characteristics of seagull, increasing its stability...(it) weighs about 30 kilograms. It is equipped with two electric motors and thermal imaging cameras...The Kazakhstani model is about three times cheaper than its foreign counterparts...The company can produce up to 150 military drones a year...

Turkish Armed Forces Becoming Increasingly Politicized



Seal of the Turkish Armed Forces.

Source: Turkish Armed Forces via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Seal_of_the_Turkish_Armed_Forces.png, Attribution: Fair Use

By Karen Kaya
OE Watch Commentary

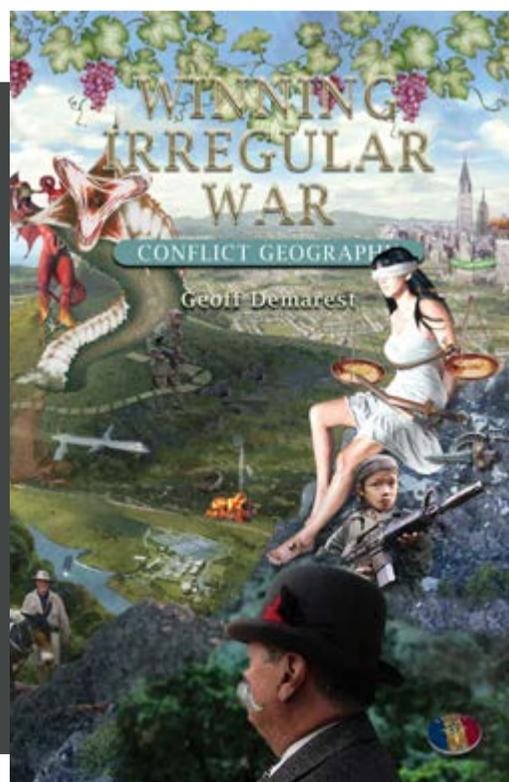
According to Admiral (ret.) Türker Ertürk, a fierce critic of the current Turkish government, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party is succeeding in its methodical efforts to politicize the country's military, NATO's second largest. This represents a sharp departure from most of Turkey's modern history, when defense policy was made based on the perspective and dogmas of the armed forces. Ertürk resigned from the Turkish military in 2010, and has since been a public figure through his many appearances on television and radio programs, international conferences, articles, as well as a brief period as a member of the main

opposition party. In a recent extended article, he discusses the changes taking place within the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and blames the government for destroying the institutional knowledge of the TAF acquired over its long history. Ertürk claims "the destruction of the TAF," as his article is titled, is taking place in six areas: traditions and genetic codes; command structure; Supreme Military Council; military schools; the military justice system; and the military health system. Reviewing the changes in each of these categories, he concludes that the TAF's traditions are being severed and replaced with a politicized military, especially following the coup attempt of 15 July 2016.

In particular, he points out, the Supreme Military Council, whose most important job was to appoint generals and admirals, "has been transformed into a non-military council through which the incumbent party, via its party organization, manages soldiers' promotions and retirements." He claims the ultimate goal of the administration is to create a "party-military." He warns that in a country where military retirements and appointments are determined by the political government, "merit disappears and politicization reaches an all-time high." In addition, the Turkish Land Forces (Army), Navy, and Air Force Commands, which had been under the full control of the Turkish General Staff before the failed coup, were brought under the Defense Ministry, which Ertürk claims has had the effect of abolishing the command-and-control link between the Force Commanders and the Chief of the General Staff. Ertürk claims that all of these changes add up to a "huge blow to the institution."

While one may dismiss Ertürk's observations as partisan, they are echoed by many observers of Turkish military affairs. For example, the second accompanying passage by Fikret Bila, a journalist considered to be very familiar with the Turkish military, discusses similar changes to the structure of the Turkish military after the coup attempt, warning that they will result in promotions to the higher ranks based on loyalty to the governing party rather than the traditional method of seniority or merit.

“The traditions, practices and institutional knowledge... that go back to the ... Republic of Turkey's independence and its founding, are trying to be destroyed.”



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>

Continued: Turkish Armed Forces Becoming Increasingly Politicized

Source: Türker Ertürk, “Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri’ndeki Tahribat (Destruction within the Turkish Armed Forces),” <https://www.turkererturk.com.tr/> (The website of retired Turkish Admiral Türker Ertürk), 6 March 2021. <https://www.turkererturk.com.tr/tskdaki-tahribat/>

There is serious destruction in all of Turkey’s government institutions and this destruction is continuing at a dizzying pace. ... In this piece, I will try to explain the reasons for this existential destruction, its background and in particular, the results it has had and may have on the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF).

Traditions and Genetic Codes of the TAF

... the TAF who, per its traditions and genetic codes, has always been loyal to the founding ideology, committed to secularism (the backbone of democracy) and our founding ideology, has always been on the side of critical thinking, positive science and modernity, has become the target of the administration. As part of this targeting, the Supreme Military Council has become the party council, the TAF’s command structure has been disrupted in violation of the Constitution, Military High Schools have been closed and the structure of the War Colleges have been changed. As a result, the traditions, practices and accumulation of knowledge based on the staff that goes back to the War Colleges and the Republic of Turkey’s independence and its founding, are trying to be destroyed.

The TAF’s Command Structure

Article 117 of the current Constitution says, “The Chief of the General Staff is the commander of the Armed Forces, and acts as Commander-in-Chief during times of war on behalf of the Presidency.” But today, the Chief of the General Staff is not in the position of being the commander of the TAF, due to powers that the administration has taken [upon itself], that are not in the Constitution. The administration has abolished the command-and-control link between the Force Commanders and the Chief of the General Staff. Who will be the commander of the TAF during war? If it will be the Chief of the General Staff, how will he manage units that he cannot command during peacetime, units whose war preparations he can’t develop or evaluate?

Supreme Military Council (SMC)

The SMC is actually a technical team and one of its most important jobs is to manage promotions and appoint Generals and Admirals. This is similar to how its done all over the world. This technical military team has been turned into a political team. So SMC has been transformed into a non-military council through which the incumbent party (via its party organization) manages soldiers’ promotions and retirements. No doubt, a party-military isn’t made in a day, but this is the goal of the administration.

As it happens all over the world, if a soldier does not have professional career autonomy; and if his retirement and appointments all the way to the very lowest levels are happening with the political government’s intervention, merit disappears and politicization reaches an all-time high.

Conclusion

Changes have been made to the TAF ... that dealt a huge blow to the institution. The Gendarmerie General Command was removed from the TAF; The Supreme Military Council was civilianized, paving the way for politics to enter the TAF; Military High Schools were closed, War Colleges and Academies’ structure changed and quality decreased to create a vulnerability in the TAF’s training and education; Military Hospitals were closed, creating a problem with field health services and battle surgery. The military justice system was abolished, creating a vulnerability in discipline.

Source: Fikret Bila, “TSK’da yeniden yapılandırma sinyalleri (Signs of a restructuring within the Turkish Armed Forces),” [T24.com](https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/fikret-bila/tsk-da-yeniden-yapilandirma-sinyalleri,23573) (an independent Turkish online newspaper), 28 August 2019. <https://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/fikret-bila/tsk-da-yeniden-yapilandirma-sinyalleri,23573>

Following the 15 July coup attempt, a series of decisions involving the TAF were made. One of the most important ones was the change in the member structure of the Supreme Military Council (SMC). The structure, which included 15 Army Generals and Admirals led by the Prime Minister, was changed. Now, the number of Military members have gone down to four (The Chief of the General Staff and the Commanders of the three Forces), and the number of civilians have gone up to seven (President, Vice President, Justice Minister, Defense Minister, Treasury Minister, Interior Minister, and Education Minister).

Following the last SMC meeting, the reduction in the number of Army Generals and Admirals within the TAF from 15 to seven is being seen as a sign of a future restructuring of TAF. While the four-star Generals who’ve completed their time are being retired, the fact that none of the lieutenant generals who have reached the seniority level have not been promoted to four-star generals, has led to the question of whether the number of four-star generals will be decreased even further in the new restructuring.

... Of course the most widely discussed issue is that it would be a mistake to base the TAF structure, promotions and commander appointments on loyalty rather than the traditional method of seniority and merit.

Somalia's Fractured Army Temporarily Holding Together



Members of the Somali National Army during a house-clearing exercise.

Source: AMISOM/flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/au_unistphotostream/7786576378 Attribution: Public Domain

By Robert Feldman
OE Watch Commentary

Expectations that the Somali National Army (SNA) is a unified fighting force were shattered 25 April when it split in two and several hundred soldiers from both sides exchanged gunfire. As the excerpted accompanying scholarly publication from the Royal African Society *African Arguments* points out, the trigger for this fissure was a political dispute over the presidential election. Thus, despite the SNA finally starting to look more professional after years of investments and training, and coupled with a new command structure that supposedly increased cohesiveness, these appearances of unity gave way rather quickly to divisions along clan lines.

The article describes the two camps as loyalists, who are aligned with the government, and mutineers, who oppose it. The dispute enraging these two can be traced back to February when voters were to choose a president and members of the parliament. That election however was postponed due to disagreements between the federal government and two member states, Puntland and Jubaland. Still deadlocked in April, the country's lower house of parliament voted to extend both its own mandate and that of the president, commonly known as Farmaajo, for an additional two years. Arguments followed that such extensions were illegal and soon thereafter the army violently split into two factions, fighting each other instead of al-Shabaab.

With a new agreement regarding elections, at least for now, according to the article, the split has been papered over. Greater integration of the SNA by creating units that draw from several clans, as has been done successfully with two very effective commando brigades, might create a more permanent fix. For the present though, similar to much of the government, clan rivalries continue to threaten the stability of the military.

“The Somali National Army's recent infighting along clan lines exposed its ongoing fragility. But integration is possible.”

Source: Liban Obsiye and Liban A. Hussein, “Somalia's Divided Army Reflects Its Divided Politics,” *African Arguments* (a scholarly publication from the Royal African Society), 23 June 2021. <https://africanarguments.org/2021/06/somalia-divided-army-reflects-its-divided-politics/>

The Somali National Army's recent infighting along clan lines exposed its ongoing fragility. But integration is possible.

This move was met with outrage both in Somalia, whose Senate rejected the move, and among the country's international donors. There had already been protests and some clashes in Mogadishu in February, but on 25 April the sound of bazookas and machine gun fire could be heard in much of the capital as soldiers allied to the opposition took up strategic positions. They argued the term extension was illegitimate and claimed soldiers allied to the president had been attacking opposition leaders. The violence, which split by clan, led up to an estimated 100,000 people to flee their homes.

After returning to negotiations, the federal government and federal member states came to an agreement on 27 May. They decided that Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble would oversee indirect elections – similar to Somalia's 2017 process – within 60 days.

Nearly a decade – and huge investments – later, the SNA has made progress. Yet it still lacks a unified and coherent operational philosophy that transcends clan loyalty. Most soldiers are former clan militias who have been given national uniforms but continue to operate within clan structures and territories. The army's leadership is dominated by members of Somalia's major clans.

But ultimately, Somalia's national army will never be able to truly succeed until wider societal mistrust is addressed. Many clan rivalries have yet to be meaningfully reconciled. Elite politics continues to be played out along clan lines. And the country's federal system lacks clear guidelines on the division of national security responsibilities between the federal government and federal member states.

Regional Responses to Assassination of Haitian President



President Jovenel Moïse in January 2020, around the time the president began to rule by decree.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Prezidan_Jovenel_Mo%C3%AFse.jpg
 Attribution: Wikimedia Commons

By Ryan Berg
 OE Watch Commentary

Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated on July 7, 2021, coming at the worst possible time for Haiti and its political stability. Moïse had been ruling by presidential decree since January 2020, following a period of instability during which parliamentary elections were not held. Consequently, there are rival claimants to the position of interim president as the country's humanitarian situation worsens. For the most part, however, regional commentary has been subdued and focused on the details of the assassination itself. While many details regarding the attack and its motivations remain murky, a widely read daily newspaper in Puerto Rico, *Primera Hora*, notes that this is just one in a long line of assassinations of sitting political leaders in the Western Hemisphere. Dating back to 1915, the newspaper counts no fewer than seven such assassinations, including in Haiti. Complicating the investigation, as well as regional relations, Colombian President Iván Duque has confirmed the participation of ex-militaries from the country. An article in the largest media outlet in Argentina, *Clarín*, generally considered to be centrist in political orientation, states that the original intention of the operation was to kidnap the Haitian president, indicating an operation gone horribly wrong. Investigators have yet to unearth the intellectual author of the operation, although there are several potential suspects.

“The director of the Colombian police, General Jorge Luis Vargas, revealed that the intention of the ex-military was to detain President Moïse and then hand him over to the DEA.”

Source: “Iván Duque confirmó que los exmilitares colombianos presos participaron del asesinato de Jovenel Moïse (Iván Duque confirmed that Colombian ex-military prisoners participated in the murder of Jovenel Moïse),” *Clarín* (the largest media outlet in Argentina, generally considered to be centrist in political orientation), 16 July 2021. https://www.clarin.com/mundo/haiti-ivan-duque-confirmando-exmilitares-colombianos-presos-participaron-asesinato-jovenel-moise_0_13gwD80vq.html

There was a smaller group of the 23 who knew exactly what the ghoulish plan was. There were others who were recruited under the guise of providing a security service, but possibly a few more learned over the course of days that there was something behind it...The director of the Colombian police, General Jorge Luis Vargas, revealed that the intention of the ex-military was to detain President Moïse and then hand him over to the DEA.

Source: “Asesinato de Jovenel Moïse se une a la trágica lista de magnicidios en América (Assassination of Jovenel Moïse joins the tragic list of assassinations in the Americas),” *Primera Hora* (a widely read daily newspaper in Puerto Rico), 7 July 2021. <https://www.primerahora.com/noticias/mundo/notas/asesinato-de-jovenel-moise-se-une-a-la-tragica-lista-de-magnicidios-en-america/>

The assassinated president of Haiti, Jovenel Moïse, joins the tragic list of assassinations committed in the Americas, among which the president of the United States John F. Kennedy or the Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo stand out. In Haiti, moreover, it is not the first assassination. On July 27, 1915, President Jean Vilbrun Guillaume Sam was assassinated by an enraged mob after hiding in the French embassy.