

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH



Volume 6
Issue #9
September 2016

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

SPECIAL ESSAY

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ON THE COVER: An Iranian ship entering Colombo, 9 February 2015.
Source: http://cdn.yjc.ir/files/fa/news/1395/4/12/4776330_715.jpg

OEWATCH

Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

Volume 6 | Issue 9

September | 2016

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Iraq: The Tactical and Political Challenges of the Mosul Offensive

OE Watch Commentary: Despite suffering heavy losses in Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State (ISIS) still controls Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, which has high symbolic and strategic importance for the group. However, there are signs that an offensive to drive ISIS out of Mosul is imminent. The accompanying passages discuss the tactical challenges of liberating Mosul, including booby-trapped buildings, street-by-street fighting in a large city, human shields, and the prospect of a huge refugee crisis. These point to a potentially long and bloody battle in Mosul. Further complicating the issue is Iraq's internal divisions: competing groups want to take part in the offensive, with the goal of having control over the territory after it is taken from ISIS.

As the first passage points out, after the fall of Fallujah in June, Mosul is the last major bastion of ISIS in Iraq. As the country's second largest city, it has high symbolic value for ISIS in addition to its strategic importance. It was here that the group's chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed a caliphate two years ago. However, the effort to liberate Mosul involves the risk of 1.3 million civilians being caught in the crossfire, given that ISIS often prevents the population from fleeing and uses people as human shields. The passage also points out that the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross are preparing for large waves of refugees.

The second passage also points out that liberating a large city like Mosul, which will entail street by street fighting, with booby-trapped buildings, promises to be costly and time consuming. The author also points out that Mosul was where the Iraqi army collapsed in June 2014, quickly abandoning its positions and tons of equipment in the face of a rag-tag army of jihadists.

As the second passage points out, further complicating the issue is a coordination nightmare: Iraqi Kurdish forces, the *peshmerga*, would like to take part in the operations, as would the irregular Shi'a forces, who are also pushing for a role. However, as the final passage discusses, Kurds' desire to take part is being resisted by the central government in Baghdad, which would like their role to be limited. The piece points out that Baghdad fears the *peshmerga* are unlikely to return to government control any territory they capture from ISIS or use it as a bargaining chip in future negotiations with authorities over other issues. In addition, Shiite militia leaders say that if the Kurdish *peshmerga* are allowed to take part in the Mosul offensive, they should be too. Thus, the battle for Mosul exposes fractures that will threaten Iraq even after ISIS is cleared. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“In such a large city [like Mosul] street by street fighting, with booby-trapped buildings, promises to be costly and time consuming...”

Source: “Mosul: The next humanitarian disaster waiting to happen,” *Deutsche Welle*, 19 August 2016. <http://www.dw.com/en/mosul-the-next-humanitarian-disaster-waiting-to-happen/a-19489059>

“All signs suggest that an offensive to drive IS from Mosul is imminent... After the fall of Fallujah in June, Mosul is the last major bastion of IS in Iraq. As the country's second largest city, it has high symbolic value for IS in addition to its strategic importance. It was here that “IS” chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed a caliphate two years ago. But the liberation offensive will involve the risk that the estimated approximately 1.3 million civilians remaining in Mosul will be caught in the crossfire. Both the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are preparing for large waves of refugees.

“The upcoming battle for the liberation of the city of Mosul will cause an unprecedented crisis - and hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Source: Henri Barkey, “The Raqqa Imperative,” *The National Interest*, 8 April 2016. <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/04/08/the-raqqa-imperative/>

“Although Mosul is a much larger target and rescuing civilians from IS's occupation is a critical goal, in such a large city, street by street fighting, with booby-trapped buildings, promises to be costly and time consuming...

Mosul is where the Iraqi army collapsed in June 2014, quickly abandoning its positions and tons of equipment in the face of a rag-tag army of jihadists.

“Further complicating this question is a coordination nightmare: Iraqi Kurdish forces, the peshmerga, would also take part in the operations, and irregular Shi'a forces from down south are pushing for a role as well.”

Source: Youssef Hamza, “Battle for Mosul exposes fractures that threaten to haunt post-ISIL Iraq,” *The National AE*, 21 August 2016, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/battle-for-mosul-exposes-fractures-that-threaten-to-haunt-post-isil-iraq#page2>

“The Kurds are another group whose desire to send their peshmerga fighters into Mosul is being vigorously resisted by the government. Baghdad fears they are unlikely to return to government control any territory they capture from ISIL or use that ground as a bargaining chip in future negotiations with authorities over a host of outstanding issues...The government insists the peshmergas' role in the assault on Mosul should be restricted to support outside the city...

Shiite militia leaders, most of whom have little or no love for the regional Kurdish government, have made it clear that if the peshmerga is allowed to take part in the assault on Mosul, then they should be too.”



Syria: A Potential Turning Point in the Fight Against ISIS

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is being pushed back in Syria. Most recently, the city of Manbij, a key stronghold for ISIS in northern Syria, has been reported 98% cleared of ISIS. Manbij was a major border crossing point where foreign fighters used to join the group in Syria, and a vital hub for the group's smuggling business. Thus, this development is being hailed as a major victory towards the eventual extermination of ISIS. The accompanying passages from Arab and Turkish sources discuss this city's importance in the fight against ISIS.

As the first passage from a Gulf-region news source points out, on 12 August, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—a coalition of Arab and Kurdish fighters—announced that they had liberated Manbij. The passage notes that the operation was dramatically slowed down by ISIS's use of civilians as human shields. It points out that the recapture of Manbij is a major blow to ISIS's self-proclaimed caliphate across Syria and Iraq. The city was of great symbolic importance as one of ISIS's larger strongholds. It was a vital hub for the group's substantial smuggling business and a center for the foreign fighters from Europe who wanted to join it.

The second passage, from a Turkish news source notes that Manbij was ISIS's "door to Europe" and claims that it has now been cleared of the group after a 70 day operation. The third passage also notes that the Manbij offensive is an important turning point in the fight against ISIS. It points out that the effort to push ISIS back is entering a new stage; claiming that the coalition has recovered 50 per cent of the territory that ISIS seized in Iraq and Syria in 2014.

Despite this important victory, the political question of who will govern Manbij is more complicated. The SDF, who led the campaign to expel ISIS from Manbij, includes a lot of Kurdish fighters. As such, the Kurds might expect to rule the city, as noted in the final passage. However, Turkey and the Syrian opposition have already warned against Kurdish attempts to dominate the city. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Manbij was ... a vital hub for [ISIS's] substantial smuggling business and a center for the misguided foreign recruits from Europe who wanted to join [the group].”

“Manbij, which was ‘the door to Europe’ for ISIS, has been cleared of [the group] after a 70-day operation...”



Source: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/07/led-air-strikes-kill-21-civilians-syria-160719045329897.html>

Source: “Coalition deserves to celebrate its victory in Manbij,” *Gulf News*, 14 August 2016. <http://gulfnews.com/opinion/editorials/coalition-deserves-to-celebrate-its-victory-in-manbij-1.1879002>

“..[T]he expulsion of Daesh from the Syrian regional city of Manbij is an important step forward to the eventual extermination of this group.

On Friday [12 August] the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced that they had fully liberated Manbij, after two years of occupation and a grim battle since June that displaced almost 100,000 civilians and left more than 400 dead.

The speed of the SDF's advance into Manbij was dramatically slowed down by Daesh's use of civilians as human shields, which forced the SDF to clear the city house by house. This has been a hallmark of Daesh's former urban strongholds like Tikrit and Ramadi in Iraq, and it will make the eventual struggle to retake Mosul in Iraq and Raqqa in Syria all the more harder.

The recapture of Manbij is a major blow to Daesh's self-proclaimed caliphate across Syria and Iraq. The city was of great symbolic importance as one of Daesh's larger strongholds, but in addition since it was only 25 miles (40km) from the Turkish border, Manbij was also a vital hub for Daesh's substantial smuggling business and a center for the misguided foreign recruits from Europe who wanted to join Daesh.”

Source: “Membiç IŞİD'in elinden kurtarıldı (Manbij has been saved from ISIS),” *Cumhuriyet.com.tr*, 12 August 2016. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/583598/Membic_ISiD_in_elinden_kurtarildi.html

“Manbij, which was ‘the door to Europe’ for ISIS, has been cleared of [the group] after a 70'day operation...”

Source: Hassan Hassan, “How Manbij can deliver a post-ISIL success story,” *The National*, 21 August 2016. <http://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/how-manbij-can-deliver-a-post-isil-success-story>

“The fight against ISIL is entering a new stage. The ... coalition has now recovered 50 per cent of the territory that ISIL seized in Iraq and Syria in 2014....

“Since they led the battle and lost many fighters, the Kurds might expect to rule the city. Turkey and the Syrian opposition have already warned against attempts to dominate.”



Iran Demands Release of Nigerian Shi'ite Cleric

OE Watch Commentary: Over the last decade, Iranian authorities have moved from considering themselves a regional power in the Persian Gulf, to a pan-regional power also projecting force in the northern Indian Ocean, to a country that defines its strategic boundaries as the Eastern Mediterranean and Gulf of Aden. But while Iran's direct military involvement in Syria and Iraq and its involvement by proxy in Lebanon, Yemen, and perhaps Bahrain attract US and broader international concern, Iranian authorities increasingly seek to leverage religious and cultural ties further abroad. Here, there has long been an Iranian focus on Africa broadly and West Africa more specifically. Iranian authorities have both tried to leverage the Lebanese Shi'ite diaspora community that settled across the region decades ago as well as proselytize to create new Shi'ite communities. This has created tension in the past. Morocco, for example, cut diplomatic ties with Iran in 2009 for, among other reasons, Iranian efforts to spread Shi'ism in the Kingdom. Gambia and Senegal both severed ties with Iran after accusing the Islamic Republic of supporting rebels or smuggling arms. In 2010, Nigerian customs authorities seized a shipment of weaponry from a ship whose manifest and containers falsely labeled them as building materials.

It is against this backdrop that Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's advocacy on behalf of Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, Nigeria's most prominent Shi'ite leader becomes important. Zakzaky is leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, and began advocating for a Shi'ite Islamic Republic on Nigerian territory in 1979, as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini triumphed in Iran. In subsequent years, Zakzaky has often parroted Iranian policy positions, condemning Israel's existence and celebrating Qods Day on the last Friday of Ramadan. On 25 July 2014, the Nigerian military clashed with Zakzaky's followers during Qods Day commemorations in Zaria, killing almost three dozen. The following year, 60 people died in clashes between the military and Zakzaky's supporters after the Nigerian government accused Zakzaky's followers of responsibility for an assassination attempt on Nigerian Army Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai. In the aftermath of that incident, the Nigerian government arrested Zakzaky.

Zakzaky has long dismissed any formal ties to Iran, and he has denied receiving money from the Islamic Republic. However, Zarif's advocacy suggests his ties to Iran are significant. The Iranian advocacy for Zakzaky comes alongside similar Iranian advocacy for Sheikh Isa Qasim, a Bahraini ayatollah whom authorities have placed under house arrest, but stands in sharp contrast to the failure of Iran to advocate for Saudi Shi'ite leader Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr before he was put to death. Nimr, however, was from the Shirazi school of Shi'ism and generally opposed clerical rule as practiced in Iran. The fact that Zarif has chosen Zakzaky as the subject for advocacy might suggest that Nigerian suspicions that the imprisoned sheikh seeks to create the Shi'ite equivalent of Boko Haram have some merit. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin).**

“Zarif...strongly urged Nigeria to free Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky”



Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky before his arrest.
Source: Alalam.ir, <http://goo.gl/FqiLuN>

Source: “Dar Khvast Jedi Zarif baraye Azadi Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky,” (“The Serious Demands of [Foreign Minister] Zarif for the Freedom of Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky”), *Islamic Students' News Agency*, 28 July 2016, <http://goo.gl/RQAvRZ>

Zarif Demands Freedom for Sheikh Zakzaky

The foreign minister of our country, who during the middle of the week visited Nigeria during his tour of West Africa, in a meeting with the president and foreign minister of this country, strongly urged them to free Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky. According to ISNA [Islamic Students' News Agency], Hojjat al-Islam Ali Falah Zarumi, representative of Al-Mustafa University [in Qom], who was in the Iranian delegation to Nigeria, said, “Dr. Zarif in his meetings with Nigerian officials, including the president of the republic and minister of foreign affairs, expressed grave concern about the physical situation of Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky and about the issue of his freedom, seriously called on all Islamic sects to maintain unity. The Foreign Minister of Iran emphasized that freedom for Sheikh Zakzaky would have a productive impact on the battle against extremists like Boko Haram in Nigeria.



Iran: Revolutionary Guards Take Part in Russian Military Games

OE Watch Commentary: In Western policy circles, Iran's relationship with Russia is often discussed in terms of arms purchases or

Russia's willingness to give diplomatic cover at the United Nations for Iranian ambitions. However, even as the Russo-Iranian diplomatic relationship has achieved a warmth not seen in more than 500 years, many Iranians retain their historical distrust of Russia, arguing that Russia will drop its support for Iran in an instant should it become in Moscow's interest to do so.

Perhaps this is one reason why Russia is sponsoring—and the Iranian military participating fully in—the International Army Games, a sort of military Olympics. While almost a couple dozen countries are participating, Iran's participation is relatively broad and not simply symbolic. Indeed, Iran is competing in more events than any other country beside Russia, China, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Venezuela. In the excerpted article, the hardline Tasnim online portal close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps outlines seven competitions. While some—like the sniper competition might be self-evident, other events are less clear: The tank biathlon involves individual and relay races in T-72 tanks over obstacles courses and with requirements to fire on targets along the way. Suvorov attacks involve similar exercises, but in BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles. The Airborne Platoon competition involved BMD-2 airborne fighting vehicles or BTR-82A armored personnel carriers, D-10 series parachute systems, and Arbalet parachute systems and requires parachute landings, races, target competition with small arms and grenade launchers, overcoming water obstacles, and relays. The Depth competition tests swimming, underwater orientation, and underwater search and rescue, and the Elbrus Ring competition is a mountaineering and climbing competition.

Soft power is important, and Russia's International Army Games seem a means to promote personal relations between elite troops not only between Russia and Iran, but also among a broader array of countries which increasingly form a pro-Russian even if informal axis in opposition to the United States. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Forces drawn from the best of the best of the army, Revolutionary Guard, and Basij...will participate in Russia's International Army Games.”



A Russian soldier checks an Iranian participant's weapon.
Source: Mashreghnews.ir, <http://goo.gl/pg1NX7>

Source: “Avalin Tasavir az Hazur Takavuran-e Artesh va Sepah dar Rusiya” (“The First Photos from the Presence of Army and IRGC Rangers in Russia.”) *Tasnim.ir*, 27 July 2016. <http://goo.gl/VR7DKA>

Iranian Military in Russia's 'Military Olympics'

The exercises of our country's premier armed forces in an international military competition in Russia have begun. From our country, seven teams will participate in the tournament: frontier snipers, tank biathlon, Suvorov attacks, airborne platoon, Elbrus ring (mountain unit), Seaborne assault, and depth. It was declared that these forces were drawn from the best of the best from the army, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Basij. The members of the teams dispatched by Iran trained for six months to achieve physical fitness, and for ten days before they departed, they also boarded in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Imam Hussein University. The International Army Games for the leading countries of the world held in Russia and Kazakhstan are now in their second iteration. The games were previously held in 2015. Until now, 23 countries have confirmed that they will participate... These games will begin on August 1 and conclude on August 14, and will take place in several cities in Russia and Kazakhstan.



Iran: New UAV to Disrupt Enemy Communications

OE Watch Commentary: Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) are increasingly a platform which Iranian military doctrine emphasizes. Every month, Iran seemingly unveils a new UAV or UAV capability. While Iran had developed its first UAVs in the 1980s, in just the first six years of this decade it has developed separate reconnaissance drones, “kamikaze” drones, and other attack drones. In addition, it has claimed the ability to navigate drones by satellite GPS overcoming the need for line-of-sight control. If the article excerpted here—and reprinted nearly verbatim in a number of Iranian newspapers the same day or in the two days after—is accurate, then Iran has augmented its UAV fleet with drones capable of jamming enemy communications and disrupting communications between an adversary’s drones and its controllers.

It remains unclear, however, whether Iran has actually achieved this technology or if its claims are merely aspirational—after all, the Iranian press often exaggerates. However, both Iran’s hacking and engineering prowess are advanced and so, even if the new drone has yet to fulfill its aims, it is likely Iran will soon achieve such a capability that will impact regional countries’ drone fleets if not that of the United States.

The Iranian emphasis on drones seems to be a bet on asymmetric warfare strategies. While Iran is increasingly engaged militarily throughout the region, it projects its power largely by proxy or with a limited number of ‘trainers.’ Even as tension rises and perhaps conflict on some level looms with Saudi Arabia or other Gulf Cooperation Council states, it is doubtful Iran will ever willingly engage in direct naval warfare or battles between standing armies. It might seek to reinvigorate its air force with planes purchased from Russia or China or revamp its naval fleet, but the emphasis on various UAV platforms suggests that the Iranian military is preparing for a different, lower-intensity conflict in the future: a type of conflict in which drones harass or seek to stymie high-price platforms used by its Arab neighbors and the Arab monarchies across the Persian Gulf. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“One of the most important achievements...was a UAV capable of disrupting enemy communications”



Iran's new UAV designed to jam enemy communications

Source: Tasnimnews, <http://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1395/03/03/139503031653414637756774.jpg>

Source: “Ravanmaye az ‘Pehpad-e Akhlalgar’ nazaja va Qabaliyat Ayjad Barazit dar Samaneh-haye Ertebat-e Doshman” (“Launch of ‘Disruptive UAV’ Capable of Jamming the Communications Systems of the Enemy”), *Iran Students Correspondents Association*, 2 August 2016, <http://www.iscanews.ir/news/666873>

Launch of UAV to Disrupt Enemy Communications

The latest achievements of the army were shown this morning in the most recent exhibition of defense equipment, and Army Chief [Ahmad Reza] Poudestan visited these achievements. One of the most important achievements on display in this exhibition was a UAV capable of disrupting enemy communications that was for the first time exhibited and unveiled. In addition to this UAV, other UAVs with imaging capabilities and a laser system able to disrupt the surveillance of other drones was also shown.



Al-Rukban and Jordan's Elusive Desert Adversary

OE Watch Commentary: Jordan faces a complex challenge at the al-Rukban desert crossing with Syria, near the border with Iraq.

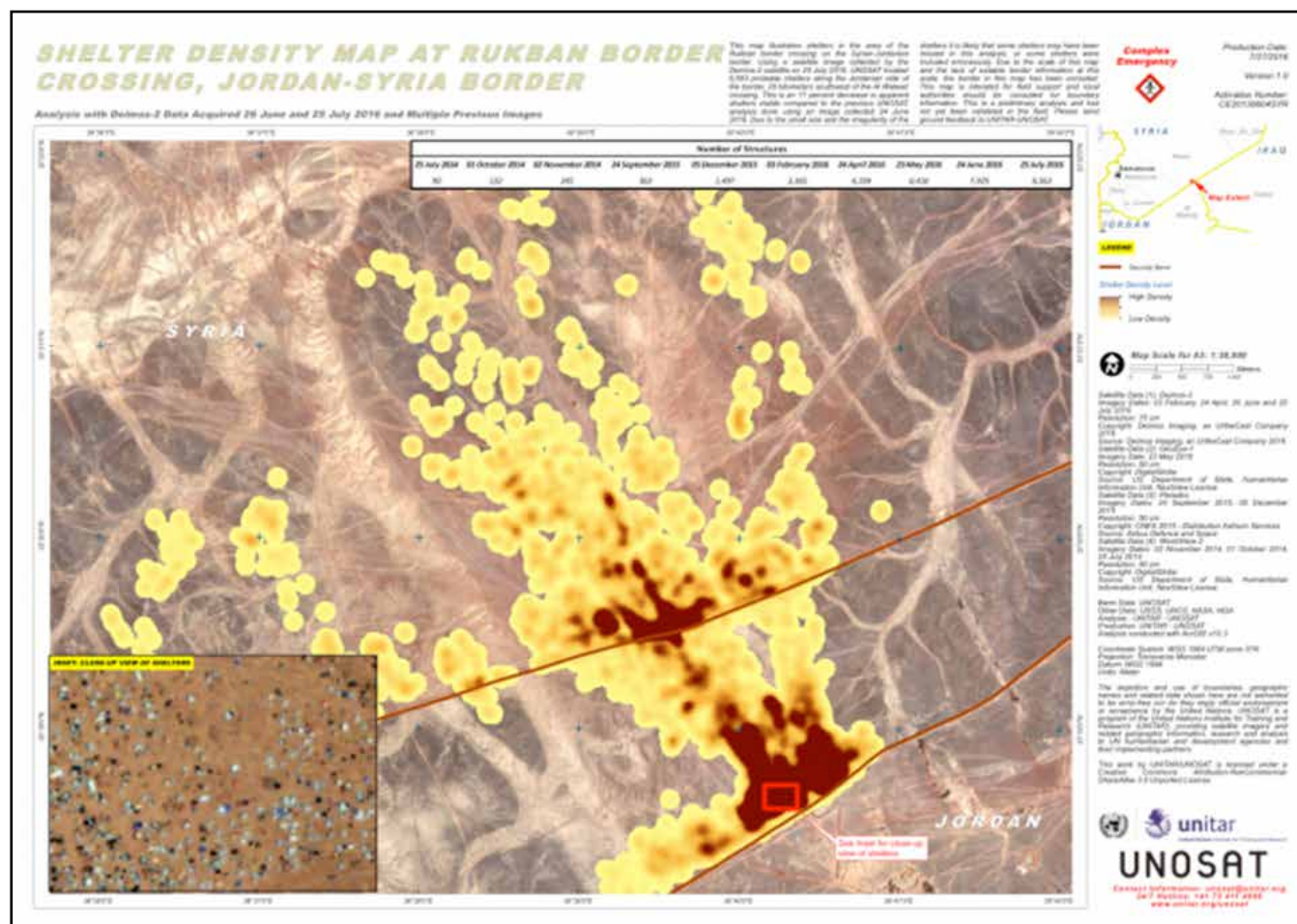
In the course of a few months starting in November 2015, an ad hoc refugee camp at the border swelled from a few thousand to an estimated 100,000 refugees. Most of the refugees are vulnerable women and children living in makeshift tents clustered next to the Jordanian side of the border, in a neutral zone between Syria and Jordan known as “the Berm.” Conditions are harsh and the camp is dependent on outside sources for water and other basic necessities. Jordanian intelligence services believe ISIS operatives and sympathizers are hiding among the refugees. Jordan has already taken in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, primarily from areas where cross-border social ties are strong. Most of al-Rukban’s refugees hail from ISIS-controlled territory and have no social ties to Jordan.

On 21 June, an explosives-laden vehicle crashed through the al-Rukban crossing, killing a handful of Jordanian personnel. Jordan immediately sealed the border and declared it a closed military zone. The attack was launched from the camp and claimed by ISIS, as noted in the first accompanying article. With the exception of water, delivery of basic aid was halted (on 4 August, relief organizations conducted a one-time cross-border food drop using large cranes).

The second accompanying article, published in *al-Jazeera* in late June 2016, argues that a clash between ISIS and the Jordanian military looms. The article claims that the Jordanian military has a precise list of ISIS and al-Qaeda-linked targets along the border, but fails to note that most if not all of these targets are in populated areas to the west, socially and geographically distant from the desert surrounding al-Rukban. The article mentions a new Jordanian military unit called the “Desert Hawks” (Suqur al-Sahara), which is to act as a desert “mobile strike force” capable of engaging ISIS targets within a limited range across the border in Syria and Iraq. The name choice is odd, given that Syrian loyalist forces have had their own anti-ISIS mobile desert strike force called the Desert Hawks since 2013.

The Syrian Desert Hawks emerged in 2013 under the patronage of regime insiders with interests in Syria’s steel, iron and energy industries. Their original field commander’s day job was leading operations in the Syrian Desert for the notorious Palmyra branch of Syrian Military Intelligence (“the Badia Branch”). (continued)

“...perhaps even a border war with Bashar al-Assad’s regime...”



Al-Rukban Density Map from July 2016

Source: <http://reliefweb.int/map/syrian-arab-republic/shelter-density-map-rukban-border-crossing-jordan-syria-border-27-jul-2016>

Source: اعتقال الاردن لعناصر في المخابرات تورطت في فضيحة بيع اسلحة (Jordan Arrests Intelligence Agents Implicated in Weapons Selling Scandal,)” *Rai al-Yaum*, 27 June 2016. <http://www.raialyoun.com/?p=465177>

Perhaps the biggest shock comes from the car bomb that exploded at a Jordanian military checkpoint last Tuesday, in the al-Rukban border area. The car came from the refugee camp on the Syrian side of the border, and led to the death of seven soldiers and aid workers. The car was part of a batch of 4x4s that were provided to Syrian opposition groups via Jordan. ISIS subsequently claimed responsibility for the attack.

Source: المواجهة بين الأردن وتنظيم الدولة تقترب من مسافة الصفر “Clashes Between Jordan and ISIS Looming,” *al-Jazeera*, 28 June 2016. <http://goo.gl/Yl6LNx>

Jordan has a map of precise and important targets for ISIS and its affiliates in areas near the border, in addition to a separate map with Nusra Front targets... the formation of a Jordanian military brigade called the “Desert Hawks,” which will function as a mobile strike force to deal with the threat of ISIS. They will operate within Syrian and Iraqi territory near the border. The force has small military vehicles ready for quick deployment and execution.

(continued)



Continued: Al-Rukban and Jordan's Elusive Desert Adversary

The Palmyra branch is believed to have informants and operatives in ISIS-controlled territory, and opposition media has accused Desert Hawks leaders of brokering trades between ISIS and the government.

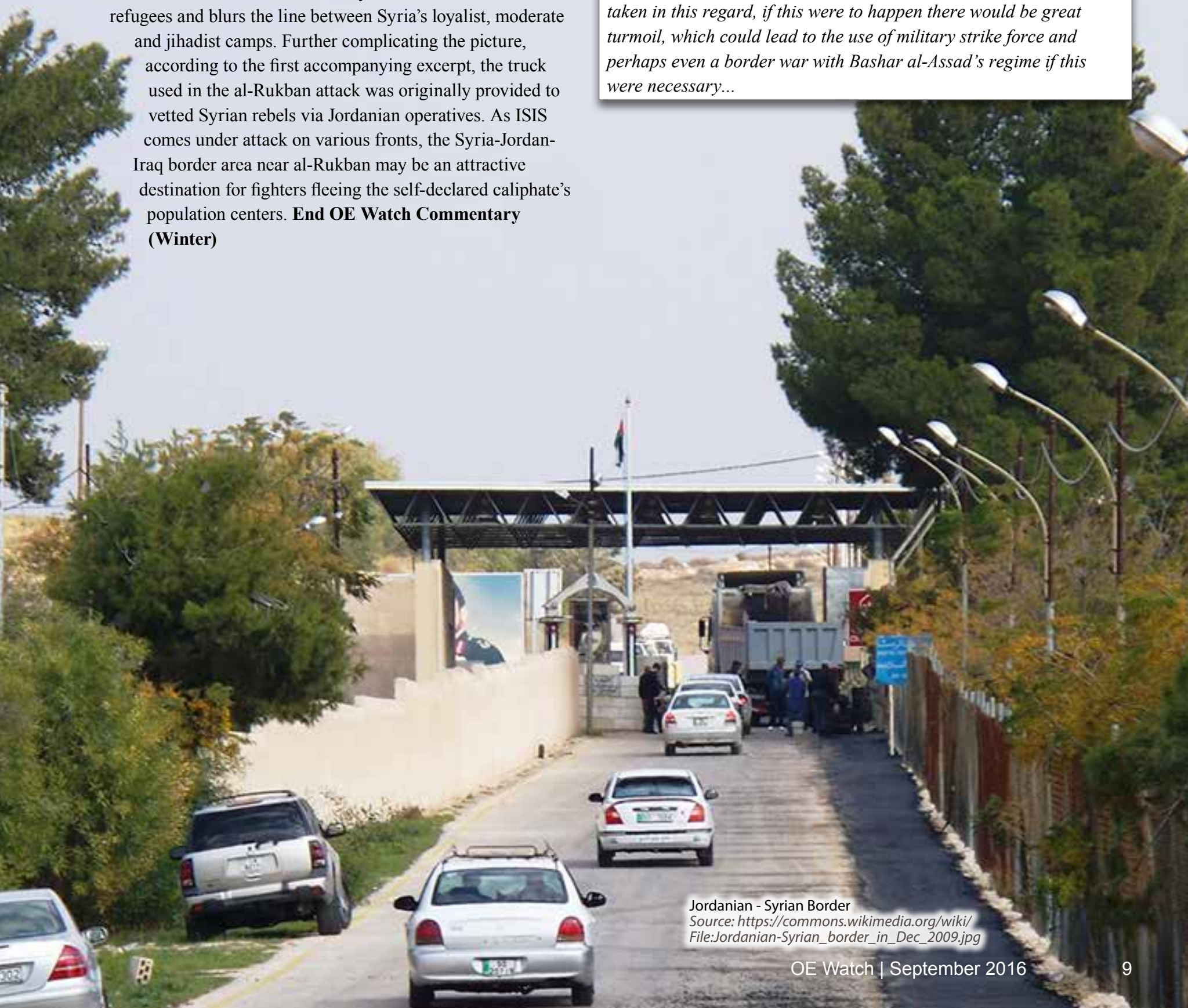
In the third accompanying article, a former Jordanian minister argues that Jordan should be focused on Syrian loyalist forces rather than on ISIS. Writing in the prominent Saudi Arabian daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, he claims that Syrian military intelligence and its allies and proxies deliberately facilitated the sudden growth of the al-Rukban refugee camp. The camp has become a bargaining chip for pressuring Jordan, he believes, under the threat of sowing panic among refugees and forcing them to storm the border en masse. Rather than a fight with ISIS, the author sees in al-Rukban the potential for a border war with the Syrian loyalist camp.

Jordan faces an elusive desert adversary who hides behind refugees and blurs the line between Syria's loyalist, moderate and jihadist camps. Further complicating the picture, according to the first accompanying excerpt, the truck used in the al-Rukban attack was originally provided to vetted Syrian rebels via Jordanian operatives. As ISIS comes under attack on various fronts, the Syria-Jordan-Iraq border area near al-Rukban may be an attractive destination for fighters fleeing the self-declared caliphate's population centers. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source:

مخيم الركبان دولة لداعش بدل دولته القديمة
 "Al-Rukban Camp a New ISIS State," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 30 June 2016. <http://goo.gl/83VK83>

Jordan has foiled many attempts by Bashar al-Assad's regime intelligence and security agencies to bring ISIS, Hizbullah and foreign sectarian organizations - particularly from Afghanistan - to Jordan's northern border... Jordan was suspicious of the sudden displacement from Raqqa, Deir Ezzour and other areas to al-Rukban, particularly since Bashar al-Assad's intelligence agencies, Hizbullah, and the al-Quds Brigade oversaw the movement ... Jordan has begun to deal with this camp as a terrorist base and now has to deal with saboteurs who could provoke a series of destructive explosions to force al-Rukban's residents to flee en masse across the Jordanian border. Despite all the rapid precautions that have been taken in this regard, if this were to happen there would be great turmoil, which could lead to the use of military strike force and perhaps even a border war with Bashar al-Assad's regime if this were necessary...



Jordanian - Syrian Border

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jordanian-Syrian_border_in_Dec_2009.jpg



Syrian Subterranean Warfare: Suicide Fighters and Quadcopters

OE Watch Commentary: The cult of the *inghimasi* is an important though understudied element of subterranean warfare in Syria and Iraq. The term *inghimasi* literally means one who submerges, plunges or fully immerses; it is used to denote fighters who have no expectation of returning alive from their mission (for more information, see: “The Islamic State’s Suicide Fighters,” in the June 2015 issue of *OE Watch*). The *inghimasi* have acquired an exalted status, particularly among jihadist factions. Sunni rebel groups in Syria and Iraq have built up sizable units of effective suicide shock troops, through a combination of military training and indoctrination.

One of the most ambitious recent *inghimasi* operations was a late April operation in which Free Syrian Army-linked rebels in Aleppo used sewer lines in an attempt to sneak an alleged 600 fighters across loyalist lines. If successful, the attack would have been among the Syrian conflict’s most effective subterranean operations. Loyalist forces were alerted by “the noise from 600 fighters moving with their ammunition through an underground tunnel,” and they dropped toxic gas bombs and explosive charges into the tunnel. Rebels acknowledged 21 deaths and 64 injuries in their ranks. Most of the attack force withdrew, and the government quickly posted videos online showing its forces clearing the sewage tunnel.

The week after the failed *inghimasi* attack, a different Aleppo rebel faction killed nearly 50 loyalist forces by demolishing their building from below. Tunnel mining is simpler, safer, and often more effective than sending forces through attack tunnels, particularly for rebels with manpower surpluses but limited equipment and training. Syrian rebels have effectively mined tunnels since at least 2013. Only in the last few months have their propaganda videos included aerial images of the detonation.

The bombing mentioned above, as well as one in July which destroyed a government-held building in downtown Aleppo, both include blast footage filmed by a small quadcopter. In addition to capturing good propaganda images, these flying video cameras can greatly improve the situational awareness of tunnel diggers. Alongside shovels, pickaxes, and wired electric and communications systems, they will likely become basic equipment for tunneling units.

Tunneling has become a tactic of choice for insurgents in both Syria and Iraq. Tunnel diggers leave behind a robust social media trail, which will be further enriched with the spread of quadcopter footage. According to the second accompanying article, activists have published details on a citywide tunnel network dug by ISIS fighters in preparation for the defense of Mosul. One should expect aerial video surveillance capabilities to be a component of this underground defense system. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...the noise from 600 fighters moving with their ammunition through an underground tunnel...”



Aerial footage of tunnel bomb, downtown Aleppo, July 2016
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wtt71Huc-UE>

Source:

تفاصيل العملية الكبيرة التي فقد بها الثوار 21 مقاتلا غرب حلب
“Details on the Major Operation in Which Rebels Lost 21 Fighters in West Aleppo,” *Arabi 21*, 2 May 2016. <http://goo.gl/AD8HmY>

The Rashidin Operations Room denied that the reason for the operation’s failure was a leak to regime forces or betrayal, instead attributing it to “the noise from 600 fighters moving with their ammunition through an underground tunnel”... the operation began with 600 fighters infiltrating through a sewer tunnel approximately 4 kilometers long and 1.5 meters in diameter. The fighters were below ground for five hours before regime forces discovered the operation, after which they dug holes in the tunnel and dropped gas and smoke bombs inside. The Mujahideen Army then directed its artillery fire toward the tunnel, forcing regime forces to withdraw from above the tunnel. Before doing so regime forces dropped an explosives charge in an attempt to cave in and block the tunnel. By divine grace the pathway was not blocked and the fighters had mallets and chisels, which they used to expand the tunnel where the explosion occurred in order to withdraw.

Source:

بعد شواذ الرقة.. أنفاق لداعش في الموصل
“Following Raqqa’s Tarps... ISIS Tunnels in Mosul,” *al-Arabiya*, 7 June 2016. <http://goo.gl/rMeoUG>

Syrian activists published a report that details where these tunnels can be found. The report claims that ISIS dug trenches to connect the city’s neighborhoods and facilitate the movement of its leaders. The tunnels are found throughout the city. Some have been completed, while others are in process. The most important ones include the tunnel behind the 2d Division HQ, formerly al-Kindi Base, which had previously been prepared as a hedge but has now been greatly improved...



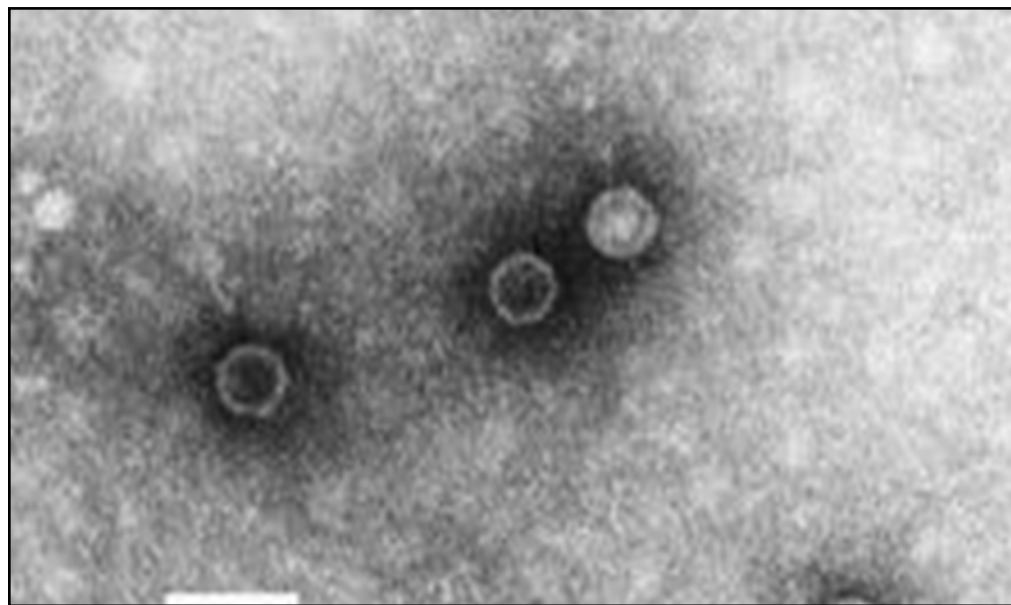
Yet Another Hardship from Living Under Boko Haram... the Return of Polio

OE Watch Commentary: With its last reported case of wild-type polio on 24 July 2014, Nigeria was cautiously optimistic that it could go one more year without any new outbreaks, earning it certification as being polio free by the World Health Organization. Unfortunately, as the accompanying article relates, such certification will have to be postponed because two fresh cases have been reported in Gwoza and Jere, areas that until recently were under control of Boko Haram.

With the insurgency raging, and with Boko Haram opposed to Western science, including vaccinations, it was not just difficult to reach rebel controlled areas for vaccination campaigns, it was sometimes deadly as the terrorist group targeted public health workers. As a result, large numbers of people went without vaccination against this crippling disease. When the Nigerian military liberated regions previously controlled by Boko Haram, public health workers could finally both vaccinate and monitor the previously inaccessible populations, leading to the discovery of the two new cases.

It is difficult to say if Nigeria was truly polio free during the past two years or if it was just unreported from certain areas. What is known though is that polio has the potential to spread, which is why at least three special vaccination campaigns are planned. Unfortunately, there is a strong possibility that based on previous experiences these will have only limited success in rebel controlled territory, increasing the likelihood that new cases of polio will occur, and thus forcing the Nigerian people living under Boko Haram who have already suffered so much to endure yet one more hardship. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“All these [polio] cases are coming out of areas that were liberated by the gallant activities of our soldiers.”



Through targeting vaccination workers and other means, Boko Haram enables the polio virus, pictured above, to spread.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Polio.jpg>

Source: Judd-Leonard Okafor, “How polio returned to Nigeria,” *Daily Trust (Nigeria)*, 11 August 2016, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/how-polio-returned-to-nigeria/158649.html>

Its last case of polio on record was 24 July 2014, and its zero-case status had held firm for two straight years.

The new cases come only weeks after its second-year milestone—and months before it was to clinch World Health Organisation certification after solid three years without the virus.

One infection was found in a child in Gwoza council area, the other in Jere council area—two places that had been inaccessible in the height of the insurgency.

“It wasn’t that we were not doing the job. A chunk of the state was out [of] reach. We couldn’t reach children there,”...

“With this confusion, where people were cut off and health workers were very big targets, we couldn’t reach these populations being liberated,”...

The two children making up Nigeria’s standing cases of polio virus infection are among thousands born since then and have “had no contact with civilization since they were liberated,” ...

“But we did not expect that there would be polio. We were expecting nutrition and other problems.”



The RED DIAMOND is the Army’s leading e-journal highlighting current threats in the Operational Environment. It is produced by the Threats Intelligence Support Activity (US Army TRADOC G-2) and posted at: <https://www.us.army.mil/suite/files/25364306>.



Shekau Ousted as Boko Leader, Then Apologizes?

OE Watch Commentary: In early August 2016, ISIS released a video declaring that its affiliate, Boko Haram, in West Africa, had a new leader: Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi, the son of the founder of Boko Haram, Muhammed Yusuf. The announcement was totally unexpected, not least to Boko Haram's current leader, Abubakar Shekau, who came out days later, rejecting that al-Barnawi was in fact a legitimate new leader of the group. Instead, Shekau insisted, he was still the head of Boko Haram. This announcement of al-Barnawi as the new ISIS-appointed head of Boko Haram has created two internal factions of Boko Haram. The two attached pieces focus on understanding and interpreting Shekau's rejoinder.

The first accompanying passage offers excerpts of Shekau's rejoinder about the appointment of al-Barnawi. In the broadest terms, Shekau admits that he and Boko Haram have heard of the appointment of al-Barnawi as the new head of Boko Haram, but refuse to accept al-Barnawi's leadership, based on his lack of qualifications, which Shekau details in eight points. He also refers to al-Barnawi as an 'Irja[i]', a term which Shekau uses to describe insufficiently radical jihadists. In addition to suggesting the list of new targets that Boko Haram will pursue, the video closes with Shekau insinuating that he will remain at the head of Boko Haram, and that the movement will remain loyal to ISIS, despite the attempted reshuffle.

The second editorialist, from nearby Burkina Faso, analyzes the Shekau video, and suggests that rather than being interpreted as an act of defiance against the ISIS decision, it should instead be read as an apology of sorts. At the core of the appointment of al-Barnawi was lingering tension between ISIS leader al-Baghdadi and Shekau, particularly over Boko Haram's tendency to attack Muslims, which ISIS did not like. Thus, the author of this article suggests that the video was less defiant, and more of a shrouded apology to ISIS, intended, as the author suggests, as "an act of humanity, intended to stay in the good graces of Daesh."

End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)

"This declaration from Abubkar Shekau [to stay at the head of Boko Haram, but stop targeting Muslims] which might initially seem like an act of defiance of the Islamic State, actually seems to us to be more of an act of contrition..."



In August, ISIS named Abu Musab al-Barnawi the new head of Boko Haram. Boko Haram's current leader, Abubakar Shekau, has claimed that this appointment is illegitimate. Source: <http://sango-ti-kodro.over-blog.com/2016/08/boko-haram-le-nouveau-chef-c-est-abu-musab-al-barnawi.html>

Source: No author cited, "I'll fight Nigeria, whole world, Boko Haram's Shekau boasts in new video." *Vanguard (Lagos)*, 8 August 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/ill-fight-nigeria-whole-world-boko-harams-shekau-boasts-new-video/>

[Transcript of Shekau's video message]:

"News has recently come to us through the media outlets, including those of the infidels. The news was that someone has been made leader or vicegerent of our movement in West Africa. But we are telling you that the appointed person has no qualifications to become our leader. We have listened and heard from them and their comment and how they tried to defame Ahlil Sunna wal jamaaa and we are further convinced that such a person cannot become our leader...."

"Besides, our leader, Abubakar Shekau, has sent you an eight-point message detailing why the person you appointed cannot lead because he is one of those that are called irjai. You (Albagdadhi) have sent a message back to our leader asking for the meaning of Irjai which he explained to you and you have failed to get back to us till date...."

"We have not reneged on our professed loyalty in the leadership of Albagdadi. We are still with him. But we will not entertain any middle man to come between us and the Khalifa Albagdadhi until we meet face to face with the Khalifa or get a video or audio message from him, then we will reveal to him core secrets about those they are building their trust on..."

Source: "Saho" (Pseudonym), "Nigeria: Sortie du chef de Boko Haram - L'acte de contrition de Shekau? (Nigeria: Departure of the BH Head of Boko Haram: An Act of Contrition from Shekau?)" *Le Pays (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso)*, 10 August 2016. <http://lepays.bf/sortie-chef-de-boko-haram-lacte-de-contrition-de-shekau/>

Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko, in a new video, contests the new decision of the Islamic State as regards his ouster as the head of the group...

This declaration from Abubkar Shekau, which might initially seem like an act of defiance of the Islamic State, actually seems to us to be more of an act of contrition, given that many members of the Islamic State find Shekau to be too radical and extremist, responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people since 2009, Muslims being in the majority. This decision to stop targeting Muslims from the man who refers to himself as "the imam of Boko Haram in Nigeria, and of the entire world" seems to be an act of humanity, intended to stay in the good graces of Dasesh.

As evidence of penance, Shekau has vowed to remain loyal to the Islamic State, and taking personal responsibility for the group's actions. Thus, the squabble within Boko Haram does not necessarily signal a weakening of the jihadist group, but instead, suggests the emergence of a double-edged sword. On one hand, the existence of two rival factions now means that they might attempt to "out-radicalize" each other, leaving Nigeria and its neighbors in a pool of blood. On the other, if Shekau actually is gone, this means that he might be replaced by an even more deadly leader. Whatever the outcome, the decision of the Islamic State has had the effect of waking up the monster (Shekau)....giving him the opportunity to demonstrate to the world that he isn't finished just yet.



Boko Haram Leadership Split to Bring More International Attacks

OE Watch Commentary: As detailed in the previous piece (“Shekau Ousted as Boko Leader, Then Apologizes?”), in August 2016, ISIS named Abu Mus’ab Al-Barnawi as the new leader of Boko Haram. While some of the implications of the shift were previously detailed, perhaps the most significant impacts will be seen in the nature of Boko Haram’s tactics. The accompanying passages from the Nigerian press discuss an important shift in the group’s tactics.

In the aftermath of the announcement that ISIS had appointed a new head, Boko Haram’s current head, Abubakar Shekau announced that the group would shift its tactics. One of the primary rifts with ISIS has been Boko Haram’s willingness to attack Muslims, of which ISIS does not approve. As a result of his desire to stay in the good graces of ISIS, Shekau has vowed to change tactics. In promising to halt (or limit) attacks on Muslims, Shekau has sought to ramp up efforts against other adversaries, doubling down on his threats to attack other areas of Nigeria, and other parts of West Africa.

As the accompanying passages discuss, one of the main shifts in Boko Haram’s presumed tactics is expanding the group’s reach, both within and outside of Nigeria. Particularly important is the call to other West African countries, namely Niger, Cameroon, and Chad, to expect more violence there. As Shekau stated forebodingly, “We are also warning you the infidels of the West African countries that in no distant time, you are going to be visited with a calamity from us that will marvel you all for a long time to come. We will shock the world very soon. Watch out for us.” Internally, as Zenn relays in an article in this issue (“Nigeria Terrorism Alert Coincides with Boko Haram Leadership Rift”), the announcement of al-Barnawi has put the Nigerian government on a so-called “Red Alert,” due to attacks in the Federal Capital Territory looking to be more imminent. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

“We are also warning you the infidels of the West African countries that in no distant time, you are going to be visited with a calamity from us that will marvel you all for a long time to come. We will shock the world very soon.”



The ISIS appointment of Abu Musab al-Barnawi to the head of Boko Haram is supposed to signal a change of Boko Haram’s tactics, which includes halting or limiting attacks on Muslims, as well as ceasing to use women and children, like those pictured here, as suicide bombers.

Source: <http://www.unmultimedia.org/radio/english/2015/11/change-of-tactics-for-boko-haram-following-military-push/#.V7wvTa5kA2c>

Source: No author cited, “I’ll fight Nigeria, whole world, Boko Haram’s Shekau boasts in new video,” *Vanguard (Lagos)*, 8 August 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/ill-fight-nigeria-whole-world-boko-harams-shekau-boasts-new-video/>

[Transcript of Shekau’s video message]:

“...We are also warning you the infidels of the West African countries that in no distant time, you are going to be visited with a calamity from us that will marvel you all for a long time to come. We will shock the world very soon. Watch out for us.

“The Chief of Army Staff, General Buratai and the army spokesman, Kukasheka; we are going to show you our strength in Nigeria. The world should know that we are no longer out to fight Nigeria but our battle is of the entire world. And the battle has just begun. It is going to be a fresh battle for you soldiers of Nigeria. Die you all in your rage.

“To you, President Buhari, very soon you will see us inside your home, the presidential palace. You will hear from us right in there by the will of God. Abuja will hear from us very soon. We will demolish infidels and bring down the green white green and replace it with our flag....

“Die you all in your rage. We are out to wage war on the world.”

Source: No author cited, “Nigeria: Boko Haram Threatens to Attack Infidels of the West African Countries, Buhari’s Presidential Villa,” *Vanguard (Lagos)*, 9 August 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201608100061.html>

In an apparent bid to reaffirm his relevance, Boko Haram’s former leader, Abubakar Shekau, has threatened fresh but more vicious attacks on Nigeria, saying this would culminate in an attack on President Muhammadu Buhari in the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

...In the concluding part of the video message that featured the group speaking from a thick forest that conforms with the Nigerian vegetation during the rainy season, the masked speaker threatened more vicious war against Nigeria and its West and Central African neighbours, including Cameroon, Chad and Niger, very soon.



Info Ops and Chibok Girls

OE Watch Commentary: As reported in the Nigerian press, Boko Haram recently released a statement claiming that the Nigerian Air Force had killed some of the Chibok Girls in an air raid that it conducted in the Sambisa Forest, the area outside of Maiduguri where Boko Haram is known to hide. For its part, the Nigerian Air Force denied these accusations, claiming that this could not have happened, because it was conducting very targeted operations.

As readers will recall, the Chibok Girls are a group of some 276 school-aged girls that were abducted by Boko Haram in April 2014 from their school in the village of Chibok. National outrage over the capture of the girls had ensued. While some of the girls are said to have escaped, the vast majority are still believed to be in captivity, or, are married off around the country, or outside of it. The Chibok Girls stand as the starkest symbol of Boko Haram's ability to strike at the heart of the Nigerian social psyche, and the military's general inability combat it.

The recent allegations that the Air Force had killed some of the Chibok Girls—and the denials from the government that this actually happened—are unsurprising. Boko Haram's motivations for making the claim—true or not—is to vilify the Nigerian military as being both incompetent, as well as indifferent to the general Nigerian populace's well-being. Painting the Nigerian government and military as the source of many of the region's problems, and not the answer to them, has long been at the core of Boko Haram's message, since the ascension of Shekau to the group's head in 2009. Importantly, Boko Haram is also attempting to continue to leverage the girls as bargaining tools, demanding that parents of kidnapped girls lobby the Nigerian government for the release of Boko Haram detainees in exchange for the girls. The Nigerian Air Force is characteristically rejecting the notion of any malfeasance. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

“It is extremely difficult and rare to hit innocent people during airstrikes because the operation is done through precision attack on identified and registered targets and locations.”



Boko Haram claims that the Nigerian Air Force killed some of the Chibok Girls in a recent raid. The Air Force denies these assertions.

Source: <http://www.yukibox.com/a-ray-of-light-on-chibok-girls-by-shehu-garba/>

Source: Uwugiaren, Iyobosa and Zacheaus Somorin, “Nigeria: Boko Haram Accuses Airforce of Killing Abducted Chibok Girls,” *This Day (Lagos, Nigeria)*, 15 August 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201608150273.html>

...Boko Haram, on Sunday accused the Nigerian Airforce of killing some of the girls abducted from Chibok, Borno State in 2014.

The terror group in its latest video, released by the Abubakar Shekau faction, purportedly showing some of the missing girls, alleged that some of the girls were killed during the Airforce's strikes on its camps in Sambisa Forest.

But the Defence Headquarters swiftly refuted Boko Haram's claim, saying that while it was still studying the video to ascertain its veracity, it was improbable that its airstrikes could have killed innocent citizens since the defence forces took extra care to protect civilian population in the theatre of war.

“It is extremely difficult and rare to hit innocent people during airstrikes because the operation is done through precision attack on identified and registered targets and locations,” it said in a statement released by its Director of Information, Brigadier-General Abubakar Rabe.

According to Rabe: “The Precision Airstrike is very effective at taking out targeted enemies because it is not a random operation. We are nevertheless studying the video clips to examine if the victims died from other causes rather from the allegation of airstrikes.”...

The video shows purported recent footage of dozens of the abducted school girls with a veiled fighter claiming, some of the girls had been killed in air strikes. One of them identified as Maina Yakubu, said she was from Chibok. She said: “What I want to tell my parents and the federal government is that the federal government should please release Boko Haram members in custody of security agents so we too can be released.

Apparently to buttress the claim that some of the girls were dead, unidentified bodies were shown on the ground.

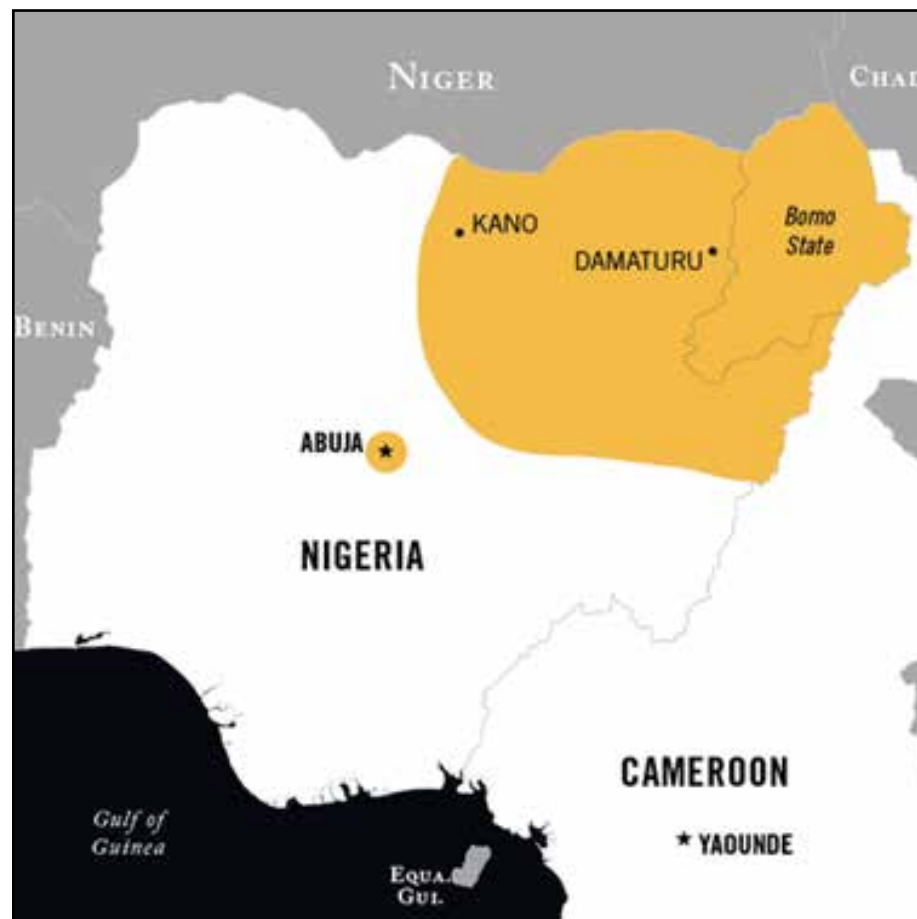


Why it's Hard to Defeat Boko Haram

OE Watch Commentary: Despite rhetoric that Boko Haram is increasingly being weakened, the group has yet to be defeated fully. To the contrary, its attacks continue, and despite the recent leadership infighting - which *might* suggest a weakening - the group remains remarkably resilient. Below are two perspectives as to just why this remains the case.

The first article details perspectives from the Chief of Army Staff of Nigeria, Tukur Buratai. As he discusses, the primary reason that the Army cannot successfully defeat Boko Haram relates to the nature of the war terrain. First it is vast, covering three Nigerian states, as well as the countries that neighbor northeastern Nigeria, including northern Cameroon, southeastern Niger, and western Chad. Not only is the space massive, but the terrain is dense, thus making aerial surveillance difficult. This reality is exacerbated by the current rainy season: not only does it create even more foliage cover, but, as he says it is now “very difficult to move heavy equipment, heavy tracking vehicles into some of those areas. The best time is the dry season.”

Taking a more internally-focused approach, the second article details why Boko Haram remains resilient, even in the face of splintering. Observers in this article relay that precisely because the group is splintering, the command and control capabilities of a central leadership network are diminished, thus allowing smaller, sub-groups to work semi-autonomously. Though this means fewer capacities to coordinate, it also means a more diffuse fighting network, which is inherently more difficult to track and trace. This article also mentions the difficulties posed by the vast area of operation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**



Despite assurances that Boko Haram has been declining in strength over the past year, the group has shown itself to be remarkably resilient. A commonly cited reason is due to the group's large area of operation, the Nigerian components of which are shown in orange, above.

Source: https://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/boko_haram.html

Source: “Nigeria: Why It’s Difficult to Wipe Out Boko Haram From North East - Army Chief,” *Premium Times (Abuja, Nigeria)*, 9 August 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201608100036.html>

“The land is so vast, the North East is very, very vast; you never appreciate it until you fly over that area or even drive around. ..Those remote areas are so diverse and thick with very difficult terrain.”

The Chief of Army Staff, Tukur Buratai, says there are still remnants of Boko Haram terrorists in parts of the North East due to the vast nature of the region....

“They still exist in the region, especially Borno, as the area is diverse and some cannot be easily accessed....”The land is so vast, the North East is very, very vast; you never appreciate it until you fly over that area or even drive around. ..Those remote areas are so diverse and thick with very difficult terrain.”

“Now that it is the rainy season, it is very difficult to move heavy equipment, heavy tracking vehicles into some of those areas. The best time is the dry season,” he said....

Source: Caryol, Rémi. “Face à l’offensive des armées, la résilience de Boko Haram” (Against Army Offensives, the Resilience of Boko Haram)” *Jeune Afrique (Paris)*, 18 August 2016. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/347415/politique/face-a-loffensive-armees-resilience-de-boko-haram/>

When it comes to Boko Harm, he is considered tired, if not dying. After months of silence, he surfaced on 3 August. In his message, he contested the new nomination of a new head of Boko Haram, named by the Islamic State, confirming that today, Boko Haram is deeply divided....

Yet, even if it is in on the defense, “it is for now, very unlikely that the movement, formed from diverse segments across a vast and specialists in terrorist attacks, could be eliminated in a decisive battle,” said the International Crisis Group, in a report from May. Even if it is difficult to establish a clear schema of the group,” the NGO believes that “the assaults from the armies of the subregion have diminished the core of the network, diminishing its capacity to ensure coordination and and carving out smaller divisions of the group in more diverse locales. Put otherwise, Boko Haram might be less well-organized than before, but that does not mean that the menace is less, and indeed, the opposite might well be the case.



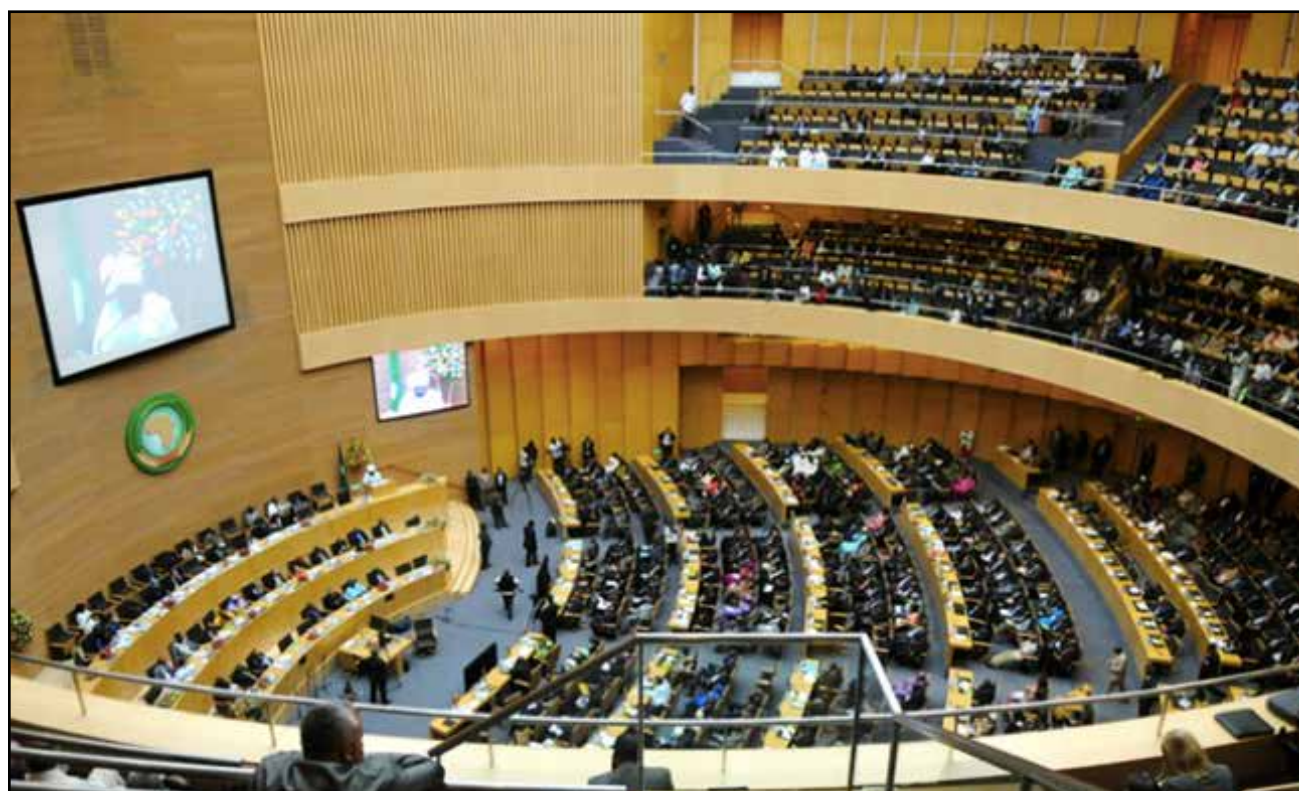
African Union: Peace and Security Updates

OE Watch Commentary: The African Union (AU) has been uncharacteristically in the news for the past several months. Below are two facets related to the AU's role in peace and security on the continent that observers might well follow in the coming months.

The first story relates to the AU Peace and Security Council's decision to start a national dialogue in Libya. After the October 2011 killing of Libyan President Moammar Qaddafi, the country split into two rival governing factions, which led to the entrance of ISIS in 2014, and destabilized much of the Sahara and Sahel. In short order, Libya went from being the primary funder and most ardent champion of the AU, to arguably, one the AU's highest priority areas of state collapse, alongside the likes of South Sudan. As discussed in the article, the AU's hope in bringing together various parties in Libya for dialogue is twofold: to help return stability to the country and the region; and to make tangible gains in its counter-terrorism profile. This AU decision is ambitious, and shows its increasing seriousness about its role in peace and security around the continent.

The second story relates to the upcoming elections for the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the organization's highest executive. After the AU failed to elect a leader in a vote in July, a new slate of candidates has come to fore. Arguably the leading candidate is the former Commissioner of the African Union's Peace and Security Council, current Algerian foreign minister Ramtane Lamamra. As the article details, Lamamra is "respected" and a "firm favorite in Addis Ababa," a sentiment echoed by many in circles familiar with the AU. In short, should Lamamra get elected to the AU's top post, it would signal an ever-deeper profile in conflict prevention for the organization. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

“The humanitarian and security situation in post-2011 Libya has long been a concern for the AU. As highlighted by the report of the AU Commission (AUC) in 2014, ‘the fate of the Libyan people is inseparable from that of the rest of their African sisters and brothers, with whom they have historical ties’....”



Candidates for the new Chairperson of the African Union Commission include Algerian Ramtane Lamamra, the widely-admired former Commissioner of the African Union's Peace and Security Council. Should he get elected in January 2017, the AU could adopt an even more robust focus on peace and security.
Source: <http://www.afribar.org/2016/01/14/au-executive-council-concerned-about-illegal-occupation-of-western-sahara/>

Source: Institute for Security Studies, “African Union Peace and Security Council Report Number 83.” Institute for Security Studies (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), August 2016. <https://www.issafrica.org/publications/peace-and-security-council-report>

At the recent AU summit, AU Peace and Security Commissioner Smal Chergui said that the AU chairperson had decided to initiate a meeting on national dialogue and reconciliation in Libya. ‘Hopefully, at this stage, this is what the Libyan people need to bring them together, for reconciliation [to happen] and to see how we can really contribute to the effort of putting an end to the crisis,’ he said...

The humanitarian and security situation in post-2011 Libya has long been a concern for the AU. As highlighted by the report of the AU Commission (AUC) in 2014, ‘the fate of the Libyan people is inseparable from that of the rest of their African sisters and brothers, with whom they have historical ties....’

In view of the external interference in Libya, the AU has consistently stressed ‘the unity, territorial integrity, political independence and sovereignty of Libya’ in all its communiques. The AU insists that ‘there can be no military solution to the current crisis in Libya’ because military interferences in the country can only exacerbate and further polarise the situation, ‘thereby making it more difficult to reach a peaceful political solution fully owned by the Libyan stakeholders’. Based on this, the AU’s response has focused on pushing for a political solution. In this context, the external powers that continue to provide military support to different factions in the region remain the focus of attention.

(continued)



Continued: African Union: Peace and Security Updates

Source: Elissa Jobson, "Why the choice of the AU chair matters so much in today's multipolar world," *The East African (Nairobi, Kenya)*. 6 August 2016. www.theeastafrican.co.ke/OpEd/comment/Why-choice-of-AU-chair-matters-so-much-in-today-multipolar-world/434750-3334748-8lceucz/index.html?utm_content=buffer9b392&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

Heads of state, gathered in Kigali on July 18 for the African Union summit, were unable to choose a replacement for Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the outgoing chair of the AU Commission (AUC), who will step down after serving one term in office...

Consequently, the election has been postponed until next January's summit and the nomination process reopened. Former Tanzania president Jakaya Kikwete is often touted as a possible next chair — he was rumoured to have been interested in running this time around but was too late to be added to the ballot. Prof Abdoulaye Bathily, a Senegalese politician turned diplomat who is currently the UN Secretary-General's special representative for Central Africa, is another possible contender who missed the April deadline.

A firm favourite in Addis Ababa, the seat of the AU's headquarters, is Algeria's Foreign Minister Ramtane Lamamra, a highly respected former AU Peace and Security Commissioner. Other names in the mix include Donald Kaberuka, the much-lauded former African Development Bank president, and Carlos Lopes, the charismatic intellectual at the helm of the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

Unique Responses to Terrorism in West Africa

OE Watch Commentary: Terrorism is increasingly becoming the order of the day in West Africa. In broad terms, three groups dominate the landscape: ISIS, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Boko Haram, in addition to other numerous affiliates and subgroups. While the primary onus for fighting such groups is typically placed on the administrations of states facing the threats themselves, the accompanying passages offer some examples of how civil society groups, non-affected African states, and international organizations are working to contribute to counter-terrorism efforts in West Africa.

As the first article details, local Muslim groups in Nigeria have interpreted the appointment of al-Barnawi as the new head of Boko Haram as a particularly dangerous phenomenon for Nigeria's Christian communities; as both Shekau's faction and al-Barnawi's factions look to cease targeting Muslims, and instead focus on Christians. Indeed, a large part of ISIS' appointment of al-Barnawi relates to Boko Haram's refusal to abide by ISIS dictates that it not attack Muslims, which the former did unabashedly. As such, as the article relays, Muslim groups are banding together to protect Christians from what they view as an impending round of violence.

In a somewhat related vein, the second article details the efforts of Muslim imams and ulemas from around West Africa to combat terrorism, at a meeting held in Senegal. It details the ways in which Muslim leaders have begun to coalesce and strategize about ways that the Islamic faith is being manipulated by Islamist groups for nefarious purposes.

The third article details how Morocco, a country that faces no real threat from Boko Haram, has offered to send arms to the government of Niger in order to combat the group. However, an important recognition, as detailed by the article, is that Morocco's offer of assistance might well be read as a power-play to gain more regional influence in West African affairs, especially as compared to its rival, neighboring Algeria, who has been developed in African counter-terrorism efforts. Finally, the last article details how Interpol is helping Burkina Faso to centralize its police information, so that it can track suspected criminals (and potentially terrorists) in lockstep with the broader international community. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

"We imams have decided to combat the jihadism that uses the Muslim religion as a pretext for violence."

Source: "Nigeria: Muslim Groups Mobilise Protection for Christians," *Daily Trust (Abuja)*, 10 August 2016. <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/-muslim-groups-mobilise-protection-for-christians/158468.html>

The Muslim Public Affairs Centre (MPAC) Nigeria and the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) have urged Muslims across the country to protect Christians against the threats of Boko Haram militants.

In separate statements, the MPAC Executive Chairman, Disu Kamor and MURIC Director, Prof. Isiaq Akintola, condemned the Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria (ISIS)-appointed leader of Boko Haram, Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi's call to kill Christians and attack churches.

"What ISIS's announcement means is that terror campaigns of Abubakar Shekau will now be replaced by the terror campaigns of Abu Musab al-Barnawi. Both Abubakar Shekau and al-Barnawi are mercurial personalities bent on destructive, hate-filled violence aimed at drowning out the voices of normative Islam and cultivating a real hatred in the hearts of those outside of Islam," he said.

(continued)



Continued: Unique Responses to Terrorism in West Africa

Source: Jabouk, Mohammed. "Le Maroc pourrait livrer des armes au Niger pour lutter contre Boko Haram (Morocco could deliver arms to Niger to fight Boko Haram)," *Yabiladi (Morocco)*, 29 June 2016. <http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/46109/maroc-pourrait-livrer-armes-niger.html>

Morocco is considering sending arms to Niger to use against insurgents from Boko Haram. The announcement of this possible delivery comes only two days after the visit of the chief Nigerien diplomat to Algeria....

The fight against terrorism is one of the cards that Morocco holds to exert its influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Proof of this strategy, the kingdom could send military materiel, notably arms, to Niger to combat the murderous attacks of Boko Haram, emanating from Nigeria....

It's the first time that Morocco has directly furnished military materiel to an African country engaged in the fight against terrorism...The kingdom did participate in the 2014 training of 200 Malian soldiers to combat terrorist groups.



Muslim clerics meet to discuss ways to reduce the influence of extremist interpretations of Islam at a meeting in Dakar, Senegal, in June 2016.

Source: <http://www.wombolombo.com/articles/107801/lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-a-dakar-les-ulemas-font-bloc-contre-lextremisme-violent>

Source: Coulibaly, Saturnin. "Afrique de l'Ouest: Lutte contre le terrorisme - A Dakar, les Ulemas font bloc contre l'extrémisme violent (West Africa: Fight Against Terrorism: Ulemas create a block against violent extremism)," *Sidaway* (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso), 8 June 2016. <http://www.wombolombo.com/articles/107801/lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-a-dakar-les-ulemas-font-bloc-contre-lextremisme-violent>

Gathering in Dakar, Senegal, a group of ulemas (religious scholars), imams, and preachers from the Sahel are waging war against violent extremist in the region, as West Africa is ever more a target of terrorist attacks.

Coming from eight member countries from "Unity of Fusion and Liaison" (UFL) - Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad - a Sahelian group that provides services and teaching about counterterrorism, has been joined by Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Senegal as observer countries, as well preachers, imams, raising their voices against the propagation of violent extremism.

The meeting brings together more than 60 religious experts allowed them to work together for the purposes of creating a scared union against radicalization.... "We imams have decided to combat the jihadism that uses the Muslim religion as a pretext for violence," declared an Ivorian imam, Cheick Ibrahim Koné.

Source: "Burkina Faso: Lutte contre le terrorisme - Un nouveau projet présenté au Premier ministre (Burkina Faso: Fight Against Terrorism)," *Fasozine* (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso), 16 August 2016. <http://burkina-faso.niooz.fr/lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-un-nouveau-projet-presente-au-premier-ministre-fasozine-9328142.shtml>

After a meeting of the International Organization of Criminal Policy (OIPC - Interpol) in Ouagadougou in May 2016...it was announced that that a project for the centralization and access of criminal and police information would begin to take place in Burkina Faso, and throughout West Africa....

This is a project that consists of assembling police and other security information and at the heart of a country, and to coordinate and centralize information. This is a project that works to create a platform to exchange information between the 15 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It's a project that has, at its base, the goals of making Burkina Faso's (police and security) systems to become compatible with Interpol's, with the goal of instantaneously exchanging information around the world.

Transition in the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan - From Conscripts to Contract Soldiers by Matt Stein

Kazakhstan's Armed Forces have been working to modernize, reform and expand their capabilities since the state became independent in 1991. Much of the attention on this development has been on security cooperation with Russia, the United States and other partners, but there have also been internally driven efforts that could have just as significant an impact. One of these efforts over the past several years has been the increase in the number of professional contract soldiers in the Armed Forces, which is part of a plan to have contract soldiers make up 99 percent of the Armed Forces by the end 2016. While the result has yet to be announced, an examination of Kazakhstan's effort to have its Armed Forces made up of contract soldiers will show how this effort has been progressing and the impact this could have on the capabilities of the country's Armed Forces and on the Central Asian region.

<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Stein%20-%20Transition%20in%20the%20Armed%20Forces%20of%20Kazakhstan%20-%20From%20Conscripts%20to%20Contract%20Soldiers.pdf>



Nigeria Terrorism Alert Coincides with Boko Haram Leadership Rift

OE Watch Commentary: In August, Boko Haram underwent a major leadership change. This has been seen in videos from the group's two factional leaders (one, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, with ISIL and the other, Abubakar Shekau, who seceded from ISIL), a leaked audio from a commander in the ISIL-affiliated faction condemning Shekau, and a publication from ISIL declaring the new ISIL-affiliated leader as its governor for West Africa Province, meaning that Shekau was dropped from the position. Despite the factional rifts in Boko Haram, Nigeria is upgrading the threat level from Boko Haram throughout the country. It seems the government is expecting the factions to outbid each other in an effort to gain attention and show relevance.

In the excerpted article for *Vanguard* on 10 August, the government explained that there is red alert for attacks in Abuja. This was the first time such an alert has been made in about two years. The government considers prisons, schools and markets as likely targets of attack. Attacks on civilian targets suggest that Shekau's faction is the one most threatening to Abuja because he is known for targeting civilian areas. The other faction, which is affiliated to ISIL is, however, known for attacking prisons. Despite the factional feud, it is possible that militants in both factions will still collaborate.

The military has succeeded in counter-insurgency to the extent that it has retaken the majority of Boko Haram-held territory in the country's northeast, but resources will be stretched thin if Boko Haram commences a new wave of asymmetric attacks in the middle or south of the country. Such attacks would undermine the government's current narrative of success and, moreover, show that while rifts in Boko Haram's leadership leave openings to further divide and weaken the militants, there is also a possibility of a diversification of the threat.

The Nigerian government has received criticism from the public, press and international community for not alerting the public of risks in the past. This time, however, the government is seeking to stay ahead by issuing this alert and not becoming overly optimistic about the leadership rift spelling the demise of Boko Haram. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Similarly, schools that are being re-opened in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states are also at risks, in the light of the wide ranging plot by the group to cause large-scale destruction.”



Longtime Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, featured in the adjacent image, has been deposed by rival factions that are now recognized by ISIL, but the Nigerian army does not expect a reduction in the threat level.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/who-is-running-boko-haram/3454310.html>

Source: Boko Haram: Army places military on red alert,” *Vanguard*, 10 August 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/boko-haram-army-places-military-red-alert-nationwide/>

The Nigerian Army has placed its officers and soldiers across the country on red alert, following ‘very credible’ intelligence that Boko Haram terrorists have concluded arrangements to attack the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, and other sensitive areas across the country. According to the intelligence, Boko Haram terrorists plan to bomb areas with large gatherings of people, such as markets, schools, among others. They also plan to attack police stations, invade armouries to get arms and attack prison facilities, ensure jailbreaks and recruit new members.

These revelations came to light when Vanguard stumbled on a signal sent by the office of the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Tukur Buratai, to military formations in all parts of the country. The signal was entitled: “Plans by Boko Haram terrorist group to attack in FCT and other parts of the country”

It would be recalled that in recent days, ISIS said they had appointed Al-Barnawi, son of late founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, as the new leader of the sect, while [Abubakar] Shekau resurfaced in a video and said the group would target the FCT.



El Salvador: MS-13 Indictment Points to Black Market Weapons for Elite Gang Force

OE Watch Commentary: On 28 July, El Salvadoran authorities seized dozens of businesses, froze bank accounts, and arrested 77 gang members associated with Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13. *La Prensa Grafica*, the El Salvadoran press, initially broke the story on “Operación Jacque,” or “Operation Check.” *El Universal* also obtained a copy of the 1,355-page indictment, which detailed the investigation. Attorney General Douglas Meléndez delivered remarks on the indictment in San Salvador after a year-long investigation into MS-13’s financial structure. Police reports revealed that the gang, which was designated a terrorist organization by the country in 2015, was laundering money through car dealerships, imports and exports, motels, and brothels among other avenues.

Additionally the articles noted that from April 2016, MS-13 purchased at least 30 bulletproof vests at \$300 apiece and obtained a larger shipment of arms, which included grenades and rocket launchers, from the Mexican black market. The articles’ authors also indicated that this was all part of a larger plan of the gang to destabilize the country with its own elite force. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz/Bunker)**

Source: Cristian Meléndez and Ana María González, “FGR: ‘El Piwa’ intentó organizar segunda tregua” (Attorney General’s Office: “Piwa” wanted to organize a second truce), *La Prensa Grafica*, 10 August 2016. <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2016/08/10/fgr-el-piwa-intento-organizar-segunda-tregua>

“Page 149 of the indictment states that MS-13 members sought weapons in Guatemala and Mexico from \$2,000 to \$3,000 that are capable of shooting down helicopters.”

Source: José Meléndez, “Iban ‘Maras’ por fusiles mexicanos ilegales” (MS-13 sought illegal weapons from Mexico), *El Universal*, 11 August 2016, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2016/08/11/iban-maras-por-fusiles-mexicanos-ilegales>

“Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13), one of two of the most dangerous gangs in Central America that has deep ties in Mexican and U.S. cities, wanted to buy 500 black market weapons from Mexico to arm an elite force that would attack political and judicial authorities, businessmen, and Salvadoran military and policy in order to destabilize El Salvador.”



MS-13 Graffiti.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mara_Salvatrucha_-_MS13.jpg



China Donates Weapons to Ecuador

OE Watch Commentary: China is donating aid to Ecuador to help strengthen the operational capacity of Ecuadoran military outposts in the general area of the earthquake that struck the country earlier this year. The Ecuadoran government re-deployed a large contingent of military personnel to lead recovery efforts. More than 600 people were killed and many thousands injured in that natural disaster. The earthquake's epicenter was in Ecuador's northwestern Manabí Department, the capital and largest town of which is Manta. The region affected by the quake also extends into the province of Esmeraldas, which borders on Colombia to the north. This engagement with China reflects the Ecuadoran government's alignment with the Bolivarian movement, which is led from Cuba and Venezuela and which takes a general anti-US geopolitical stance. The detail of the type of aid, e.g. AK47s, is interesting as it might reflect an Ecuadorian decision to beef up toward the Colombian border for one reason or another. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...centering on military encampments in the region of the earthquake of 16 April...”

Source: “China donó a Ecuador 10 mil fusiles AK47 y tres lanchas patrulleras,” [China donated 10 thousand AK47 rifles and three patrol boats to Ecuador] *El Universo, Guayaquil*, 15 August 2015. <http://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2016/08/16/nota/5745396/china-dono-ffaa-10-mil-fusiles>

“According to ministry [Ecuadoran defense ministry] technicians, the rifles would be a ‘modern version’ of the AK47...this last [shipment] is part of the aid [package] decided upon for 2016, centering on assistance to military encampments in the region of the earthquake of 16 April... Yulin [Wang Yulin, Chinese Ambassador to Ecuador] noted that both donations correspond to a total of 9 million [denomination uncertain] in aid to increase operational capacity, apart from the assistance that was given in response to the earthquake. Patiño [Ricardo Patiño, Ecuadoran Minister of Defense] highlighted that China took items from its strategic reserves to donate them to the Ecuadoran military.”

Bolivarian Regional Apparatus in Ill Health

OE Watch Commentary: The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) was created by treaty in 2008 and began operating, more or less, in 2011. It was purposed to offset and ultimately replace the Organization of American States (OAS) as the predominant regional diplomatic organization. Among UNASUR's key differences from the OAS was the exclusion of Canada, Mexico and the United States, coupled with the prominent inclusion of Cuba. Ultimately, according to the vision, UNASUR would grow into something like the European Union, controlled by member parties of the Forum of Sao Paulo with leadership from the ‘bolivarian’ governments, especially Venezuela's. The Venezuelan crisis is now putting UNASUR against the ropes. It operates by consensus, and there now appears to be no consensus among its members to supplant the OAS. The government of Venezuela under Hugo Chávez made control of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) another pillar of the bolivarian effort to lead regional political and economic decision making. Now that Argentina and Paraguay have turned out their pro-bolivarian parties, and the Brazilian government is at least temporarily in non-bolivarian hands, MERCOSUR is also looking like it will not be siding with the bolivarian government in Venezuela. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...several of its Member States said that the UNASUR meeting should be suspended...”

Source: Emilio J. Cárdenas, “Unasur” ha sido, finalmente, puesta en su lugar” (UNASUR has finally, been put in its place), *Diario Exterior, Madrid*, 30 June 2016, <http://www.eldiarioexterior.com/finalmente-ponen-a-unasur-en-su-lugar-47840.htm>

“The Venezuelan question is exactly what put UNASUR under the Organization of American States (OAS)...very soon what it [UNASUR] really is will be made evident: a clearly redundant organism, created for the purpose of fortifying - more or less covertly - the now discredited ‘bolivarians’....several of its Member States said that the UNASUR meeting should be suspended for the simple reason that the issue [Venezuela's internal crisis] was already in the hands of the OAS....It is Caracas that, let us remember, holds the presidency pro tem of UNASUR, [but] in spite of its familiar and arrogant way of acting, could not block the suspension of its activity.”

Source: “¡No Incluye a Venezuela! Paraguay: ‘Mercosur es propiedad de los 4 cuatro Estados fundadores’” (It Doesn't Include Venezuela!: Paraguay: ‘Mercosur is property of the 4 founding States’), *DolarToday*, 17 August 2016, <https://dolartoday.com/incluye-venezuela-paraguay-respondera-las-insolencias-de-maduro-mercursos-es-propiedad-de-los-4-cuatro-estados-fundadores/>

“Venezuela is not recognized as president. Paraguay is one of the countries of Mercosur, along with Argentina and Brazil, that does not recognize Venezuela's unilateral decision, made at the end of the month, when it announced that it would take charge of the presidency pro tem of the block according to the alphabetical rotation established in its regulations....Until then, the presidency had been exercised by Uruguay, which ended its mandate without the traditional summit of Chiefs of State of Mercosur, which Paraguay conditions as indispensable for there to be a transference.”



Questions Surrounding the Colombian Peace Plebiscite

OE Watch Commentary: Before too long, the Colombian administration led by President Juan Manuel Santos is to convene a Yes/No vote on the implementation of the agreements that the government and the FARC are seemingly about to complete in Havana. There are a number of questions in the air about the process and its consequences. A useful article, albeit from an opinion source not highly enthusiastic about the negotiations, appeared in Colombian newspapers that outlines ten of those questions and offers simple answers. We provide translation of four of those Q&A's, which we think are most useful to OE Watch readers. It is already known that in order for the agreement to evidence the public support necessary (such as to empower the administration to proceed with implementation of the accords), the number of yes votes has to reach only 13% of the suffrage, that is, of the total number of qualified voters nationally. President Santos has set 2 October as the date for the plebiscite, and the congress is likely to approve that date. If the congress approves the date, which it is very likely to do, campaigns for the yes and no votes will begin on Wednesday, 7 September. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...If the ‘No’ wins it is necessary to return to renegotiate the agreements...”

Source: Colprensa, “Estas son las dudas que rodean el plebiscito por la paz” (These are the questions surrounding the plebiscite for peace), *El País, Cali*, 18 August 2016. <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/colombia/proceso-paz/noticias/estas-son-dudas-rodean-plebiscito-por-paz>

Q. What happens if the ‘No’ wins?

A. ...If the ‘No’ wins it is necessary to return to renegotiate the agreements because the court decision clearly states that it is not about the right to peace but rather to approve or disapprove the content of the agreement that they reached in Havana....

Q. Once the plebiscite has been voted, will it be possible to renegotiate the agreement?

A. Eduardo Cifuentes Muñoz (ECM), ex-president of the Supreme Court: ...This does not mean that in the future the parties can not consider a renegotiation...

Q. Can the plebiscite be conducted even though the FARC has not yet turned in their weapons?

A. Juan Fernando Cristo, Minister of the Interior: The court decision does not oblige the FARC to abandon its weapons before the convocation of the plebiscite; on the contrary, it indicates that the group make an express declaration that it will abandon [future tense] weapons and its violent action....

Q. Must amnesty for reinserted guerrillas be defined before convoking the plebiscite?

A. ...No, this question has already been decided, amnesties cannot be made until after the plebiscite. It is not a condition for convoking them, it is a condition according to the FARC, but the decision of the Court regarding this question is the opposite: amnesties must be produced after the realization of the plebiscite and not before....

Source: Manuel Reyes Beltrán, “El miércoles comenzarán campañas por el SÍ y el NO en plebiscito por la paz” (Campaigns for the Yes and No votes in the peace plebiscite will begin Wednesday), *Radio Santafé*, 27 August 2016, <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2016/08/26/proximo-miercoles-comenzarian-campanas-por-el-si-y-el-no-en-plebiscito-por-la-paz/>

The respective and anticipated campaigns for the Yes and for the No in the peace plebiscite can begin Wednesday next week [7September]...[for the plebiscite] which has been set for October 2 by President Santos.”

Joke or Smart Strategy in Venezuela?

OE Watch Commentary: This report seems as though it should have been created by *The Onion* as parody, but it has been picked up by many standard news outlets. According to the accompanying article, the socialist economic planners in Venezuela decided to fine bread shops if customers formed long lines to buy the shops' bread. Shortage of flour and other inputs has apparently led to delayed and reduced baking in many stores, impelling the formation lines in those or other stores. Government officials, however, publicly claim that the lines are contrived—that they are a form of demonstration in which fake line-waiters are sent to make the shortages appear worse than they are, thus causing public unease and exacerbating lack of faith in the regime. Not impossible perhaps, but for opponents of the regime the real reason for the fines is to make it appear as though the shortages are not as bad as they are. Never mind the economics, this is making market theatre of the absurd slump toward bazaar of the bizarre. In related news, the opposition parties have scheduled a major protest march in Caracas for September 1. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...The superintendent...assured that with this measure, the strategy of ‘generating anxiety’ among consumers will be dismantled...”

Source: “La Culpa Es Del Sofá: Panaderías que tengan colas serán multadas” (It's the sofa's fault! Bread stores that have waiting lines will be fined), *DolarToday*, 18 August 2016. <https://dolartoday.com/la-culpa-es-del-sofa-panaderias-que-tengan-colas-seran-multadas/>

“...The superintendent, William Contreras, assured that with this measure, the strategy of ‘generating anxiety’ among consumers will be dismantled, a strategy which in his opinion is part of a political motivation and not due to shortages of product....”



Drug Trafficking Landscape in Guatemala Continues to Evolve

OE Watch Commentary: Starting around 2007, Mexican drug cartels such as Los Zetas, the Gulf Cartel, and the Sinaloa Cartel began establishing trafficking networks in Guatemala. To achieve success, they partnered with traditional Guatemalan transport groups run by the Mendoza and Lorenzana families, amongst others. At first, Los Zetas worked alongside these family enterprises but later looked to gain complete control of routes in Peten (north), Huehuetenango, and Quiche (west). Their desire for absolute control increased violence in the aforementioned areas and also drew the attention of authorities who launched subsequent campaigns to arrest and extradite Los Zetas and key Guatemalan transport group leaders in these areas as discussed by the first two accompanying excerpts.

During this same time period, the Sinaloa Cartel established firm control of Pacific routes which are highly important given that the 400km Guatemalan coastline serves as a key entrance and exit point for methamphetamines from Asia and cocaine shipments from Colombia and Ecuador. The Sinaloa Cartel also maintained peaceful relations with Guatemalan transport groups allowing the organization to maintain a lower profile than Los Zetas. These actions, coupled with the arrests of key Los Zetas leaders and transport leaders in the region, have resulted in a shift of drug routes from the north and west of Guatemala to the Pacific as indicated by the second excerpt. A secondary result of this shift is that maritime routes are once again gaining popularity over clandestine aerial routes that were preferred in Los Zetas territory.

End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)

“...Cocaine trafficking through Guatemala has been modified and it is now carried out mainly through the waters of the Pacific in boats coming from Colombia and Ecuador, drastically reducing clandestine flights.”



Self-propelled semi-submersible laden with 7 tons of cocaine is being seized by elements of the US Coast Guard 200 miles south from Guatemala.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Drugsub-Coast_Guard.jpg

Source: “Los Zetas provocan cambios en la estructura criminal de Guatemala (Los Zetas Precipitate Changes in Guatemala’s Drug Trafficking Structure).” *Expansion*. Accessed from <http://expansion.mx/nacional/2010/12/31/los-zetas-provocan-cambios-en-la-estructura-criminal-de-guatemala>

“In the past, Mexican drug cartels cooperated with Guatemalan cartels as they (Guatemalan cartels) served as intermediaries for drug shipments moving north. As part of this cooperation, Guatemalan cartels maintained their territory which helped to keep levels of violence in the country low. Starting around 2008, Los Zetas began to actively fight for control of routes which increased violence levels in the country and drew the attention of authorities.”

Source: “Gobernación identifica tres grupos en control del narcotráfico (Government Identifies Three Groups Controlling Drug Trafficking Operations in Guatemala).” *Prensa Libre*. Accessed from <http://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/comunitario/gobernacion-identifica-tres-estructuras-en-control-del-narcotrafico>

“The arrest and further extradition to the United States of some 30 powerful local drug traffickers, members of family clans such as Los Lorenzana and Los Mendoza amongst them, as well as the persecution to the bloodthirsty Zetas, has caused a change in the chess game of drug trafficking in Guatemala. At present, three main groups to include the Sinaloa Cartel of Mexico are controlling operations in the country.”...

...“Cocaine trafficking through Guatemala has been modified and it is now carried out mainly through the waters of the Pacific in boats coming from Colombia and Ecuador, drastically reducing clandestine flights.”



San Andres Island Serves as a Colombian Trafficking Hub in Central America

OE Watch Commentary: Islands in Central America and the Caribbean have served as smuggling hubs for well-known criminal organizations such as the Cali and Medellin Cartels since the early 80s due to the multitude of options. Islands and archipelagos dot the region where an estimated 90% of all cocaine shipments pass through before their eventual arrival to the US. Well-known trafficking islands in the region currently include the Corn Islands in Nicaragua, Guna Yala in Panama (boasts an archipelago with over 365 small islands), the Bay Islands in Honduras, and San Andres Island in Colombia.

All of the aforementioned locations have gained popularity in recent years as they can be used as layover points to store cocaine shipments, as handoff points where shipments can be dropped from aerial flights or simply exchanged at high-sea, or as logistical hubs to refuel fast boats. Rarely can one location provide all these advantages, but San Andres Island does; which is likely why it serves as a key trafficking hub for Colombian cartels in Central America.

San Andrés is located just 110 kilometers off the coast of Nicaragua and 730 kilometers from Colombia. It has been a smuggling hub for centuries because of its proximity to both Central America and the Caribbean and its logistical appeal as indicated by excerpt one. San Andres in particular was initially used by the Medellin Cartel in the early 80s to dead-drop aerial cocaine shipments at high sea where they would be recovered by fishermen. As Colombia improved its aerial radar monitoring system, maritime shipments via go fast boats quickly gained popularity and San Andres converged into more of a logistical stop-over point used to refuel the water vessels. In time, trafficking methods once again morphed as cartels contracted locals to operate fast boats because of their knowledge of geographical constraints surrounding the island as discussed in excerpt two. During the recruitment process, cartels quickly learned that the locals in San Andres represented an indispensable resource given their knowledge of the area and their willingness to participate or at least accept trafficking activity as discussed in the third excerpt. At present, no one knows for sure how many of the islands' 77,000 reported inhabitants are currently working at the service of Colombian drug cartels, but excerpt three indicates that there could be over 800. What is certain is that San Andres Island is and will likely continue to serve as an important drug hub for Colombian Cartels in Central America. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Those most likely to be recruited by drug trafficking organizations are young males willing to be bought for ‘easy’ money.”

Source: “San Andres es un paso estrategico para el narcotrafico: Comandante de la isla (San Andres is a Strategic Trafficking Point for Drug Trafficking Organizations According to Colombian Military Commander).” *El Pais*. Accessed from <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/judicial/noticias/san-andres-paso-estrategico-para-narcotrafico-comandante-isla>

“We (San Andres Island) are considered to be a transit zone that connects the Caribbean with Central America. For this reason, it is necessary for drug shipments to pass through our waters before their eventual delivery onto mainland. San Andrés in particular is a strategic island in the region as it is used as a refueling point for fast boats continuing on to Central America or Mexico.”



San Andres Island.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:San_Andres_Island.png

Source: “Porque San Andres (Why San Andres).” *La Semana*. Accessed from <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/porque-san-andres/25010-3>

“Those most likely to be recruited by drug trafficking organizations are young males willing to be bought for “easy” money. These individuals are either unemployed or earn lesser salaries than other types of work on the island. Most commonly, they are expert high sea navigators who can easily maneuver the rocky and reef laden areas surrounding the island.”

Source: Narcoislas, un tesoro entre dos oceanos (Narco Islands, A Treasure between Two Oceans).” *Animal Politico*. Accessed from <http://www.animalpolitico.com/2013/09/narcoislas-un-tesoro-entre-dos-oceanos/>

“There could be between 500 and 800 locals working for trafficking organizations in one way or another. But in the archipelago’s tight-knit community, local attitudes also have a lot to do with why it is hard to sever the drug trade’s roots on the islands. According to a 2014 survey, San Andrés was more accepting of drug trafficking than any other Colombian city, with 42 percent of respondents saying they did not have a problem with traffickers in the area. Only 24 percent rejected corrupt practices.”



Police Reveal New Trafficking Scheme

OE Watch Commentary: In recent months, authorities in Central and South America have struggled to find ways to manage the large influx of Cuban migrants entering into the region as part of their journey to the United States. The general consensus has been to simply let them pass in accordance with the humanitarian agreements signed by select countries, but on 9 May 2016, Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela announced his decision to close select shared border crossing points with Colombia in an attempt to slow the migratory crisis currently plaguing the region. Select open source channels indicated that this change came about after Panamanian and Colombian authorities discovered that Clan Usaga (a drug trafficking organization based out of Colombia) is using illegal Cuban migrants (in addition to those from other nations) to transport anywhere from 25-30 kilograms of cocaine in exchange for passage from Colombia to Panama and then on to Central America as indicated in the first excerpt.

To make the drug smuggling operation a success, Clan Usaga is said to work directly with human smuggling groups that are willing to waive the \$2,000 cost normally charged to migrants for passage from Colombia to Panama as discussed in excerpt two. In some cases, migrants are offered up to \$5,000 which allows them to complete their journey to the border of the United States with a “coyote”—a guide paid to transport illegal migrants. Those who accept the deal generally depart from Turbo, Colombia as discussed in excerpt three. From there, they are transported to the densely forested Darien province in Panama where they backpack for approximately five days until they arrive to the coast where they are picked up and transported north. Given that this method has been utilized by the FARC in the past with indigenous peoples from Panama, it does not come as a big surprise that it has been adapted by Clan Usaga to take advantage of the current migratory crisis occurring in the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“As part of this new modus operandi, migrants carry anywhere from 25-30 kilograms of cocaine through the Darien province. This journey is said to take up to 5 days.”

Source: “Policía revela ‘el hormigueo’, nueva modalidad del Clan Úsuga para sacar droga del país (Police Reveal New Micro-Trafficking Scheme Utilized by Clan Úsuga to Move Drugs from Colombia to Panama).” *Noticias CM*. Accessed from <http://www.cmi.com.co/policia-revela-el-hormigueo-nueva-modalidad-del-clan-Úsuga-para-sacar-droga-del-pais>

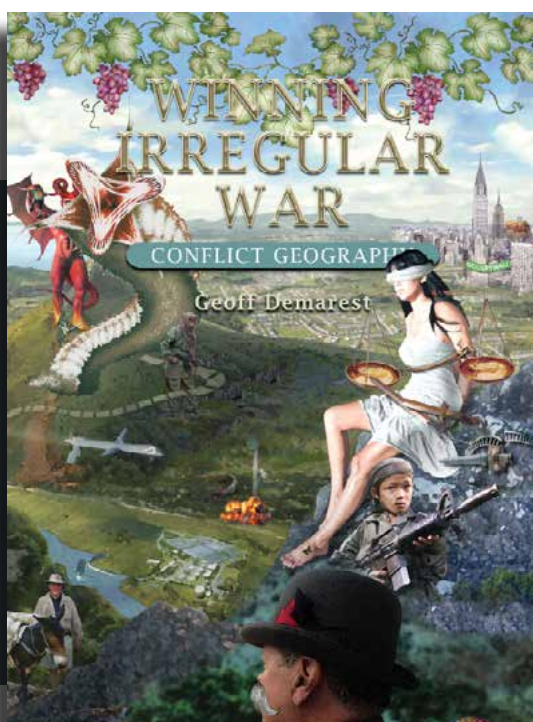
“Clan Usaga has known trafficking routes that extend from Uraba, Colombia into Darien, Panama. Recently, this group began using migrants (Cuban, African, and Asian) to transport drugs along this route. As part of this new modus operandi, migrants carry anywhere from 25-30 kilograms of cocaine through the Darien province. This journey is said to take up to 5 days.”

Source: “Narcotraficantes colombianos usan migrantes para transportar drogas (Colombian Drug Traffickers Use Migrants to Transport Drugs).” *Pura Noticia*. Accessed from <http://www.puranoticia.cl/noticias/internacional/narcotraficantes-colombianos-usan-a-migrantes-para-transportar-drogas/2016-01-04/134056.html>

“Authorities reported that Clan Úsuga is using migrants to traffic drugs with the help of local human smuggling groups. This method represents one of many that is used by the group to move shipments from origin to destination. Furthermore, it provides migrants financial opportunity as they are paid anywhere from \$2,000-\$5,000 for their cooperation in addition to free transport from Colombia into Panama.”

Source: “Mafia usa a migrantes ilegales para llevar cocaine hacia Panama (Mafia Uses Illegal Migrants to Transport Cocaine to Panama).” *El Tiempo*. Accessed from <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/justicia/transporte-de-cocaina-en-la-frontera-con-panama/16593159>

“The municipality of Turbo represents a convergence point for illegal immigrants and drug shipments. From this location, both use maritime routes to arrive in Panama where they begin their eventual journey to Central America towards the United States.”



Geoff Demarest’s *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just ‘insurgency.’ In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest raises new and overlooked concepts related to modern conflict in a provocative manner designed to stir up debate and critical thinking. As Geoff Demarest puts it: “I hope that some of the ideas in it will be contagious.”

http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/E-Pubs/Epubs/WIrW_2015.pdf



Criminals Raid Gold Mine in Sonora

OE Watch Commentary: In late July, unidentified criminals successfully raided the Canadian-owned La India gold mine, located in the remote and mountainous region straddling the states of Sonora and Chihuahua in northwest Mexico. The precise amount of gold stolen has not been revealed, but could be substantial. Even locating the mine would require detailed local knowledge – a successful raid suggests the perpetrators had access to inside information. The sophistication of the attack also indicates likely organized crime involvement. The excerpted passages from Mexican news sources discuss the raid.

As discussed in the February 2016 issue of *OE Watch* (“Mexican Cartels Operate Diverse Enterprises”), Mexican criminal organizations have been increasingly diversifying their activities. This is specifically attributable to several high-profile successes by Mexican authorities. As the government apprehends and/or kills leaders of federated cartels, subordinate gangs disintegrate from the larger groups and lose access to transnational smuggling networks. They adapt by expanding into activities less lucrative than narcotics smuggling. Mexico is the source of much mineral wealth, including precious metals such as gold and silver, so one of the trends that has manifested is criminal interest in mining activities.

Placed in this context, although the raid on the La India mine was a victory (so far) for the criminals involved, it actually could be an indicator that drug cartels are losing the Mexican drug war. Nevertheless, it represents a real security challenge for Mexico, because criminal diversification (which includes increased violence) affects the Mexican populace more directly than drug smuggling, in which Mexico is more of a transit than a target country. In the long run, as the Mexican government is more successful in stopping smuggling, it could actually lose popular support for security operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Daniel Sánchez Dórame, “Comando asalta mina de oro en Sonora (Command assaults gold mine in Sonora),” *Excelsior*, 21 July 2016, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/07/21/1106176>.

... An armed command assaulted the La India gold mine, located in the municipality of Arivechia in the mountains of Sonora ... the robbery was perpetrated by various suspects associated with a criminal organization, who evidently had experience and knowledge of the security measures implemented by the mine ... at this time authorities have not reported arrests of any suspects ...



Copper canyon, in Chihuahua, is illustrative of the complex terrain in northwest Mexico.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Barranca_del_cobre_2.jpg

Source: Cristina Gómez Lima, “Sonora: comando armado asalta mia de oro (Sonora: armed command assaults gold mine),” *La Jornada*, 20 July 2016, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2016/07/20/sonora-comando-armado-asalta-mina-de-oro>.

Armed men raided ... the La India Mine ... and stole unspecified amounts of gold ...the criminal group had a well-planned modus operandi ... The Canadian mine employed 368 persons and has not previously had security problems ... The Company opened the mine in 2011 ... and began commercial extraction during 2014 ...



Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mx.html>



Police Deactivate “Car Bomb” in Central Mexico

OE Watch Commentary: Although not unheard of, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are not the most common weapon that Mexican cartels employ, so it is no surprise that there has been significant press coverage of a mid-August 2016 incident in Guanajuato when police discovered a vehicle rigged with explosives. The accompanying passage from a Mexican newspaper article discusses the details of the incident, which raises important questions about the use of IEDs by Mexican gangs.

As the accompanying passage states, two individuals claimed that a man operating under alias contracted them to drive a vehicle from Guanajuato to Michoacán, and that the device would allegedly be transferred at the destination. The location of the incident is noteworthy. Michoacán has struggled for decades with rampant criminality. Guanajuato, conversely, has been less impacted by crime historically, although parts of the state have been contested by rival gangs in the past few years, leading to increased violence.

The real question is whether this IED is an isolated incident or if it is the beginning a new, emerging trend of increased preference for IEDs by Mexican gangs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Carlos Quiroz and Andrés Guardiola, “Desactivan ‘coche bomba’ en Guanajuato; iba a Michoacán (Disabled ‘car bomb’ in Guanajuato; headed to Michoacán),” *Excelsior*, 12 August 2016, www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/08/12/1110418.

Federal Police Officers arrested two suspects who were transporting an explosive device, apparently home-made ... the driver ... told federal police that he and his companion had left Celaya, Guanajuato and were traveling to La Piedad, Michoacán. The companion ... warned officers that he had to start the vehicle immediately, because if it remained stopped more than 30 minutes it would explode ... the copilot admitted to officers that a man identified as Cholo KA El Mocho had paid them each \$(MXN) 1,000 to transport the device from Celaya to La Piedad, where it would be dismantled and installed in another vehicle ... 16th Military Zone soldiers came to the site ... they found a black plastic bag with an electronic device and a remote control ...

Mexican Navy Deploys New Unmanned Aerial System

OE Watch Commentary: As of late July 2016, the Mexican Navy had fielded Arcturus T-20 unmanned aerial systems (UAS). Acquisition of the UAS was a collaborative venture between Mexico’s Navy, Natural Resources, and Agriculture Departments, with a primary mission of protecting endangered maritime fauna from poaching. As the first excerpted article from a Mexican Navy press release discusses, this wildlife conservation mission is in line with national priorities. As of early August 2016, the UAS program had already yielded positive results, according to the second accompanying passage.

While the Mexican Navy has made international headlines for arresting drug cartel leaders, protection of maritime species remains an important mission. The Navy is not just a warfighting service but also a maritime law enforcement agency, emergency rescue service, and scientific research service. Plus, combatting poaching also combats organized crime: Mexican gangs are the primary culprits, selling poached fish overseas – especially to customers in China.

The Mexican Navy also has a history of interagency cooperation, including multi-purpose surveillance and reconnaissance programs. For example, Mexico’s overhead imagery satellites are used for environmental monitoring, oceanography, and disaster response. The collaboration between the Navy, Natural Resources and Agriculture Departments to protect endangered species is consistent with this operational model. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Entrega e inicio de operaciones de un Sistema Aéreo no Tripulado (Delivery and start of operations of an Unmanned Aerial System),” *Mexican Navy Press release 126/16*, 28 July 2016, <http://www.gob.mx/semar/prensa/entrega-e-inicio-de-operaciones-de-un-sistema-aereo-no-tripulado>.

In the context of interinstitutional collaboration between the Departments of the Navy, Natural Resources, and Agriculture... the “Arcturus T-20” Unmanned Aerial System began operations. This surveillance system is meant to support population recovery for the vaquita porpoise and conduct activities against illegal fishing of the totoaba fish... the system... will include three planes with high-resolution cameras, a mobile ground-control vehicle, a logistic vehicle, control and satellite antenna, a pneumatic launcher... the Natural Resources secretary emphasized that protection of natural patrimony is a priority for the administration of President Enrique Peña Nieto ...

Source: Carlos Madrazo Silva, “Avances tecnológicos y preservación del habitat natural (Technological advances in preservation of the natural habitat),” *Siempre*, 06 August 2016, <http://www.siempre.com.mx/2016/08/avances-tecnologicos-y-preservacion-del-habitat-natural/>.

... the airplanes are made from carbon fiber; they have infrared cameras, which allow them to fly at night ... and flying range of 12 hours and 100km over the sea, reaching an altitude of 18,000ft and speed of 65knots. Most importantly, with the implementation of this program they have already been able to rescue 10 whales, 13 totoabas, and 11 gulf turtles ...



Major Cocaine Busts in Manzanillo

OE Watch Commentary: In mid-July, Mexican sailors acted on national intelligence tips and discovered a massive shipment of cocaine hidden in barrels of picante salsa that had arrived in Manzanillo, a city in the Mexican state of Colima, from Ecuador. A week later, Navy personnel at Manzanillo seized a smaller, but still huge, shipment of cocaine from Guatemala, this time hidden in refrigerators. Although drug cartels have used food to conceal drug shipments for many years, the picante cocaine shipment was large even by Mexican standards. The accompanying excerpted articles from Mexican news sources discuss these operations.

The *prima facie* takeaway is that drug cartels continue to use creative and diverse methods to conceal their shipments. Perhaps what is more important is the location. Manzanillo remains a major smuggling hub for drugs and precursors being shipped into Mexico for later diversion to other markets (not just in North America, but increasingly in Europe and Asia). The reason is partially attributable to infrastructure – most of the world's commerce moves by sea and Manzanillo is an important Pacific port with enough legitimate commercial throughput to conceal illegal traffic. However, the prevalence of drug trafficking in Manzanillo, as opposed to other Mexican west-coast ports, suggests a criminal *plaza* that is particularly entrenched, possibly the port of preference for maritime smugglers. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Decomisa Semar 13 toneladas de cocaína que venían a Mazatlán (13 tons of cocaine en route to Mazatlan confiscated),” *Noroeste* redaction from *El Universal*, 13 July 2016, <http://beta.noroeste.com.mx/publicaciones/view/decomisa-semar-13-toneladas-de-cocana-que-venan-a-mazatlán-1036311>.

A shipment of cocaine diluted in picante salsa was discovered by Navy Department personnel in Manzanillo, Colima. The drug was inside a container that had arrived from Guayaquil, Ecuador, with an intended destination of Mazatlán, Sinaloa ... The discovery resulted from intelligence work of Federal government agencies, which led to them conducting a non-intrusive search of the suspicious container ...



Source: Unattributed author(s), “Semar y SAT decomisan 390 kilos de cocaína dentro de refrigeradores en Manzanillo (390 kilos of cocaine inside refrigerators in Manzanillo confiscated),” *Ángelguardián.mx* redaction, 20 July 2016, <http://angelguardian.mx/semar-y-sat-decomisan-390-kilos-de-cocaina-dentro-de-refrigeradores-en-manzanillo/>.

... personnel assigned to the Sixth Naval Region, supported by Customs Administration Service personnel, seized a container transporting refrigerators ... containing 390.4kg of cocaine ... the container arrived aboard the ship APL HOLLAND, registered in Singapore ... destined for Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala ... the shipment arrived from Buenaventura, Colombia ...

Cranes at Manzanillo port.

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Mejoramiento para el Puerto de manzanillo,” Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, 31 October 2013, https://www.flickr.com/photos/sct_mx/27016424032/in/photostream/.





Indian Defense Ministry Funds Arunachal Pradesh Border Highway

OE Watch Commentary: Although the Indian Army initially voiced concerns about the tactical, strategic, and sustainment implications of the project, the Indian Defence Ministry has approved funding for a highway to be constructed along the disputed McMahon Line, in order to connect the extremities of the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. The project is being funded nationally, but it is also a state initiative, and is ostensibly driven by economic interests. The accompanying passages from Indian news sources discuss this development.

India has to balance its interests in developing Arunachal Pradesh with the risk of provoking China. China disputes the McMahon Line, and road construction is a sensitive topic because it was one of the disputes leading to the 1962 Sino-India War.

As the third passage discusses, the timing is also sensitive, because it comes just weeks after India deployed 100 T-72 tanks to the northwestern part of its border, the Himalayan region of Ladakh, in response to alleged Chinese border incursions. Ladakh, like the Arunachal Pradesh border, is also contested with China. With regards to the tanks themselves, it is unclear which versions of the T-72 India is deploying. India has several models available, ranging from imports to domestically-produced versions. Because of the extreme climate, which can reach temperatures that affect fuel performance, knowing which versions have been deployed would reveal how and when India plans to employ the tanks.

India can justify the road construction in Arunachal Pradesh as economically essential and can justify the tank deployments as a response to aggressive Chinese behavior. However, the real questions are whether China chooses to perceive these actions as also being aggressions, and whether China chooses to respond. If so, tensions could escalate in an already contentious region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

“The Director General of Military Operations of the Army had objected to the road’s proposed alignment as it was running too close to the disputed sections of the McMohan [sic] Line.”

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Defence Ministry Approves 2000-km Highway for Arunachal,” Northeast Today, 7 August 2016, <http://www.northeasttoday.in/defence-ministry-approves-2000-km-highway-for-arunachal/>.

The Ministry of Defence has approved a strategically vital 2000-km highway that connects the western and eastern extremities of Arunachal Pradesh – Tawang to Vijaynagar – after incorporating the Army’s views on the alignment of the road ... The Director General of Military Operations of the Army had objected to the road’s proposed alignment as it was running too close to the disputed sections of the McMohan [sic] Line ... the area has very little population and sustaining the safety and civilian traffic would end up being the responsibility of the armed forces. Also, the road could be used by insurgents to slip-in and out of the country. There is no boundary marked on the ground, perception on the exact alignment of the McMohan [sic] Line vary by a few miles on either side in India and China ...



“This is the second time in history that India has deployed the T-72 tanks in the Himalayan region. The first was in 1962 during the Indo-China war [sic] ...”

Indian T-72.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:T-72_Ajeya1.jpg

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Arunachal asks for approving 200-km [sic] Tawang-Vijayanagar Road,” The Economic Times, redaction from PTI, 15 March 2015, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/arunachal-asks-for-approving-200-km-tawang-vijayanagar-road/articleshow/46573096.cms>.

Arunachal Pradesh has urged the Centre to approve the proposed 2,000-km road from Tawang to Vijaynagar to provide connectivity to the border areas along the MacMohan [sic] line by declaring it as National Highway. State PWD Minister Gojen Gadi made the plea during a meeting with Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju ... Both the roads are pet projects of Rijiju, which he had announced here in July 2014.

Source: S.V. Krishnamachari, “Indian Army deploys T-72 tanks in Ladakh to counter Chinese military build-up,” *International Business Times*, 20 July 2016, <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/indian-army-deploys-t-72-tanks-ladakh-counter-chinese-military-build-687232#H0pjM1qviHVG1Zma.97>.

The Indian Army has moved more than 100 T-72 tanks to its disputed border with China in the mountainous region of Ladakh in Jammu & Kashmir ... This is the second time in history that India has deployed the T-72 tanks in the Himalayan region. The first was in 1962 during the Indo-China war [Comment: The author probably means “tanks” in general, not T-72s, which did not exist in 1962.], when the Indian Army airdropped five tanks in Ladakh, which has seen frequent incursions by the People’s Liberation Army of China ... The latest incursion ... was on March 8 this year ... The Chinese PLA had made similar incursions ... in April 2015 and twice in 2014 ... The build-up by India on its China border in the Ladakh region comes in the wake of reports that China has scaled up its presence ...



Indian Student Satellite to Augment PNT

OE Watch Commentary: The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is preparing for a September launch that will include a domestically-built student microsatellite, named “Pratham,” as a secondary payload. As the accompanying passages discuss, the satellite mission is to study the ionosphere to predict storms and improve India’s Position, Navigation, and Timing (PNT) constellation. The primary payload will be ScatSat, a microsatellite developed by ISRO itself.

ISRO launched the final satellite of India’s domestic PNT constellation, NAVigation with Indian Constellation (NAVIC) in late April 2016. As discussed in the June 2016 issue of *OE Watch* (“India’s NAVIC Constellation Is Underway”), the space component NAVIC constellation is fully capable of operations (although the PNT system requires end-user hardware that is still being developed and deployed). Functionality does not equate to optimization, however. One obvious method to optimize performance is to increase the number of satellites in sight of the target location, allowing more precise location. In this case however, the Pratham project appears to be trying to understand – in hopes of ultimately improving – the variables that degrade the signal itself. This could be particularly beneficial when ionosphere activity is elevated.

The technical aspect of this topic may be less important than its strategic implications. The Pratham project demonstrates that interest in India’s domestic PNT capability extends beyond military or even government circles – larger swathes of Indian society support and want to contribute to improving Indian space capability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Tanaya Singh, “‘Pratham’ Satellite Developed by IIT-B Students to Be Launched by ISRO next Month,” *The Better India*, 03 August 2016, <http://www.thebetterindia.com/63439/isro-iit-bombay-pratham-student-satellite/>.

Pratham, a microsatellite developed by IIT Bombay will be launched by Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota in September ... the satellite will finally be launched with ISRO’s main satellite ScatSat and few other satellites on board a four-stage Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). The brain child of two IIT-B students ... the main function of the satellite will be to measure the electron count of the ionosphere, which can be used for tsunami alerts and also to increase the accuracy of Global Positioning System in India. Many communication errors can be corrected with the help of counting electrons ... Currently, Pratham is in the clean room of ISRO Satellite Centre in Bengaluru and the exact launch date is yet to be finalized ...

Source: Shivangi Sharma “ISRO to blast IIT-B’s Pratham satellite using PSLV in September,” *The TeCake*, 02 August 2016, <http://tecake.in/news/space/isro-blast-iit-bs-pratham-satellite-using-pslv-september-21431.html>.

ISRO’s Satellite Pratham will be launched in September along with PSLV (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle) ... ISRO will soon announce the date for the event ... Pratham will be a co-passenger of ScatSat, which is ISRO’s main satellite. Initially, the two satellites are planned to set into different orbits for about 30 minutes ... Pratham will be placed 720 km above the altitude of the earth ...



China’s cyber policy has become partly visible to foreign nations through observation, tracking, and inference. The policy appears to have three vectors. These three aspects—peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner—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.

<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/E-Pubs/Epubs/3Faces%20of%20the%20Dragon.pdf>



Growing Indonesian and Cambodian Defense Cooperation: A Counter to China?

OE Watch Commentary: The following excerpts are drawn from two articles that, put side-by-side, could prompt the conclusion that Cambodia—China’s closest ally in Southeast Asia—might possibly shift its support from China to Indonesia, which has been at odds with China over territorial issues. The first article is about growing defense cooperation between Indonesia and Cambodia and the second describes Cambodia’s hopes of purchasing two warships from China earlier this year.

On 17 August, Indonesia marked its Independence Day by sinking 60 boats that it had seized for illegally fishing near its borders. (Note: Maritime and Fisheries Minister Susi Pudjiastuti has reportedly organized the destruction of more than 200 fishing boats since 2014). Many of the boats were seized near the Natuna Islands, a 272 archipelago claimed by Indonesia. The event was a clear warning to neighboring countries, including China, that Indonesia will not tolerate “illegal” fishing in its waters. Due to territorial issues, Indonesia’s relationship with China has been waning in recent months. China’s claimed territory in the South China Sea partly overlaps Indonesia’s exclusive economic zone near the Natuna Islands. While China does not dispute Indonesia’s claim to the Natuna islands, it insists it has the right to fish within close proximity of the islands, upon which nearly 100,000 Indonesians live.

Meanwhile, six months earlier, Cambodia, which has been described as China’s closest ally in Southeast Asia, had reportedly been contemplating the purchase of two Chinese warships following its first-ever joint naval exercise between it and China. According to the second article, Admiral Tea Vinh, commander of the Royal Cambodian Navy believed that possessing the Chinese ships would bolster both maritime security and Cambodia’s reputation. Another Cambodian admiral predicted an increase in shipping traffic off the coast of Cambodia if China’s maritime Silk Road came to fruition. Any such deal, however, has not yet happened.

Now, according to the first article, “Indonesia is willing to offer Cambodia navy ships at a discount and would like the Kingdom to be involved in joint patrols in the region.” Furthermore, both sides have discussed a new defense cooperation agreement, which will provide increased military training, weapons, and uniformed sales to Cambodia.

The more recent report is interesting in that it begs the question of what, if any, are Indonesia’s intentions? How might it play out for Cambodia and, more so, could it lessen Cambodia’s ties to China? **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“[Indonesia and Cambodia] discussed a new defense cooperation agreement, which will include increased military training and potential weapons and uniform sales.”

Location of the Natuna Islands.
Source: Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17066>



Source: Shaun Turton and Vong Sokheng, “Indonesia, Cambodia Discuss Defense Cooperation,” *Phnom Pehn Post*, 11 August 2016, <http://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/indonesia-cambodia-discuss-defence-cooperation>.

Indonesia is willing to offer Cambodia’s navy ships at a discount and would like the Kingdom to be involved in joint patrols in the region... [both countries] discussed a new defense cooperation agreement..., which will include increased military training and potential weapons and uniform sales... According to Indonesia’s Defense Attaché office, the MoU [memorandum of understanding] would allow Indonesia to train soldiers from all Royal Cambodian Armed Forces branches... In an interview yesterday at the Cambodiana Hotel, [Defense Minister Ryamizard] Ryacudu said he would also float the proposal of selling Cambodia warships so it could cooperate more closely with Indonesia’s naval operations, particularly joint patrols in the northern South China Sea.

The country [INDONESIA] is among the most influential in the ASEAN bloc, which has been split by the divisive South China Sea dispute, particularly after a decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, which dismissed most of China’s claim to the waters.

Source: Khuon Narim and Peter Ford, “Cambodia Wants Two Warships from China, Admiral Says,” *The Cambodian Daily*, 25 February 2016, <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/cambodia-wants-two-warships-from-china-general-says-108943/>.

[Royal Cambodian Navy Commander] Adm. [Tea] Vinh did not say what kind of ships the navy was interested in acquiring, nor whether it intended to purchase them outright. He said the vessels would bolster both maritime security and Cambodia’s reputation.

“We want to stop our neighboring countries from looking down on us,” he said. “I want these two big ships, not for making war, but just to show that they can’t look down on Cambodia.”...

Rear Adm. Yu [Manjiang] also predicted an increase in shipping traffic off the coast of Cambodia if Chinese President Xi Jinping’s plan for a Maritime Silk Road comes to fruition.

“China has a lot of [cargo] ships that will need to cross through and they will partly need the Cambodian navy to protect them,” he said.



Santoso is Gone But Threats Remain

OE Watch Commentary: While the killing of Indonesian Islamist extremist leader Santoso in late July is a major victory for Indonesian authorities, analysts caution that other extremist cells now pose a greater threat. According to excerpts from the accompanying article in mainstream Indonesian daily *Coconuts Bali*, Santoso was a potent jihadi symbol who inspired legions of other militants.

As pointed out in the accompanying article, according to Sidney Jones, director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, a Jakarta think-tank, Santoso built a local terror network. Jones points out that, “There have been well over 100 people who have gone through [Santoso’s] training network, and therefore developed some kind of ties with him, so that he has become the symbolic heart of the jihadi movement.” He also notes, “The combination of his attacks on police, plus his training, contacts with Syria, and his symbolic importance, make him an important catch.”

As described in the accompanying article, Santoso and his ragtag bunch of poorly armed fighters, called the Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen, had been hiding out in the jungles and mountains around Poso, Sulawesi for several years, with the area gaining a reputation as a militant hotbed. His group rose to prominence after carrying out deadly assaults on security forces and by training militants from across the archipelago. Indonesian security forces were able to finally kill Santoso during a shootout in Tambarana village in Poso after authorities were able to corner him in the jungle during their long quest to catch him.

The article also points out that Santoso and his group of fighters, which dwindled to around 20 following the authorities’ campaign, were among the few in Indonesia that remained a real threat, after a years-long, largely successful crackdown which severely weakened other militant groups. In recent times, Chinese Uighur radicals joined the militants, and Santoso also developed links with Indonesians fighting with Islamic State, (IS) who are believed to have sent him substantial funds. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

For more information, see: “Indonesian Security Forces Close In on Santoso while Islamic State Continues to Support Local Extremist Groups,” *OE Watch*, Jan 2016

“[Santoso] was a potent jihadi symbol who kept up a violent struggle in the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation that inspired legions of other militants.”



Indonesian armed Police officers during the January 2016 Jakarta terrorist attacks in Jakarta.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_Jakarta_attacks#/media/File:Indonesian_BRIMOB_police_officers.jpg

Source: “Santoso: ‘Symbolic heart’ of the Indonesian jihadi movement killed,” *Coconuts Bali*, 20 July 2016. <http://bali.coconuts.co/2016/07/20/santoso-symbolic-heart-indonesian-jihadi-movement-killed>

“Indonesian Islamist extremist leader Santoso, killed in a shootout with security forces, was a potent jihadi symbol who kept up a violent struggle ... that inspired legions of other militants.

But while the killing of the Islamic State (IS) group supporter is a major victory for authorities, analysts caution that other extremist cells now pose a greater threat. ...

Santoso and his ragtag bunch of poorly armed fighters, called the Eastern Indonesia Mujahideen, had been hiding out in the jungles and mountains around Poso on the central island of Sulawesi for several years, with the area gaining a reputation as a militant hotbed.

His group rose to prominence after carrying out deadly assaults on security forces and by training militants from across the archipelago. In recent times Chinese Uighur radicals joined the militants, and Santoso developed links with Indonesians fighting with IS, who are believed to have sent him substantial funds.”

“There have been well over 100 people who have gone through his training network, and therefore developed some kind of ties with him, so that he has become the symbolic heart of the jihadi movement,” Sidney Jones, director of Jakarta think-tank the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, ...

“The combination of his attacks on police, plus his training, contacts with Syria, and his symbolic importance, make him an important catch.”

The security forces’ sustained campaign to pin Santoso down finally paid off Monday, when he was killed in a shootout in Tambarana village in Poso.

Santoso and his group of fighters—which have dwindled to around 20 following the authorities’ campaign—were among the few in Indonesia that remained a real threat, after a years-long, largely successful crackdown severely weakened other militant groups.

... as authorities had him cornered in the jungle during their long quest to catch him.”



Islamic State's Pivot to Southeast Asia

OE Watch Commentary: The announcement of Wilayah Philippines, or Philippine Province, in the southern Philippines epitomizes a new Islamic State (IS) strategy to “pivot” to Southeast Asia and signals a direct threat to countries in the region as IS Central comes under pressure in the Middle East. According to the accompanying commentary from S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, IS has explicitly laid claim to Southeast Asia and the group’s actions are a powerful signal that it has political, ideological and military claims over the region. Another commentary notes that IS has already begun to lay the groundwork in the province by forming a new brigade in July, the Katibah Al-Muhajir or The Brigade of the Migrant.

According to the accompanying commentary, as an official province, Wilayah Philippines will be fully expected to intensify and coordinate operations within Southeast Asia, which will likely lead to increased terrorist attacks in the region. The passage notes that Southeast Asia should brace itself for more IS-linked jihadi attacks in the coming months, given that the region has already seen recent IS-inspired attacks in Jakarta, Indonesia and Puchong, Malaysia; and the likelihood that the fledgling province will actively seek to legitimize its existence.

The second commentary points out that the local jihadi group called the Brigade of the Migrant has already established a presence the region. To date, IS has supposedly accumulated 10 battalions of the local group in six locations in southern Philippines. To attract prospective foreign jihadists, a potential member can reportedly secure his travel arrangements from Malaysia to the Philippines, and be given a complimentary weapon for approximately US\$123.

According to both commentaries, the group’s presence provides IS a unique sanctuary, similar to the way the Al Qaeda-linked and Indonesian-based Jemaah Islamiyah network has found a similar permissive setting in the same area since the late 1980s. Their presence has also turned the tri-border maritime area between Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia along the Sulawesi Straits into a new epicenter of jihadis loyal to IS. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

“Wilayah Philippines [WP] signals a direct threat to countries in the region even as IS Central comes under pressure in the Middle East”



Southeast Asia's largest mosque Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Istiqlal_Mosque,_Jakarta#/media/File:Istiqlal_Mosque_Monas.jpg

Source: “Islamic State’s Wilayah Philippines: Implications for Southeast Asia,” S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 21 July 2016. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co16187-islamic-states-wilayah-philippines-implications-for-southeast-asia/#.V6llsTWGpnk>

“The announcement of Wilayah Philippines [WP] in southern Philippines epitomises a new IS strategy to “pivot” to Southeast Asia. It signals a direct threat to countries in the region even as IS Central comes under pressure in the Middle East.

... WP the self-proclaimed caliphate has explicitly laid claim to Southeast Asia. It is IS’s most powerful signal yet that it has political, ideological and military claims over the region ...

As an official wilayah, WP will fully be expected to intensify and coordinate operations within the region. It means that the probability of increased terrorist attacks in the region has just gone up. Already IS-inspired attacks have taken place in Jakarta and Puchong near Kuala Lumpur. Southeast Asia should brace itself for more IS-linked jihadi operations in the coming months, as the fledgling wilayah actively seeks to legitimise and announce its existence.

The presence of local jihadi groups in southern Philippines, moreover, provides IS a unique sanctuary, much like the way the Al Qaeda-linked and Indonesian-based Jemaah Islamiyah network found a similar permissive milieu in the same area since the late 1980s. Already, Katibah al-Muhajir, a Southeast Asian combat unit has been established in WP in July 2016.”

Source: “The Tri-Border Area: Jihadi Epicentre in Southeast Asia,” S.Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 21 July 2016. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/co16186-the-tri-border-area-jihadi-epicentre-in-southeast-asia/#.V6llsjWGpnk>

“... a new brigade for migrants, the Katibah Al-Muhajir (KaM) or The Brigade of the Migrant. For approximately 500 Malaysian Ringgit, a prospective foreign jihadist can secure his travel arrangements, from Malaysia to the Philippines, and be given a complimentary weapon. IS has ostensibly accumulated 10 battalions in six locations in southern Philippines according to the ANA....”

For more information, see: “Islamic State is Promoting Local Terrorism in Southeast Asia,” *OE Watch*, Aug 2016



Has ASEAN Become China's Pawn?

OE Watch Commentary: Apparent disagreements within ASEAN over the South China Sea highlight divisions in the group and how its unity is coming under severe stress, according to excerpts from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies commentary. ASEAN's disunity could be the start of what the group has strenuously and assiduously avoided thus far: ASEAN as pawns in great power competition.

According to excerpts, the joint statement of the 49th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 24 July followed a period of deadlock, where the group could not move its statement forward as it emerged that Cambodia prevented any reference to the Permanent Court of Arbitration's legal award. ASEAN's released statement then remarkably omitted any reference to the tribunal's legal ruling on the South China Sea arbitration case initiated by the Philippines.

As pointed out in the first accompanying commentary, Cambodia's actions should cause increasing discomfort for ASEAN since this was not an isolated incident. In July 2012, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting failed to issue a joint statement for the first time in ASEAN history with observers noting the 'spoiler role' that Cambodia played then, as also pointed out in the second passage. More recently, a month before the 49th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, a statement that was strongly worded on the South China Sea issue was initially released by Malaysia, but retracted three hours later as a result of Laos and Cambodia blocking it.

As the excerpt from the accompanying commentary indicates, some countries have proven willing to forego both ASEAN centrality and sacrifice its own and ASEAN's reputation to cooperate with China. According to the excerpt, this should be extremely disturbing for ASEAN leaders since these noncompliant members have shown little flexibility. The commentary concludes that ASEAN's unity, and by extension its centrality and international reputation, will continue to come under strain due to the opposing interests and postures of one or two parties. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

“This could be the start of what ASEAN has strenuously and assiduously avoided thus far: ASEAN as pawns in great power competition.”



ASEAN members' flags in Jakarta.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Association_of_Southeast_Asian_Nations#/media/File:ASEAN_Nations_Flags_in_Jakarta_3.jpg.

Source: “What Price Asean Unity?,” S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 5 August 2016. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/col6200-what-price-asean-unity>

Apparent disagreements within ASEAN over the South China Sea question has highlighted cleavages in the grouping and how its unity is coming under severe stress. ...

ON 24 JULY 2016, the Joint Communiqué of the 49th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos was released. The statement, remarkably, omit any reference to the Permanent Court of Arbitration's legal ruling on the South China Sea arbitration case initiated by the Philippines. The statement came after a period of deadlock, played out publicly through the media, where ASEAN could not move the statement forward as it emerged that Cambodia prevented any reference to the tribunal's legal award.

It should also cause ASEAN increasing discomfort that this was not an isolated incident. One recalls the failure of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in July 2012 to issue a joint communiqué for the first time in ASEAN history with observers noting the 'spoiler role' that certain ASEAN countries played then.

Fast forward four years later, while not an exact repeat, the echo is clear: There are some countries, such as Cambodia, that has proven itself willing to forego both ASEAN centrality and sacrifice its own and ASEAN's reputation to cooperate with China. This should be extremely disturbing to ASEAN leaders, especially since these recalcitrant members have shown little flexibility.

A month before the 49th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, a somewhat similar incident took place during a special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Kunming, China. A statement that was strongly worded on the South China Sea issue was initially released by Malaysia. However, barely three hours later it was retracted as a result of Laos and Cambodia blocking it,...

In short, ASEAN's unity – and by extension its centrality and international reputation – will continue to come under strain due to the opposing interests and postures of one or two parties. Furthermore, this could be the start of what ASEAN has strenuously and assiduously avoided thus far: ASEAN as pawns in great power competition.

Source: “Behind the scenes of ASEAN's breakdown,” *Asia Times Online*, 27 July 2012. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/NG27Ae03.html

Until Cambodia spoke, no country took exception to the interventions by the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. When it was Cambodia's turn to speak its foreign minister queried why it was necessary to mention Scarborough Shoal, where China and the Philippines were recently engaged in a two-month stand-off.

For more information, see: “Vietnam and China are Both Trying to Win Over Cambodia,” *OE Watch*, Jul 2016



Vietnam's UAV Development: From Civilian Uses to South China Sea Defense

OE Watch Commentary: The People's Army of Vietnam first began experimenting with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) as early as 1993. However, only in the 2000s did UAVs become common for civilian uses. In the past few years, as a result of increasing tensions with China over disputed islands in the South China Sea, Vietnam has also used UAVs for military purposes, such as training, surveillance, border patrols, and search and rescue.

The excerpted article from *Viettimes* of the Vietnamese press on 28 July discussed Vietnam's latest efforts to develop UAVs for military purposes. Landing a deal with India on a satellite tracking station in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam seeks to establish greater intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. As Vietnam is on the front line of the South China Sea dispute with China, an increase in ISR capabilities, particularly long-range UAVs, will increase Vietnam's ability to monitor Chinese movements around disputed islands in the South China Sea, particularly those that are farther off the Vietnamese coast. For Vietnam, this is an important part of deterring China and being prepared to respond to Chinese actions that threaten islands that Vietnamese controls and claims.

The article's reference to UAVs only for defense purposes suggests that armed UAVs are not imminently going to be part of Vietnam's arsenal. If Vietnam were to deploy armed UAVs it would heighten the risk of a violent confrontation with China. This would not only increase tensions between China and Vietnam but could also undermine regional security and put other Southeast Asian nations in a bind. The development of armed UAVs could also lead to a UAV arms race in Southeast Asia. Thus by maintaining a defensive ISR posture with its UAVs, Vietnam is more effectively responding to China's activities in the South China Seas and surveilling China's navy without causing concern among its Southeast neighbors. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“UAV and remote sensing satellite programs in Vietnam are often focused on their advantages in agriculture, disaster management and fisheries management. But clearly the use of satellites could be used for defense purposes.”



Fleets of Chinese fishing vessels shown in the adjacent image, which are supported by the Chinese navy, have added to Vietnam's motivation to deploy UAVs to monitor its coastline.
Source: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/vietnam/vietnam-china-01082016152748.html>

Source: “Việt Nam làm mới kho vũ khí, tăng năng lực “chống tiếp cận” Biển Đông,” [Vietnam refreshes its arsenal, strengthens “anti-access” capacity in the East Sea], *Viettimes*, 28 July 2016. <http://viettimes.vn/quoc-phong/vu-khi-cong-nghe/viet-nam-lam-moi-kho-vu-khi-tang-nang-luc-chong-tiep-can-bien-dong-69179.html>

Vietnam is gradually purchasing more weapons to “refresh” its arsenal, largely from Russia, but also increasingly from other sources. Vietnam plans to develop the capacity of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). For the military to be effective it obviously depends not only on hot weapons; but also on the ability to detect, track, and guide weapons, which are the other important factors. With this in mind, in addition to continuing to buy more weapons, Hanoi has taken initial important steps in establishing a comprehensive ISR network. In this context, one can explain the tremendous military potential of the agreement between Vietnam and India to establish a satellite tracking station in [Ho Chi Minh] City, and an earlier report on UAVs that will patrol the South China Sea.

UAV and remote sensing satellite programs in Vietnam are often focused on their advantages in agriculture, disaster management and fisheries management. But clearly the use of satellites could be used for defense purposes. Civilian satellites may not possess equivalent capacity as military variants, but they can still accomplish some low-intensity military tasks in peacetime and in wartime. With a coastline of 3,444km (not counting the islands) and vast sea areas where there are claims on the South China Sea, Vietnam clearly needs a comprehensive strategy to enhance ISR.



Weapons over Ideology: Vietnam Diversifies Partners in Missile Upgrade

OE Watch Commentary: According to the excerpted Vietnamese language article in the Vietnamese language daily *Viettimes* on 5 August, Vietnam has acquired mobile rocket launchers from Israel. Although they are not reported to be armed, the article states that they are capable of being armed and installed on several islands in the South China Sea. Given their range, they would be able to hit Chinese targets from longer distances than before and provide a greater deterrent to Chinese assertiveness over island claims.

The article also notes that Vietnam made the deal with Israel despite Israel being a capitalist country. The strategic value of the weapons system is therefore more important than Vietnam's relations with a country that formerly would have been considered an ideological enemy. It was only in 2009 that the first Vietnamese ambassador was posted to Israel and in 2011 that military relations were established and attaches exchanged.

As Vietnam increasingly opens up economically, albeit not as much politically, the country is leaving behind ideological constraints on military deals and partnerships with formerly enemy countries. The deal with Israel is occurring at the same time the US is ending an arms embargo on Vietnam; Japan is being allowed to make port calls at Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay; and India is selling cruise missiles to Vietnam. Russia is still Vietnam's largest arms supplier, however, and Vietnam is weary to become embroiled in US-China competition, but it is clear that Vietnam is becoming a part of the Southeast Asian hub-and-spoke alliance structure with new friends both in the region and further abroad. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“For the first time viewers saw a new missile in the procurement of the Vietnam People’s Army that has derived from a capitalist country, Israel.”



China has long accused the US and its allies, such as Israel, of arming China's South China Sea rivals, such as Philippines, whose naval vessels are seen an exercise in the adjacent image, and increasingly also Vietnam.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/china-accuses-us-of-militarizing-south-china-sea/2886799.html>

Source: “Việt Nam dùng tên lửa Israel “làm cỏ” địch đồ bộ đảo Biển Đông,” [Vietnam uses Israeli missiles to “weed out” enemy amphibious plans on East Sea islands] *Viettimes*, 5 August 2016. <http://viettimes.vn/quoc-phong/chien-luoc-chien-thuat/viet-nam-dung-ten-lua-israel-lam-co-dich-do-bo-dao-bien-dong-54654.html>

During the parade the day of the 60th anniversary of the Navy in the military port of Cam Ranh, Khanh Hoa Province, for the first time viewers saw a new missile in the procurement of the Vietnam People’s Army that has derived from a capitalist country, Israel. They were the guided ballistic missiles called EXTRA.

EXTRA combat missiles are effective against fixed targets such as command centers, battlefield solid defenses, communications centers, and military infrastructure. Only EXTRA ballistic missile have an inertial navigation system and satellite navigation, compact launchers, and ammunition in containers for long term storage. They can be installed on multiple islands and camouflaged with the smallest area of the platform or to meet defense requirements and effectively fight an enemy’s attack.

Marine Forces island military defense can create a strong fire grid, capable of repelling the surprise invasion from the sea on the island of Vietnam’s sovereignty.



Japan Researching Removal of Space Debris

OE Watch Commentary: The Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) is moving forward with plans to test space debris removal technology this fall. The accompanying excerpts discuss the technology, vision and motives behind this. Embracing a role as a responsible space leader is also a powerful diplomatic gesture, as it sends a message to China in particular, which has been condemned worldwide for deliberately creating space debris while testing anti-satellite kinetic weapons.

According to the first excerpted article, the conceptual technology will involve using magnetism to slow debris enough to degrade its orbit. The second piece discusses that research into space cleanup technology is part of JAXA's operational vision. Space debris removal has been a Japanese priority for several years, and their motives are not entirely selfless – their own astronauts have been threatened by space debris, as discussed in the third excerpted article.

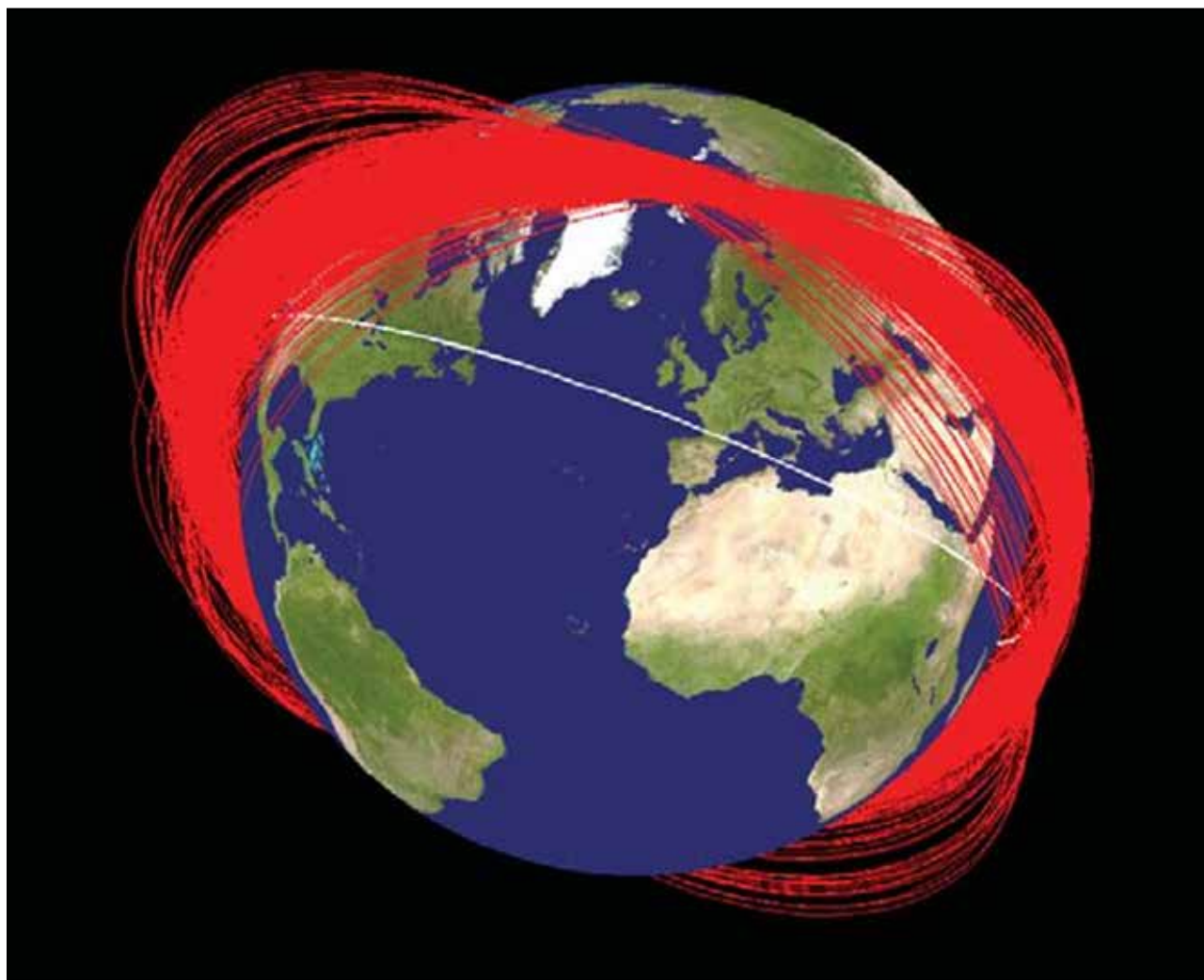
If the Japanese experiment is successful, there will be several hurdles to cross above and beyond the technological capability. International Space Law, in particular, will have to be amended, because there currently are no legal authorities or protections for anyone removing debris from a country other than their own, as discussed in the third passage.

In the long term, there is also the question of how such technology would affect international opinions on space warfare. If the technology works, it could actually remove internal restraints and decrease external pressure against potential space combatants, since creation of debris would no longer be as much of a problem. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

“... it may be necessary to develop a new framework of international space law concerning the provision of funds for debris removal, and the release of ownership of removed satellites, etc. ...”

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Japanese Space Agency To Trial Electric Cable For Space Junk Removal,” *Japan Times*, 30 June 2016, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/06/30/national/japanese-space-agency-trial-electric-cable-space-junk-removal>.

The space agency is planning an experiment to remove simulated space junk as part of efforts to develop a simple and inexpensive disposal system for objects that might puncture the International Space Station or destroy satellites ... scientists will try to slow a cylindrical object and steer it toward the atmosphere, where debris typically burns up ... The experiment is expected to take place this fall ... The debris disposal method relies on how objects move when an electric current is applied in a magnetic field. The agency will test whether the object can be shunted toward the atmosphere by applying a force against its direction of travel.



Comparison of the orbits of Fengyun-1C debris with the orbit of the International Space Station.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fengyun-1C_debris.jpg.

Source: Naoki Okumura, “Issuance of the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency,” *Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency*, June 2015, <http://global.jaxa.jp/activity/pr/brochure/files/general06.pdf>.

Several thousand tons of space debris (space junks) is floating around Earth, posing a risk of collision for the International Space Station and satellites that has become a major international problem. In order for safe use of space in future, JAXA is conducting research on technologies to assess the actual situation of space debris, to recover and remove it, to prevent it from increasing, as well as to protect spacecraft from it. [sic]

(continued)



Continued: Japan Researching Removal of Space Debris

“... scientists will try to slow a cylindrical object and steer it toward the atmosphere, where debris typically burns up ...”



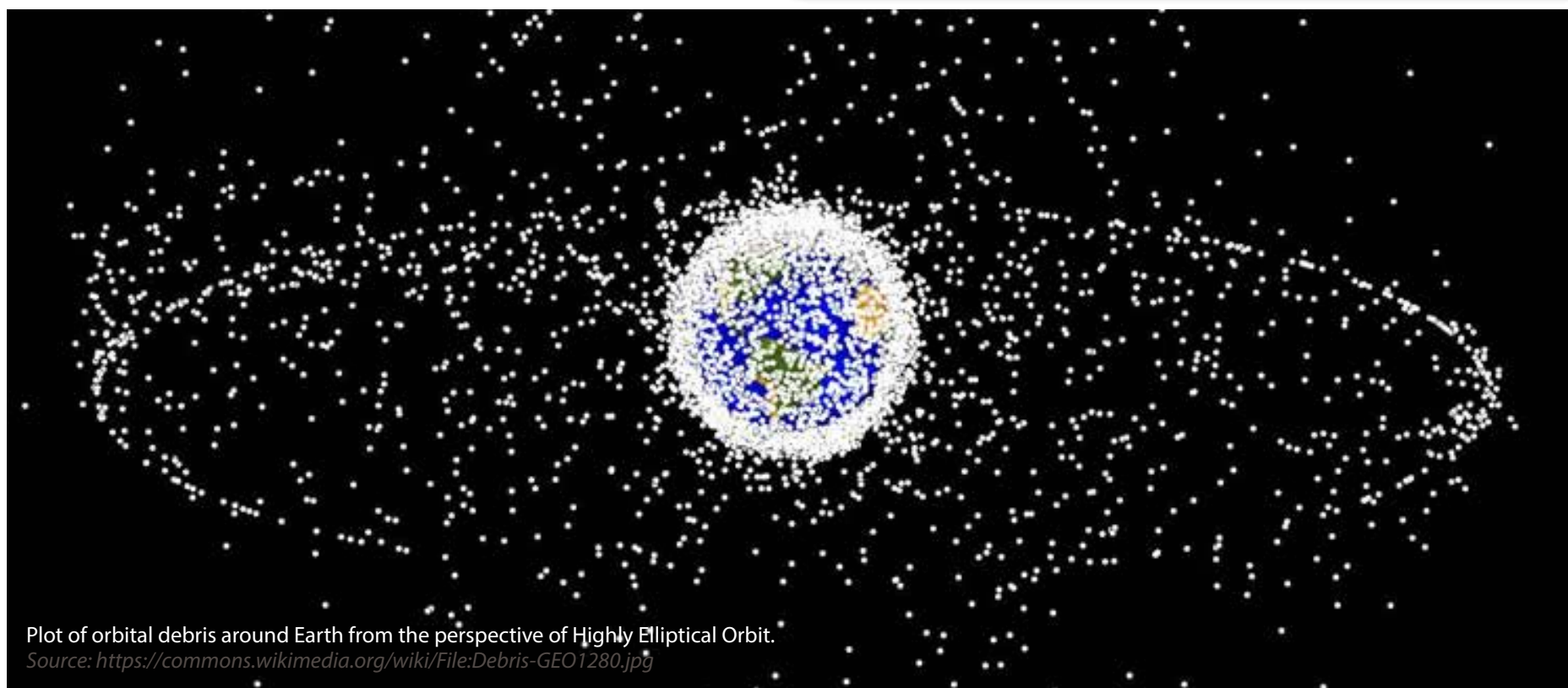
Result of space debris impact upon US Space Shuttle Endeavor.

Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:STS-118>

Source: Yasuaki Hashimoto, “Briefing Memo: Space Debris and Security,” *The National Institute for Defense Studies News*, 01 February 2013, http://www.nids.go.jp/english/publication/briefing/pdf/2013/briefing_e173.pdf.

... ISS altered its trajectory nearly 10 times since the start of its operation to avoid space debris, and in June, 2011 the entire crew including Dr. Satoshi Furukawa, a Japanese astronaut,

evacuated to the Soyuz spacecraft for an emergency escape in preparation of unexpected problems ... In Japan, the Japan Space Forum (JSF) and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) are monitoring debris in outer space. The JSF observes space debris by radar and optical telescope installed in Okayama Prefecture and sends observation data to JAXA for analysis. ... At present, the observation of space debris is not part of the tasks of the Ministry of Defense or Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) ... Japan is in the process of considering the development of a system that can observe the situation of space, including space debris, with a high degree of accuracy ... The next necessary step is the removal of debris, but at the moment the removal technology is no more than just an idea. Still, it is noteworthy that Japan has the cutting edge in the development of debris removal technology. For example, Japan is one of the world leaders in technology to slow the velocity of defunct artificial satellites and debris by attaching charged tethers to them and incinerating them by forcing them to plunge into the atmosphere. Robotics technology, in which Japan excels, can also be applied in many areas ... In addition, as international space law is interpreted as giving ownership of malfunctioned satellites to their registered states, no third state may be able to remove them without prior consent of such registered states. In consideration of these points, it may be necessary to develop a new framework of international space law concerning the provision of funds for debris removal, and the release of ownership of removed satellites, etc. ...



Plot of orbital debris around Earth from the perspective of Highly Elliptical Orbit.

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Debris-GEO1280.jpg>



Japanese Startup Specializes in Small Satellite Lift

OE Watch Commentary:

Small satellites are usually launched as a secondary payload to a larger, much more expensive satellite. However, the increasing popularity of microsatellites, including CubeSATS, is creating a market for space lift services specializing in small payloads. As the accompanying article indicates, the Japanese startup company Interstellar Technologies is preparing a test launch with this market in mind. The implementation remains a way off, but if successful, it will eventually make access to space faster and cheaper.

This will have implications across the world. For traditional space actors, it will be a matter of scale, allowing faster and cheaper deployment of satellite constellations for whatever purpose is needed. For non-state actors and for nations without robust space programs, it will make space more accessible, putting military space capabilities within reach and giving them a greater voice in international space dialogue. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

“Our focus is not to develop high-end rockets but something simple and affordable, just like the Super Cub (Honda Motor’s popular small motorbike).”

“Minisatellites can be developed at lower cost and more quickly than large satellites.”



1U CubeSat structure without outer skin; CubeSATS are one of the most popular microsatellite frames because of their standardized configurations.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CubeSat_in_hand.jpg

Source: Junichi Taki interviewing Takahiro Inagawa, “Interview: Hokkaido startup aims high in small satellite launches,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, 26 June 2016, <http://asia.nikkei.com/Tech-Science/Tech/Hokkaido-startup-aims-high-in-small-satellite-launches>.

... Takahiro Inagawa, CEO of Interstellar Technologies, recently spoke with *The Nikkei* about the company’s goal of building cheap booster rockets for small satellites. The startup is preparing to launch its first sounding rocket for observation as early as this summer ... As satellites get smaller, potential demand for compact satellite-launch rockets is increasing ... One study estimates there is annual demand for 300 launches worldwide. Minisatellites can be developed at lower cost and more quickly than large satellites ... At present, small satellites are often launched together with a larger, main satellite using a large launch vehicle. This has limited the number of small satellite launches, and often the small satellite fails to reach the anticipated orbit. In addition, when a small satellite is loaded onto a launch vehicle together with a main satellite, the safety criteria tend to be set higher than they should be, which raises costs. These hurdles prevent the market for small satellites from expanding. Our focus is not to develop high-end rockets but something simple and affordable, just like the Super Cub (Honda Motor’s popular small motorbike) ... To keep the cost down, we are trying to make the design as simple as possible and use as many off-the-shelf parts as possible. We won’t be able to make a rocket under budget from the beginning. But as we launch more vehicles, we should be able to increase cost-efficiency through mass production. As with other industrial devices, quantity is an important way to cut costs drastically ...



Military-Civilian Unity: An Important Part of the China Dream

OE Watch Commentary: Prior to the 1980s, China's defense industry was controlled exclusively by the military, operating independently from the civilian industry. Over time and through countless lessons learned, China's leadership has pushed for the integration of the defense and civilian sectors. Since President Xi Jinping took office, the consolidation of the defense and civilian sectors has received new impetus.

The following excerpts are from a recent article that offers a glimpse into what China expects to accomplish by consolidating and maintaining "military-civilian solidarity," as the article puts it. Having both the military and civilian sectors working closely together, according to Xi, will help the country realize the "China Dream" of "the great rejuvenation..." Emphasis is put on having both sectors cooperate in research and manufacturing of military products. This is clearly an important tool in helping China to achieve the "China Dream." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

"The seamless solidarity between the military, government and public is an important guarantee for China to weather storms and march from triumph to triumph..."

Source: "Xi Urges Renewed Efforts in Boosting Military Civilian Solidarity," *Xinhua*, 29 July 2016, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/29/c_135550244.htm.

Calling for relentless efforts to maintain military-civilian solidarity, Xi called on the military and civilian sectors to be like-minded and work in synergy, which would help the country realize the great rejuvenation of the nation.

The seamless solidarity between the military, government and public is an important guarantee for China to weather storms and march from triumph to triumph, Xi said.

Calling the ongoing national defense and military reform "across-the-board" and "revolutionary," Xi said it commanded support from all sectors.

Xi called for solid content and diversified forms of work to promote military-civilian unity, in order to support the Party and state work, as well as the construction of national defense and armed forces.

He underscored the allocation of priority use of land for military purposes and construction of roads for national defense needs, while improving support facilities for war readiness and medical uses, as well as public services.

Enterprises with a competitive edge should be guided to participate in research and manufacturing of military products, Li said, adding that more should be done to help officers and soldiers with any difficulties.

Demobilized soldiers who start their own businesses or engage in innovation should be given support, according to Li.

China-Taliban Relations: How Strong Are They?

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese authorities have reportedly met with members of the Taliban at various times throughout the past years. Most recently, according to the following excerpted article, a delegation, led by Abbas Stanakzal, head of the Taliban's political office in Qatar, visited Beijing July 18-22.

China tends to remain low keyed in its dealing with the Taliban, rarely coming out and admitting meetings between the two. The article is interesting in that it shows China's involvement with, and concern over Afghanistan. China strives to maintain contact with all parties related to the Afghan issue. As the article points out, China has good reason to be involved with all parties. The country's biggest fear clearly is that instability in Afghanistan might spill over into Xinjiang, which borders the country. It could also negatively impact China's Belt and Road initiative. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

"The visit of the Taliban delegation is part of a routine level of communication China maintains with opposition forces in Afghanistan..."

Source: Bai Tiantian, "China Indirectly Confirms Meeting with Taliban," *Global Times*, 3 August 2016. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/998033.shtml>.

Analysts said the visit came at a delicate time after a former Taliban leader was killed in a US drone strike a few months ago, as China is interested in learning the new leader's political stance to help facilitate the peace talks.

In a faxed statement to the Global Times on Tuesday, China's foreign ministry said the country has always supported the "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" political reconciliation process and supports the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban so the country can restore stability as soon as possible.

"Therefore, China maintains contact with all parties related to the Afghan issue and is willing to continue playing a constructive role," the foreign ministry said without providing further details on the visit.

"The visit of the Taliban delegation is part of a routine level of communication China maintains with opposition forces in Afghanistan," said Yu Guoqing, a research fellow of West and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

China's interests in the country have been growing in the past few years, fearing that instability in Afghanistan might spill over into the bordering Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region or affect China's global economic strategy - the Belt and Road initiative.



China and the Levant

OE Watch Commentary: Shortly before Chinese leader Xi Jinping visited the Middle East in January 2016, China's foreign affairs ministry issued a document titled "China's Arab Policy Paper." As the accompanying excerpts from the paper note, strategic cooperative relations underpinned by strong economic ties and pragmatic relationships drive China's Middle East policy. Regional fracturing and polarization, most notably in the Syrian conflict, makes the Chinese-Arab courtship increasingly difficult. According to the second accompanying article, when it comes to Syria, the Chinese government's foreign ministry seeks to remain neutral for fear of upsetting economic relationships in the Gulf, while its defense ministry fears that the desire to offend none may shut it out of the Levantine battlefield. China's stated position calls for a negotiated political solution to the Syrian conflict, and in March 2016 it appointed a seasoned diplomat as special envoy to Syria in the hopes of furthering this goal.

China's most immediate military concern in Syria is the growth of the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). The TIP is a jihadist group seeking independence for "East Turkistan" (in China's western province of Xinjiang), home to China's Muslim Uyghur ethnic minority. In the summer and fall of 2015 the TIP emerged as one of the Syrian rebellion's most capable assault units, contributing vitally to important rebel victories in Idlib and Lattakia Provinces (for more information, see: "Turkistan Islamic Party Makes its Mark on the Syrian Rebellion," in the July 2016 issue of *OE Watch*). In July and August 2016, TIP shock troops played a key role in the successful rebel offensive to break the siege of rebel-held territory in Aleppo. Chinese understanding of the TIP in Syria is likely based on discussions with Iranian, Russian and Syrian counterparts.

In addition to gathering intelligence on the TIP, China may be drawn to the Syrian battlefield to test and assess weaponry and more generally learn about contemporary battlefields. In mid-August, a high-level Chinese military delegation led by Rear Adm. Guan Youfei met with Russian and Syrian military leadership in Damascus and expressed hopes of deepening cooperation with the Syrian military, as noted in the third accompanying excerpt. Some level of cooperation already exists; as the article notes, "there are already Chinese military advisors in Syria, focusing on personnel training in weapons." The fourth excerpt, from a July 2014 article in Syrian opposition media, claims that Chinese personnel play a prominent role in Defense Factory 790, a vital Syrian military production facility around 20 kilometers southeast of Aleppo.

The Syrian government and its Russian and Iranian allies can be expected to court a more robust Chinese presence in Syria. There are many ways of doing so, including promising to back China's position on the South China Sea territorial disputes (as Syria recently did) and highlighting the threat posed by the TIP's growth in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"... the Chinese military is more interested than its foreign ministry in getting involved..."

Source: "China's Arab Policy Paper," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 13 January 2016. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1331683.shtml

Arab countries as a whole have become China's biggest supplier of crude oil... China is willing to have pragmatic cooperation in the principle of mutual benefit and win-win results with Arab states... We will deepen China-Arab military cooperation and exchange. We will strengthen exchange of visits of military officials, expand military personnel exchange, deepen cooperation on weapons, equipment and various specialized technologies, and carry out joint military exercises.

Source: قراءة في خلفيات رغبة الصين بتطوير علاقاتها العسكرية مع سوريا "Background on China's Desire to Develop Military Relations with Syria," *al-Mayadeen*, 18 August 2016. <http://goo.gl/kOp5r1>

... the Chinese delegation sought information on Uyghur combatants of the Turkistan Islamic Party, ISIS, and the Nusra Front in Syria. ... Chinese strategy seeks to contain the growing threat from Uyghur separatists. China, according to Syrian researcher Dr. Aqil Said Mahfoudh, may have become more interested in the topic after receiving advice from Russia and Iran. Deepening military relations with Syria could involve intelligence sharing and coordination... the Chinese military is more interested than its foreign ministry in getting involved, as the latter fears the repercussion of doing so on relations with Arabian Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia... In an audio recording from 30 May, TIP leader Abdel Haq called ISIS deviant and said his group was in Syria to train Muslim fighters and encourage them to help their brothers in the Levant and join the jihad against the enemies of Islam. He added that his group is ready to return to "East Turkistan" (Xinjiang) to fight the Chinese infidel government and liberate the Muslim territory... China does not wish to anger Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to protect its investments and interests there. Furthermore, it fears that military intervention in Syria would lead to an escalation in tensions with Muslims in Xinjiang.

Source: "China Boosts Syria Support," *Global Times*, 18 August 2016. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1001150.shtml>

Rear Admiral Guan Youfei, director of the Office for International Military Cooperation of China's Central Military Commission, met Fahad Jassim al-Frej, Syrian Defense Minister, in Damascus. Both sides agreed to further cooperate on personnel training and humanitarian aid from the Chinese military... Guan also met with a Russian general heading its Syrian reconciliation center in Damascus on Monday on "issues of common interests"... China can learn from Russian's military actions and tactics in Syria and Crimea... "Many contracts were signed before the Syrian civil war, but due to the unstable situation, many couldn't be fulfilled in the past few years"... There are already Chinese military advisors in Syria, focusing on personnel training in weapons, since the Syrian government forces are buyers of Chinese weapons, including sniper rifles, rocket launchers and machine guns.

(continued)

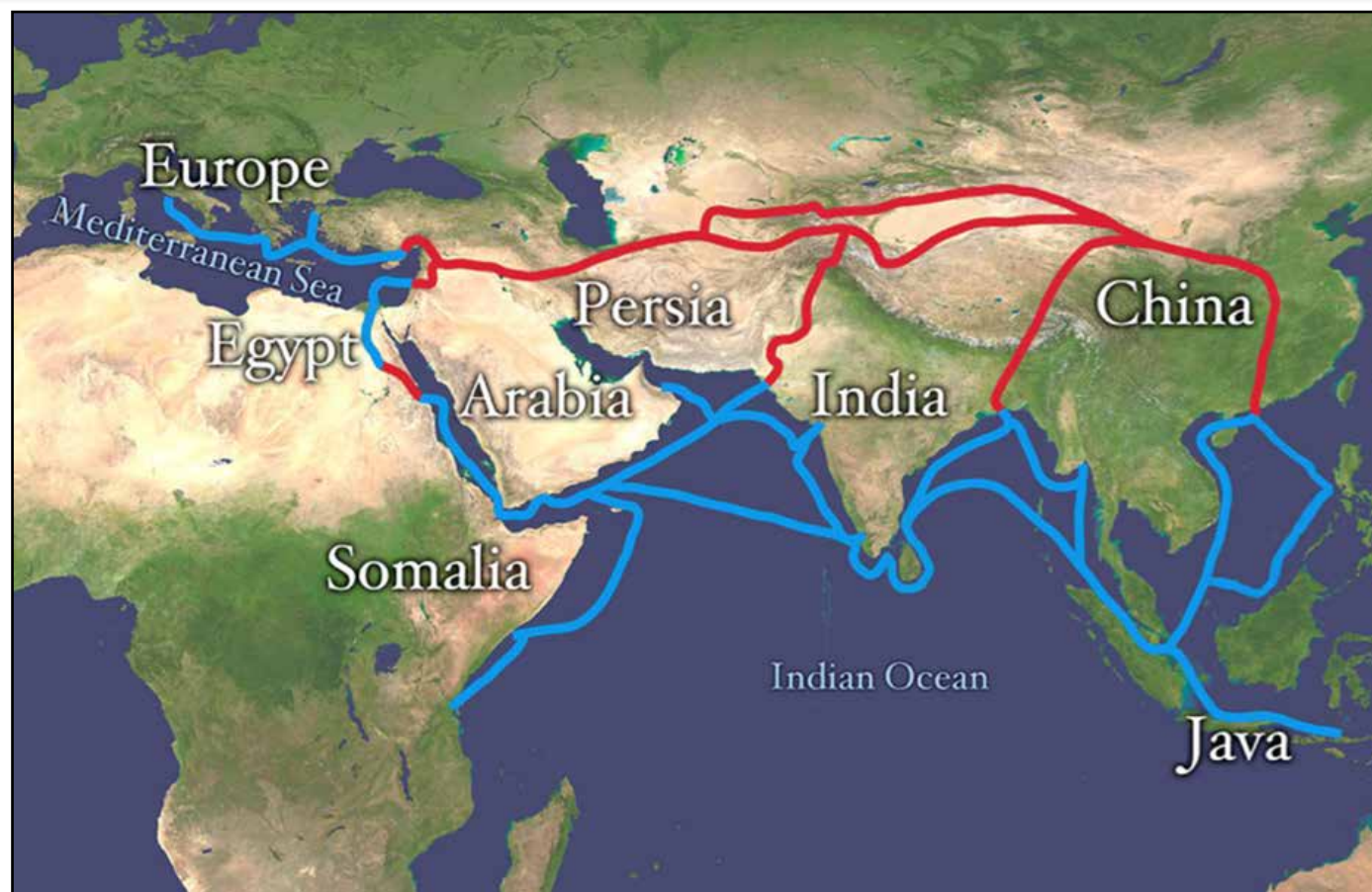


Continued: China and the Levant

Source:

أسرار وتفاصيل أضخم معامل قوات الأسد لتصنيع السلاح في سوريا
 “Secrets and Details on the Largest Weapons Factory in Syria,” al-An, 17 July 2014. <http://www.akhbaralaan.net/news/exclusive/2014/7/17/secrets-and-details-largest-coefficient-assads-forces-manufacture-weapons-syria> 1

According to the engineer, there are over 2000 workers at the factory. The highest authority are the Chinese experts, who are responsible for the furnaces that produce barrel bombs, surface-to-surface missiles, heavy artillery shells, mortars, and 23-mm rounds. The Chinese forbid anyone from entering the Chinese furnaces... He noted that four different authorities operate administratively independent from one another, with Iranians considered the second most influential after the Chinese...



Ancient Silk Road (red) and spice trade routes (blue).

Source: Whole_world_-_land_and_oceans_12000.jpg: NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center derivative work:Splette derivative work:Bongan NASA - Visible Earth, images combined and scaled down by HighInBC (20 megabyte upload limit) NASA Visible Earth [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Keeping NBC Relevant

Flame Weapons in the Russian Armed Forces

By Charles Bartles

The Russian Nuclear, Biological, And Chemical (NBC) Defense Troops are tasked with identifying NBC threats in the environment, performing decontamination of troops and equipment, and most interestingly, employing aerosols and flame weapons to engage the enemy. In most militaries, flame weapons have traditionally belonged to the NBC Troops. The popularity of such weapons has waned significantly throughout the world, but not so in the Russian Armed Forces. While the utility of NBC Troops in today's asymmetric warfare is questioned in other armies, Russian NBC Troops firm grasp of flame weapons keeps them relevant, engaged, and makes them an important asset in the Russian maneuver commander's toolbox.

http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Flame_2015.pdf



A Pakistani Government Helicopter Crashes in Afghanistan

OE Watch Commentary: On 4 August, a Mi-17 transport helicopter belonging to the government of Pakistan crashed in the Logar Province of Afghanistan. While there were only minor injuries reported, the crew was quickly taken hostage by the Taliban (or affiliated group) that controls the local district. The accompanying excerpted article reports on the incident and points out that it comes at a difficult time in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The author also discusses how the situation in various districts in Afghanistan contributed to the incident. While the author mentions that the circumstances of the crash are mysterious, there have been no reports that the helicopter was shot down.

The author's reference to mysterious circumstances could be related to the crew, which included three retired officers from Pakistan's military and a Russian navigator. Multiple reports noted that the helicopter had been en route to Uzbekistan for maintenance with the company "Russian Helicopters" as part of a contract, but this did not prevent media in the region from speculating that the presence of retired Pakistani officers indicated that the crew had been involved in an effort to destabilize Afghanistan. The statement from the Afghan government suggests that officials knew about the flight and its purpose, but the crash may result in closer scrutiny of future flights.

Pakistan recovered the helicopter and a photograph posted on social media a day after the crash showed it (minus the rotor blades and tail) being hauled on a trailer in Kabul, where it would eventually make its way to the border. The author notes that the government of Afghanistan has lost control over a large number of districts across the country and that multiple groups claimed to have the crew. The article also included an update the day after it was published online, reporting that negotiations resulted in the release of the hostages. This is worth noting because hostage situations in Afghanistan are not typically resolved this quickly. Ultimately, despite tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the situation in various districts across the latter, the incident does not appear to have caused any significant problems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

"A spokesperson for the Punjab government said that the carrier belonged to Punjab and that it [had] six people on board, including three retired Pakistan army officials along with a Russian navigator..."



The Pakistani government helicopter that crashed in Afghanistan on 4 August was recovered quickly, but it did sustain damage as can be seen from this photo as it traveled through Kabul..
Source: <https://khabarial.com/archives/167441>

Source: Muhammad, Irfan. "Flight risk," *The Friday Times*, 12 August 2016.
<http://www.thefridaytimes.com/tft/flight-risk/>

Just as tensions between Kabul and Islamabad were at an all-time high over the construction of a border gate on the Pakistani side, a Pakistani helicopter made what was described as a crash landing in Logar province of eastern Afghanistan under 'mysterious' circumstances on August 5. All six crew members, including a Russian citizen, have been in captivity of insurgents since then...there has been no clarity on who is actually holding them as one party's claims have been contradicted by another and their positions are further contradicted by the ground reality of who controls the turf.

What is known, however, is that the village of Mati in the Azra district, where the landing took place, is part of one of the 400 districts that the Afghan government has lost control of to the Afghan Taliban...A spokesperson for the Punjab government said that the carrier belonged to Punjab and that its six people on board, including three retired Pakistan army officials along with a Russian navigator...The statement from the (Afghan) president's office made it clear that the helicopter had formal approval for travelling over the country's airspace but it added that, "a delegation was assigned to look into the different aspects of the case" and whether "the specifics of the Mi-17 match the ones rendered in the request letter and permission documents". The statement also asked for a review of the policy to use Afghanistan's air space.

A security official told TFT that the helicopter had flown from Peshawar and was bound to Uzbekistan for overhauling... a day after the crash the wrecked tail and rotors along with the body was put on a trailer and taken to Kabul where it was placed near the Kabul airport.

UPDATE August 13: AFP reported on Saturday that the hostages were released... they were "released in an inter-tribe exchange on the Pakistan-Afghan border (and) arrived in Islamabad today"...



Protecting the Port of Aktau, Kazakhstan

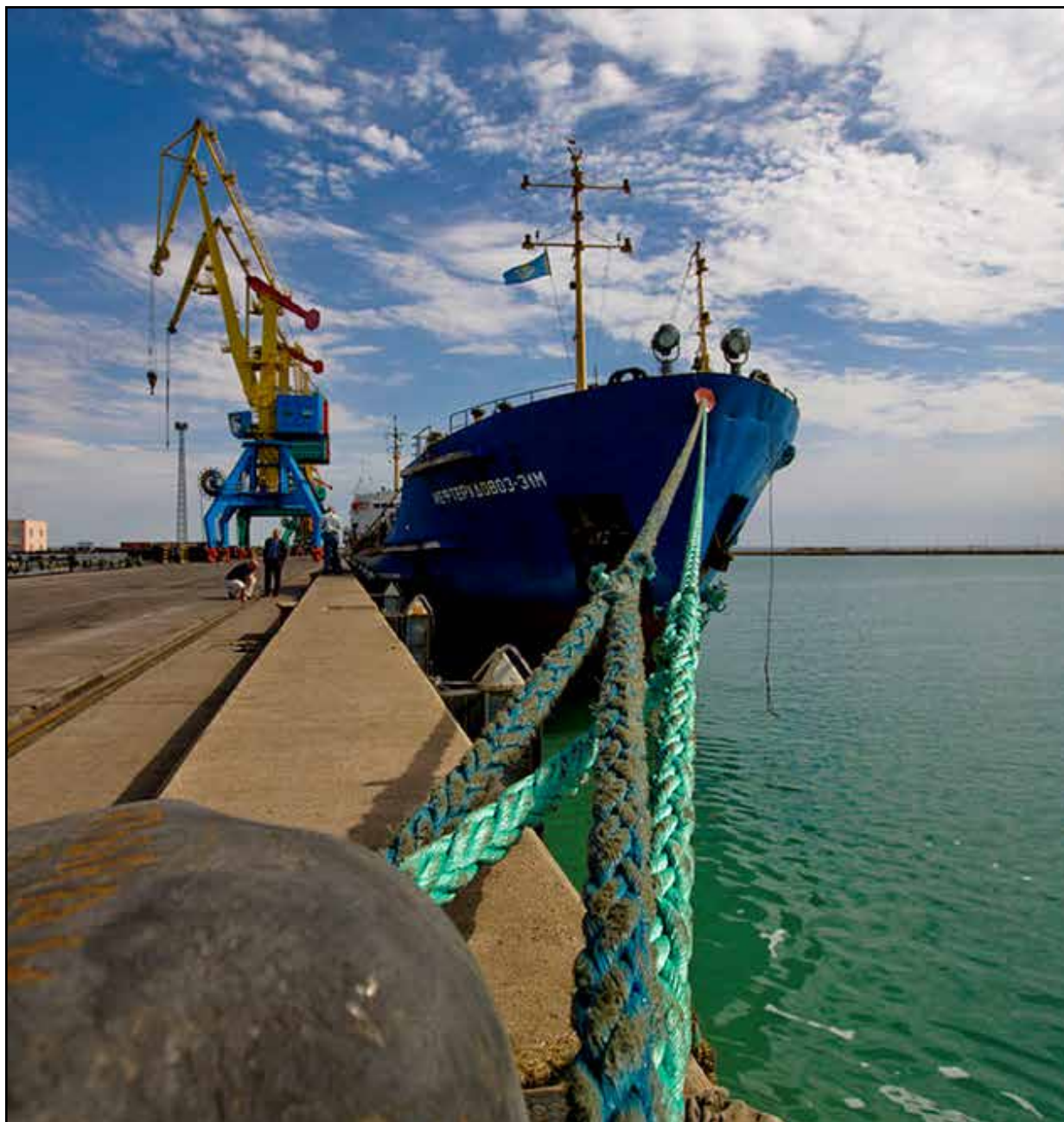
OE Watch Commentary: The government of Kazakhstan has made a number of upgrades to its Caspian Sea fleet with the construction or purchase of ships for the Navy and the Border Guards Service over the past several years. While additions to the fleet have improved the capabilities of both services, the accompanying excerpted article reports on one area of the Navy that has been lacking and the effort to resolve it: a pier for the country's naval forces.

As the author discusses, the construction of a naval pier on the Caspian is taking place largely because of logistics. As the author notes, Kazakhstan's fleet is currently deployed in a leased pier located 80 miles from the naval base, which causes problems for service members living in the city of Aktau. While eliminating this problem is a good reason for construction of the pier, the security aspect of the pier might be just as important.

The author also points out that the pier will allow the Kazakh Navy to better respond to threats. The *Zenit* shipyard recently launched a small ship with the purpose of better protecting Caspian ports from sabotage and this is in contrast to the larger rocket-artillery ships that have been put into service in recent years. Construction of the pier started in February and it is worth noting that authorities conducted a counterterrorism exercise in the port in May 2015 (the National Security Committee led the exercise and units from the Ministry of Defense participated). Not much appeared in the media on the exercise outside of government public relations channels, but it may have prompted officials to provide better security for the port. Ultimately, while the construction of the pier will certainly help cut down on costs, it may play a more important role in securing the port of Aktau. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

For more information, see "The public relations value of counterterrorism exercises in Kazakhstan" in the September 2015 issue of *OE Watch*.

"Kazakhstan's fleet is currently deployed in a leased pier in Bautino located at a distance of 140 km from the naval base which causes problems for service members living in the city of Aktau."



"The port of Aktau is one of the busiest and most important ports for Kazakhstan, but it is only recently that the government started construction on the first pier for country's Naval forces."

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Aktau#/media/File:Port_Aktau.jpg

Source: Kutsai, Stanislava. "В октябре планируют завершить строительство в Актау первого военного пирса (Construction of the first naval pier in Aktau is expected to be completed in October)," *Lada*, 13 August 2016. https://www.lada.kz/aktau_news/society/41189-v-oktyabre-planiruyut-zavershit-stroitelstvo-pervogo-v-aktau-voennogo-pirsa.html

According to the press service of the Ministry of Defense, the pier in the port of Aktau will be the first pier of military designation in the history of the Navy of Kazakhstan...Kazakhstan's fleet is currently deployed in a leased pier in Bautino located at a distance of 140 km from the naval base which causes problems for service members living in the city of Aktau.

...the Naval Forces of Kazakhstan in Aktau will be able to quickly and effectively respond to possible threats and better organize logistics. This will save on the service life of weapons and equipment and reduce the cost of fuel...Construction of the pier began in February...It will be located on a dedicated port area of 1.2 hectares...



Russia's Current, and Possibly Future, Western Military Dispositions

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from the popular, pro-regime news source, *Gazeta.ru* discusses military dispositions on Russia's western border, and speculates about future capabilities. The map provided in the article lays out these dispositions (red for current units, green for proposed units). Although the writer depicts current units well, there is little chance that Russia would field the author's proposed future units and dispositions.

The creation of new combined arms armies (army groups) and associated maneuver and support units would involve a massive increase in the size of the Russian Armed Forces. The Russian Ground Forces currently have an estimated 220,000 soldiers. Considering the units depicted and necessary associated support units, the proposed force structure would likely involve a major gutting of the other operational strategic commands/military districts or increasing the Ground Forces' personnel level by at least 100,000 soldiers. Aside from the personnel and cost issues from such an expansion, it also seems contrary to current trends in the Russian Armed Forces. In general, the Russian Armed Forces have been downsizing, and eliminating superfluous commands and leadership. The 2008 "New Look" reforms eliminated or downgraded many officer positions, including general officer positions. Even after adjustment for the relative numbers of personnel, three and four star generals are fairly rare in the Russian Armed Forces in comparison to the US military, especially considering the Russian Defense Minister and deputy ministers are general officers. It seems unlikely that Russia would increase the number of army group and corps-level commands when it has just gone through great lengths to "lean" the force. If Russia does add more military capacity, it will most likely add new maneuver units such as brigades and divisions or support units, and not new higher command elements such as army groups and corps.

An interesting aspect of the map is the legend, which depicts different echelons (operational strategic commands/military districts, army groups, corps, brigades, etc.) of units. It also shows how Russians view them in terms of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of military activity. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Mikhail Khodarenok, "They Want Changes on the Western Front: How One Can Strengthen the Troop Grouping in Russia's West," *Gazeta.ru Online*, 27 July 2016, <<https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2016/07/25/9701081.shtml>>, accessed 15 August 2015.

Gazeta.ru has assessed the troop grouping that exists in Russia's west today and has speculated how one can strengthen it over the next 15 years to guarantee national security while the NATO Bloc expands to the East. The attached map is hypothetical and is not an actual document.

In 1991, after the disintegration of the USSR, the Moscow, Leningrad, and North Caucasus military districts suddenly became border military districts. Prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, they were in the deep rear and practically did not have deployed and combat ready formations and combined formations in their composition and amounted to a certain combination of cadre units, military educational institutions, units, and rear services institutions. The operational preparation of the territories of the regions, which suddenly became border regions, had practically not been conducted in support of the country's defense. There were fundamentally no troops on the new western border. In particular, in Moscow Military District there were just two not fully-manned divisions, which were primarily designated for the conduct of parades on Red Square...

It has only very recently been ascertained that there are no troops at all, which are adequate to guarantee the country's national security on the western border and the infrastructure practically completely does not correspond to the new threats and challenges. In this situation, the leadership of the country and the Armed Forces made a decision at the end of 2015 on the deployment of three combined-arms divisions on the western borders at Yelnya (144th Motorized Rifle Division, Smolensk Oblast), Boguchar (10th Tank Division, Voronezh Oblast), and Novocherkassk (150th Motorized Rifle Division, Rostov Oblast).

Today Russia lags behind NATO by nearly twofold in personnel, by approximately three times in armored combat vehicles, by two times in combat aircraft, and by three times in attack helicopters...

...At the present time, 6th Combined-Arms Army is deployed in St. Petersburg in the composition of two motorized rifle brigades and weapons and military equipment storage bases. Based upon its combat and numerical strength, this operational combined formation is less than a standard army corps. Therefore, we urgently need to augment the Ground Troops grouping in the region, at least up to the minimally needed level. In particular, deploy an army corps in the composition of three motorized rifle brigades in Luga. We need to form a combined-arms army in the composition of three motorized rifle divisions in Velikiye Luki. Deploy a combined arms army in the composition of three divisions (two motorized rifle and one tank) in Smolensk...

...At the present time, this military district is the most powerful based upon combat and numerical strength. However, the troops on the border with Ukraine are clearly inadequate today. We need to deploy a combined arms army in the composition of two motorized rifle and one tank division in Belgorod. We need to form an army corps in the composition of three motorized rifle brigades in Rostov-na-Donu...

We need to deploy a fighter aviation division in the composition of two regiments of Su-30SM aircraft at Rostov-na-Donu and Krymsk airfields to cover from enemy air strikes from the southwestern strategic axis...

...With respect to the Long Range Aviation grouping on the territory (continued)

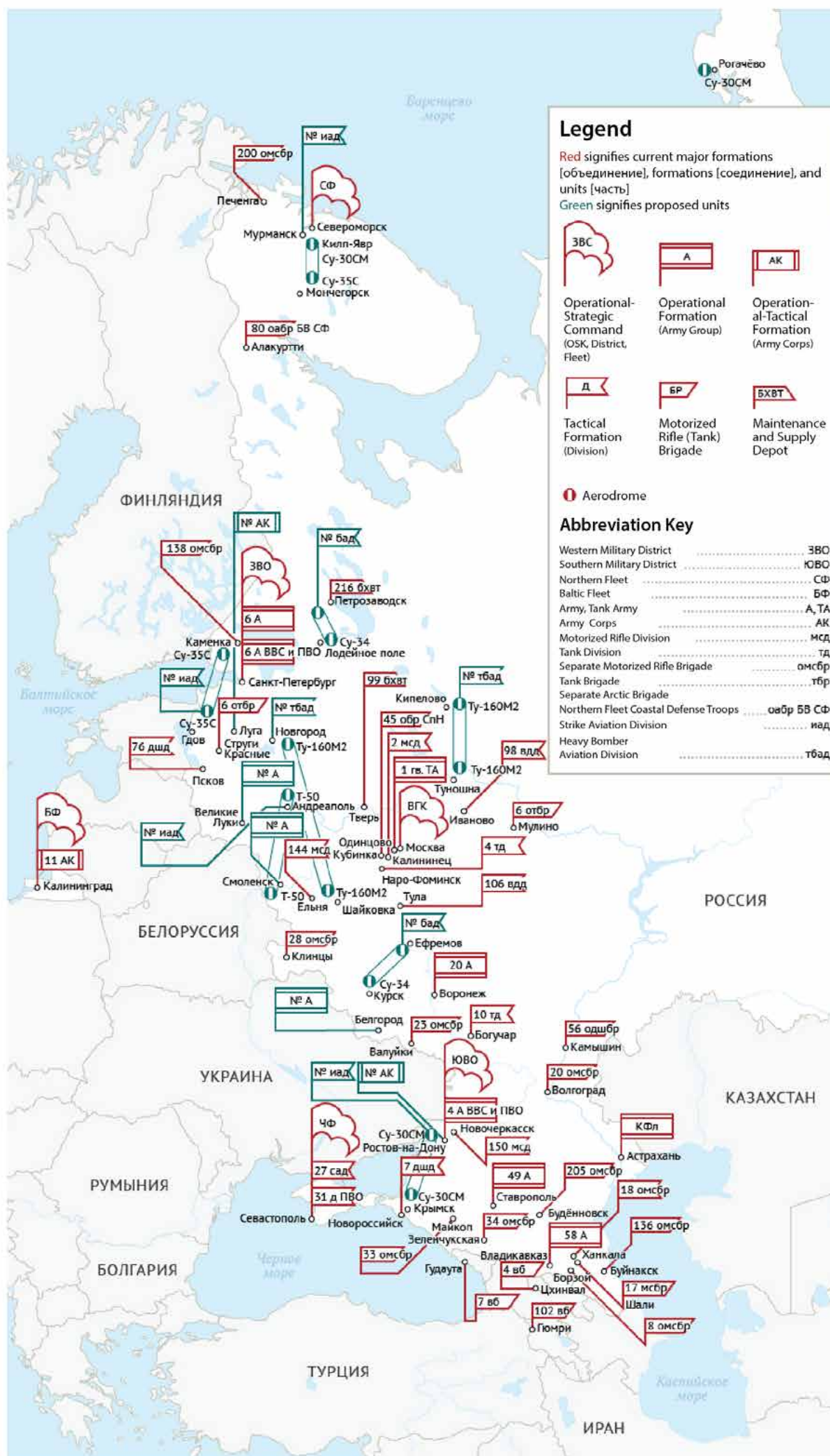


Continued: Russia's Current, and Possibly Future, Western Military Dispositions

of Russia's European portion, it appears to be advisable to additionally form at least two more strategic bomber divisions in this region. Deploy one of these heavy bomber aviation divisions with Tu-160M2 aircraft at Kipelovo (Vologda) and Tunoshna (Yaroslavl) airfields. Deploy the division command element at Kipelovo Airfield. Deploy the second Tu-160M2 heavy bomber division at Soltsy (Novgorod) and Shaykovka (Kaluga Oblast) airfields. Deploy the division command element at Soltsy Airfield.

After the conduct of these more than large-scale organizational-staff measures, one will be able to consider that Russia's western border has been covered at least at a solid satisfactory rating. Today, one can consider these plans to be a variety of operational-strategic fantasies under conditions of the extremely tough resource and financial limitations. However, we will have to return to the issue of augmenting the troops on the western border sooner or later. Today the combat and numerical strength is clearly inadequate and does not meet the changed conditions of the geopolitical situation.

Potential Forces on the Western Border



РАМБЛЕР ИНФОГРАФИКА Source: <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2016/07/25/9701081.shtml>

газета.ru



Evolving Combined Arms Maneuver: The Company Tactical Group?

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article from the pro-regime news site, *Gazeta.ru* features an interview with Vyacheslav Khalitov, the Deputy General Director for Special Vehicles for Uralvagonzavod—the corporation that produces the T-72 and new Armata series tanks and combat vehicles. Khalitov discusses how the troop structure will change with the introduction of advanced equipment on the Armada platform.

Interestingly, Khalitov proposes that the future of combined arms maneuver could involve “combat modules” of approximately ten vehicles. These combat modules could have 1-2 tanks, 2-3 heavy BMPs (infantry fighting vehicles), a fire support vehicle with an automated turret with a 57 millimeter gun, a combat strike vehicle with an automated turret with a 152 millimeter gun, a command and control vehicle, and a support vehicle. In the Russian system, brigades and regiments are the lowest echelons that practice combined arms maneuver, the term “battalion tactical group” is used to annotate that this lower echelon unit now is a combined arms formation, on a temporary basis, by way of attachments. These combat modules could in a sense be considered as “Company Tactical Groups” because they involve a (small) combined arms formation approximately the size of a Russian motorized rifle or tank company (ten vehicles). **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Effective armor protection, which is comparable with the equivalent armor that tanks have, is the main criterion of an armored infantry vehicle’s success on the battlefield today.”

— Vyacheslav Khalitov, Uralvagonzavod Deputy General Director for Special Vehicles

Source: Mikhail Khodarenok, “The Ideology of the Future Combat System: How the Troop Structure Will Change with the Introduction of Advanced Equipment on the ‘Armata’ Platform,” 21 July 2016, <<https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2016/07/21/9701087.shtml>>, accessed 15 August 2016.

The Armata heavy universal tracked platform will result in the rejection of classic companies and battalions and the transition to modular type subunits. Uralvagonzavod Corporation Deputy Director for Special Equipment Vyacheslav Khalitov told Gazeta.Ru about the ideology of the Future Combat System...

Armored infantry vehicles have given a good account of themselves in local wars and armed conflicts as infantry support weapon systems, the conduct of reconnaissance and the escort of troop columns. However, the armor of the majority of BMPs [infantry fighting vehicles] and BTRs [armored personnel carriers] remains bullet-proof and it does not appear to be possible to use these vehicles as tank support weapons in an engagement.

...only tanks at best have reached the enemy’s last defensive line, and all of the rest were easily destroyed and disabled by enemy fire during the course

of an attack. If the infantry still managed to attack on foot behind the tanks, then this method of attack most often resulted in the separation of the riflemen from the armored vehicles using submachine gun and machinegun fire, after which the armored vehicles themselves were destroyed. It is obvious that, while attacking in the same combat formations with the tanks, there is no need to make heightened requirements of BMPs based upon their firepower and amphibious capability. Effective armor protection, which is



T-14 on Armata Chassis.

Source: <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/>

(continued)



Continued: Evolving Combined Arms Maneuver: The Company Tactical Group?

comparable with the equivalent armor that tanks have, is the main criterion of an armored infantry vehicle's success on the battlefield today.

"We have an ideology of the future combat system based upon the Armata heavy universal tracked platform - we are proposing to move away from such standard subunits as the motorized and tank company and to transition to combat modules, in other words, a certain combination of combat and support vehicles," told Gazeta.Ru.

He explained that, for example, the composition of the minimal tactical module could look like this: 1-2 T-14 Armata tanks, 2-3 T-15 heavy BMPs, a fire support vehicle with a combat module, which is equipped with a 57 millimeter gun, a combat strike vehicle with a combat module, which is equipped with a 152 millimeter gun, a combat command and control vehicle, and a support vehicle. {These vehicles are all produced by Uralvagonzavod}

"This subunit will possess a higher potential as compared to the standard motorized rifle and tank subunits, and the main thing – have equal mobility and equal protection on the battlefield," Khalitov thinks.

The conduct of an engagement under conditions of dense urban development, mountainous-desolate or marshy and forested terrain – is totally not one and the same and therefore it is impossible to require identical approaches to the organizational staff structure of the subunits, which are accomplishing combat missions under totally different conditions and with an enemy, which has a different level of equipment.

"A combination of several modules is needed to accomplish different combat missions. By way of illustration, if there is a need, then add air defense missile and artillery modules, an engineer counter-obstacle vehicle, a bridge laying vehicle, a mine-laying vehicle, and an armored mine-clearing vehicle to the composition of a tactical subunit (combat team). In other words, adapt the structure of the subunit (combat team) to specific combat operations, which will have to be conducted at this specific moment of time, similar to how, as it were, a commander assembles an organic unit from a designer's details, which will be required in an impending engagement. In short, we must possess a flexible platform. I am convinced that the future is with this approach," the expert thinks.

The formation of these modules has occurred during the course of past armed conflicts. By way of illustration, they created a team in the composition of 1-2 tanks, up to three BMPs, 1-2 ZSU-23-4 self-propelled antiaircraft artillery mounts for firing at the upper stories of buildings, combat engineer subunits, and flamethrower operators. But these were improvised detachments, which were enlisted from various subunits, where the combat crews practically didn't know each other. And if everything would be worked out during the course of combat and operational training in peacetime in a single authorized staff structure, the effectiveness of such subunits was an order of magnitude higher in an engagement, Khalitov clarifies.

...the concept of a heavy universal tracked platform and a modular approach to the formation of subunits and units based upon it in a contemporary engagement appears to be more appropriate, extremely advanced, and of great promise today. The experts think that we will mandatorily arrive at the modular principle and the sooner, the better.

"We have an ideology of the future combat system based upon the Armata heavy universal tracked platform - we are proposing to move away from such standard subunits as the motorized and tank company and to transition to combat modules, in other words, a certain combination of combat and support vehicles,"

— Vyacheslav Khalitov, Uralvagonzavod Deputy General Director for Special Vehicles



T-15 on Armata Chassis.
Source: <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/>



Russia Opening Underground Warfare Center

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article discusses Russian plans to establish an underground warfare center at the Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School. Apparently, Russian experiences in Syria, where tunneling and the underground aspects of warfare are commonplace, have required Russia to start formalized training to master the necessary skillsets for these endeavors. Russia's interest in underground warfare and tunneling is another example of how Russian lessons learned in Syria are being brought home and incorporated into mainstream Russian doctrine, training, and tactics. Other areas of Russian development due to the Syrian campaign include: urban warfare, artillery direct tactics, refining combined arms maneuver, and the combat testing of a host of a new technologies and equipment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The last time the Airborne Troops and Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) Spetsnaz operated underground was during the Afghan campaign. Today we have the opportunity to encounter this, for example, in Syria, where not even detached homes, but entire quarters of cities are connected by a network of underground communications. For a Spetsnaz soldier, the ability to operate unnoticed in underground communications – is the foundation of contemporary warfare...”

— Ivan Konovalov, Director of the Center for the Strategic Awareness Center

Source: Dmitriy Litovkin, “They Are Teaching the Airborne Troops to Fight Underground,” *Izvestiya Online*, 12 August 2016, <<http://izvestia.ru/news/626745#ixzz4HAEKryty>>, accessed 17 August 2016.

*Total darkness, a labyrinth of rooms, corridors, and stairs, and only one exit to the light. This will become the first underground range in the country near Ryazan to hone the skills of the conduct of combat operations in closed spaces and underground for the Ministry of Defense Airborne Troops and Special Operations Forces. A Ministry of Defense spokesman told **Izvestiya** that a unique training complex for special operations subunits under various conditions of the conduct of combat operations, including underground, will be built based at Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School. (RVVDKU)...*

“They hone the skills for the conduct of an underwater engagement in a special swimming pool, a morale-psychological training course is being created – this is a labyrinth with a large number of rooms and a single exit. The facility has been designated to teach the skills of rapid decision-making and orientation under conditions of being in closed spaces during the accomplishment of a combat operation”.

Izvestiya's source pointed out that the role of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief's operational reserve is assigned to the VDV forces in the contemporary structure of the Armed Forces. In other words, these are rapid reaction subunits, which can be redeployed on short notice to any theater of the conduct of combat operations for immediate employment. While proceeding from this concept, all of the plans of recent military exercises have been structured when Airborne Troops subunits from the country's interior are deployed to previously unknown theaters: to the Far East, the Caucasus, and to the Arctic. At one recent exercise, an assault force landed on a drift ice floe near the North Pole without preliminary training plus the landing site had not been prepared beforehand.

*Skill training for the conduct of combat operations underwater and underground – these are new elements in the training program both of the RVVDKU cadets and also of the servicemen of VDV subunits. **Izvestiya's** source pointed out that it is important to develop not only the skills but also morale and psychological qualities during work in total darkness and in a closed space. They are also developing the ability to use state-of-the-art thermal-imaging equipment.*

*“The last time the Airborne Troops and Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) Spetsnaz operated underground was during the Afghan campaign,” Ivan Konovalov, Director of the Center for the Strategic Awareness Center, told **Izvestiya**. “Today we have the opportunity to encounter this, for example, in Syria, where not even detached homes, but entire quarters of cities are connected by a network of underground communications. For a Spetsnaz soldier, the ability to operate unnoticed in underground communications – is the foundation of contemporary warfare. An underground training complex must provide the training of people, who are capable of working in a very restricted area of a destroyed urban structure – there, where any other serviceman would pull back.*



Insignia of the Ryazan Higher Airborne Command School

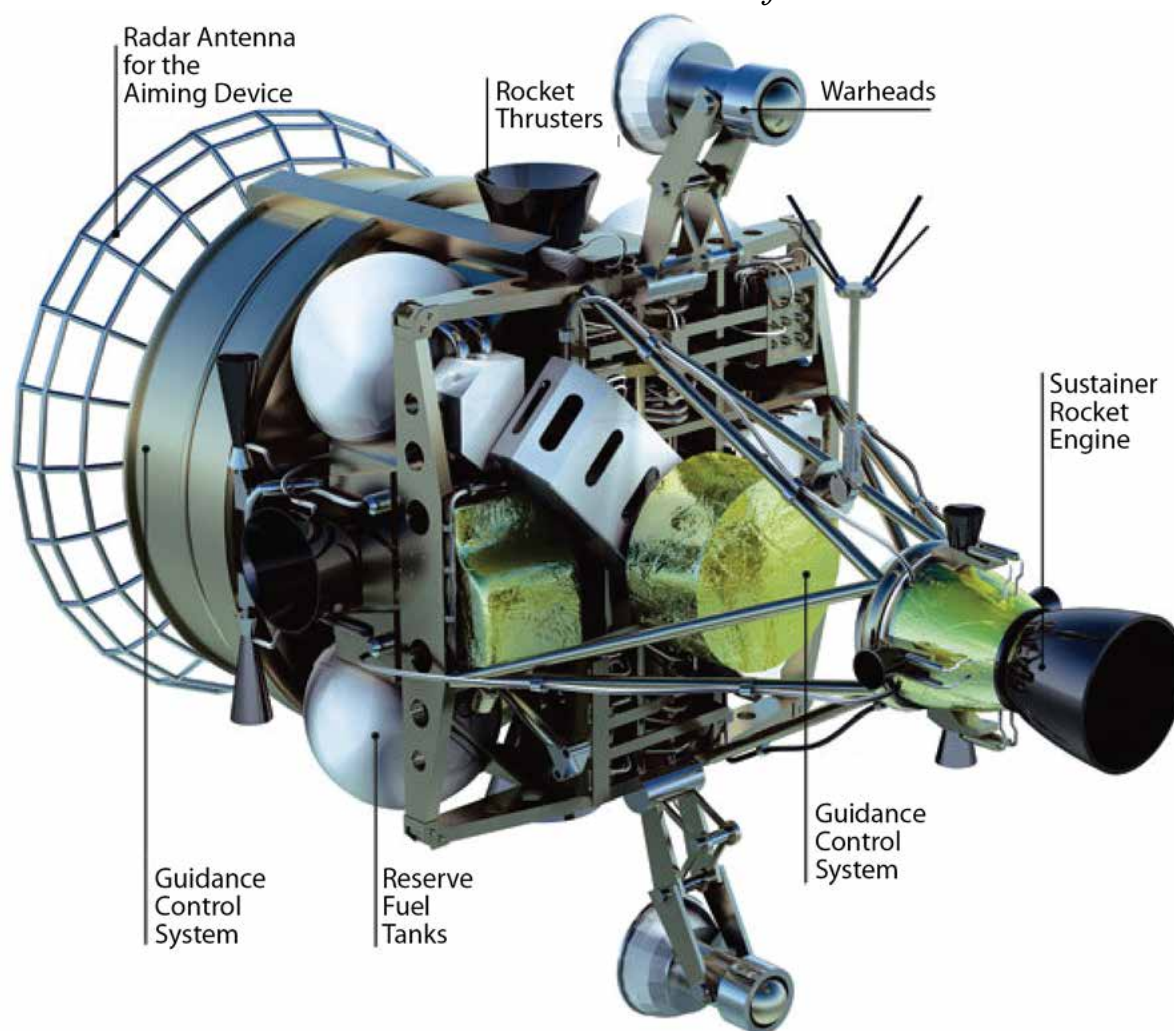
Source: https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Рязанское_высшее_воздушно-десантное_командное_училище#/media/File:Мо_нарznaki102_1.png



The “Killer Satellites” Threat to US Space Based Capabilities

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Armed Forces are keenly aware of the US military’s reliance on space based capabilities for the purposes of communication; intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance (ISR); navigation; and timing. Russian military theorists have posited that destroying or disabling the US’s space based capabilities is one of the best ways to defeat US high precision fires, which Russia believes are essential for US military success, such as in the 1991 Gulf War. The accompanying article discusses the capabilities of the Naryad (code-named IS-MU) “killer satellites” that the Soviets experimented with in the early 1980s operated by the Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN). Given the Soviet Union’s capability to successfully field an antisatellite weapon in the early 1980s, one can imagine the capabilities of any current Russian antisatellite program, if one has been embarked upon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“It is not possible to learn more details about the subsequent fate of this fantastic weapon [antisatellite weapon]...But the conclusion can be drawn from everything existing in open access that science fiction has become reality. Russia possesses a system of protection against space weapons and is capable of neutralizing any threat no matter from whence it comes.”



Source: <http://newinform.com/19501-iz-rossii-s-lyubovyu-naryad-protiv-voennyh-sputnikov-ssha>

Source: “Bon Voyage: The Russian Federation’s “Naryad” for US Military Satellites: Analysts Are Confident That the Threat to American Satellites Results from US Weakness,” *NewInform Online*, 24 July 2016, <<http://newinform.com/19501-iz-rossii-s-lyubovyu-Narod-protiv-voennyh-sputnikov-ssha>>, accessed 15 August 2016.

...Space is interesting not only as a field of scientific research, but also as a military component. Satellite navigation permits not only determining the coordinates of one’s own position, but also correcting the position of guidance heads of various weapons. Television and radio broadcasting signals are transmitted and space radio communications and surveillance are accomplished with the help of spacecraft. Orbital craft are capable of carrying weapons and destroying enemy ground and airborne targets. In this connection the desire appeared to create a weapon capable of destroying military and dual-purpose spacecraft...

The first launch of Kosmos-1379 satellite took place in June 1982. The Soviet media reported that the launch was being made for scientific purposes to study the Earth. Despite the first successful test of the complex, the USSR leadership decided in August 1983 to halt work on the antisatellite weapon program, but scientists renewed work in this direction a year after the death of CPSU General Secretary Yuriy Andropov...But test work did not cease. It probably took place without actual interceptor missile launches against virtual or real targets. Practice launches probably were carried out along a ballistic trajectory for fractional-orbit intercept of the satellites. The fact that the complex was made operational in 1991 speaks in favor of such suppositions.

With the introduction of the IS-MU to the Strategic Rocket Forces order of battle, Russia got the capability of monitoring and destroying several kinds of satellites:

- targets that had not managed to make even one revolution around the Earth (“fractional-orbit intercept”)*
- intercept of satellites which had made several revolutions*
- multiple approaches to a target in the course of several revolutions. The complex included four interceptor missiles to achieve that capability*
- head-on intercept of a space target.*
- In connection with classification of the more complete name for the IS-MD complex, its various names of Narod and*

(continued)



Continued: The “Killer Satellites” Threat to US Space Based Capabilities

Narod-V figure in different sources. Most likely this name difference involved the program under which it was being created.

The enemy naturally has a developed ground-based system for monitoring objects on our country's territory, and he is capable of intersecting a missile launch, intercepting control commands, and issuing warning commands to his satellites. To preclude that possibility, engineers created a combined control system of the 14F10 satellite. A ground control station would issue control commands to a combined homing head having a radar system and an infrared system. The complex would receive each signal from separate ground stations. The radar signal came from the Krona complex and the electro-optical signal from the Okno complex. Both stations were located in different corners of the country.

Specifications and performance characteristics of the complex.

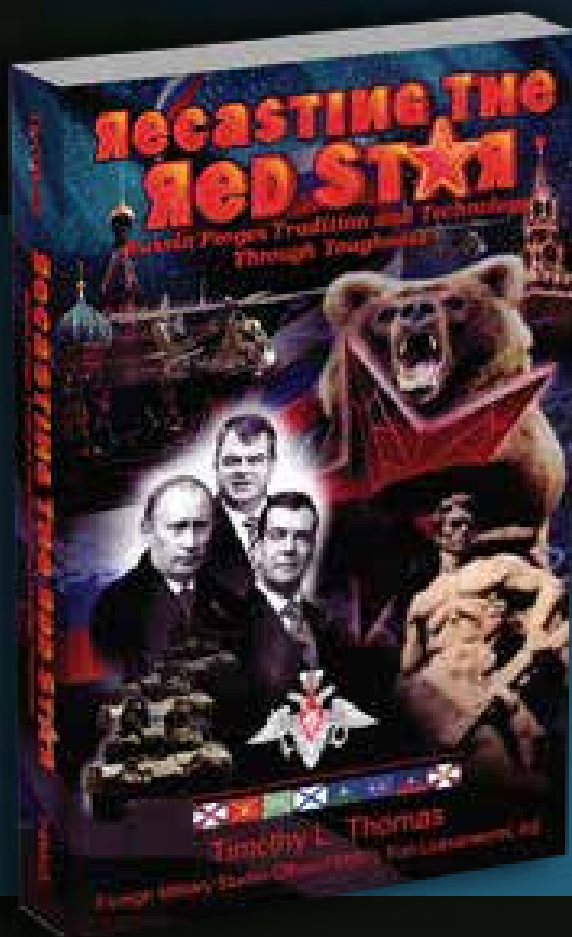
Weight of interceptor satellite: at least 1,400 kg

Orbital altitude of target satellite: up to 500 km

Warhead types: fragmentation-high explosive

Subsequently the missile interceptor complex went through several modernizations and allowed engaging spacecraft in a geostationary orbit. It represented a self-contained antisatellite complex.

It is not possible to learn more details about the subsequent fate of this fantastic weapon, inasmuch as all information has a secret classification. This is justified by state security. But the conclusion can be drawn from everything existing in open access that science fiction has become reality. Russia possesses a system of protection against space weapons and is capable of neutralizing any threat no matter from whence it comes.



Tim Thomas's *Recasting the Red Star* describes Russia's culture of military thought through its modernization effort. Adding to his robust library of work on the subject, Tim Thomas illuminates Russia's Defense Ministry reform efforts, the Russian national security strategy take on the operational environment, and a relevant review of the Russian military doctrine.

<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/E-Pubs/Epubs/Recasting%20the%20red%20Star.pdf>



A Kremlin Message on Syria in Russian Media

OE Watch Commentary: On 11 July 2016, the traditionally liberal *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (*Independent Newspaper*) published an article by Vladimir Mukhin about the coming confrontation between the US and Russia in Syria. The article is a typical example of how Kremlin-controlled media in Russia presents the Syria crisis to the public.

According to the article, the recent ceasefire in Syria is failing to hold because of the US. According to the author, fighting only intensified in Syria since the ceasefire began, and the “distinctive feature” of the situation is that US-made weapons are being supplied to the “militants” through Turkey, Jordan, and other Arab countries. Mukhin sees this situation as evidence that the US is planning to eliminate Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad. He writes, “The destruction of the Syrian Mi-25 with Russian combat crew on 8 July from an American heavy anti-tank missile system (ATGM) TOW in the sky over Palmyra—is one piece of the evidence of this conclusion.” Mukhin then proceeds to observe that the US-trained and armed Free Syrian Army (FSA) and New Syrian Army, “lent” some of its weapons to the militants ‘Islamic State.’” Lastly, Mukhin cites an expert who concludes that the US is moving new weaponry into Syria, which the expert claims is proof that the US is soon about to confront Assad—and therefore Russia.

Nowhere does the article discuss the ratio of Russia’s operations against the Islamic State and others, the failure to achieve a ceasefire, or allegations of ethnic cleansing. Instead, it is propagating the Kremlin-created message that everyone who opposes Assad is a terrorist, often supported by the US, while Russia leads a lone fight for stability and security. This is the typical message Russian citizens hear when it comes to Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Противостояние США и РФ в Сирии только начинается.” Ми-25 с российским экипажем сбили ракетой из тех, которые боевики получают по каналам ЦРУ.” [US and Russia Opposition in Syria has only just begun, Mi-25 with Russian crew was shot down by a missile among those militants received through CIA channels] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (*Independent Newspaper*), 11 July 2016. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2016-07-11/1_siria.html

The announced truce did not bring any effect in Syria. The fighting only intensified. A distinctive feature of the situation is – the supply capacity to militants of effective weapons, mainly US-made, from Turkey and Jordan and other Arab countries. It is not out of the question that this is due to the realization of US plans to eliminate Bashar al-Assad’s regime, what more than 50 employees of the State Department last month called on President Barack Obama to do.

The destruction of the Syrian Mi-25 with Russian combat crew on July 8 from an American heavy anti-tank missile system (ATGM) TOW in the sky over Palmyra—is one piece of the evidence of this conclusion...

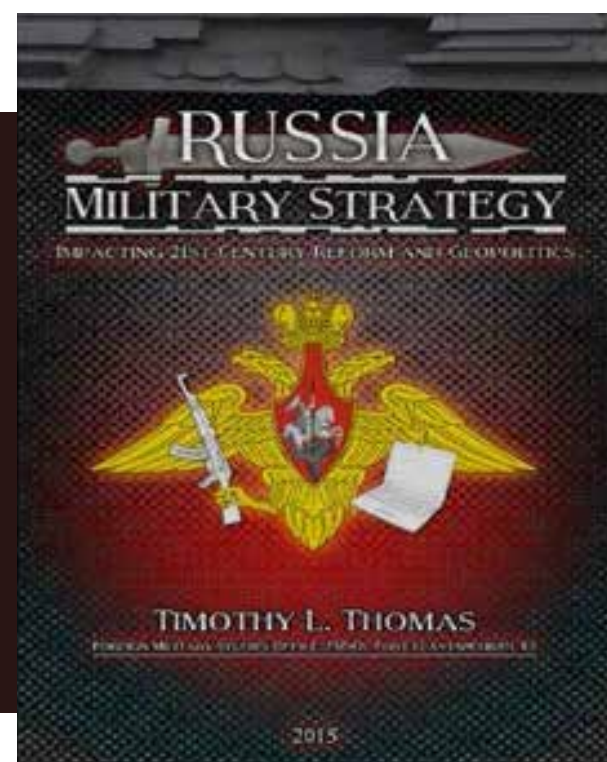
After the Russian Federation began its operation in Syria, believes Netkachev, in Arab social networks the number of images that show the use of anti-tank missiles BGM-71 TOW in operations of government troops, increased significantly. The Telegraph wrote that after the beginning of the Russian campaign in Syria, the use of anti-tank missile systems grew 800% ...

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the NSA [New Syrian Army], trained by the CIA and armed in accordance with the Pentagon’s program in the amount of \$500 million, “lent” some of its weapons to the militants “Islamic State” (IS – is a terrorist organization banned in Russia)...

“I won’t be mistaken if I say that the USA, following its traditions, moved to Syria not some second-hand, but new types of weapons to be used against Assad’s army, which also means against Russian military equipment and aircraft,” said a member -correspondent of the Academy of Military Sciences Edward Rodyukov...

For the past ten years, as Prime Minister and President, Vladimir Putin has led an extensive reorganization and reequipping of his country’s armed forces. Further, he has taken several opportunities to reclaim Russian territory that was taken, from his perspective, illegally. This book describes Putin and the military’s use of various strategic concepts, the Defense Ministry’s new equipment and reform initiatives, and Putin’s geopolitical quest for influence in the Arctic and Ukraine. Included in the discussion are some of the unintended consequences of his actions (negative world opinion, sanctions, NATO responses, etc.).

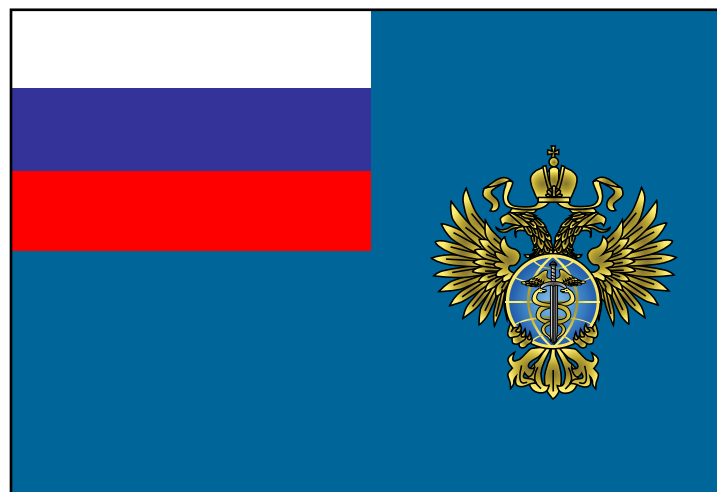
[http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/E-Pubs/Epubs/Thomas_Russian%20Military%20Strategy_Final_\(2%20May%202016\).pdf](http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/E-Pubs/Epubs/Thomas_Russian%20Military%20Strategy_Final_(2%20May%202016).pdf)





Fomin: Parity between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Middle East Needs Russian Weapons

“Russia aims to maintain parity in supply of military equipment to Armenia and Azerbaijan in a situation where conflict has intensified between the two countries over Nagorno-Karabakh.”



Flag of Federal service on military - technical cooperation of the Russian Federation.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russia,_Flag_of_Federal_service_on_military_-_technical_cooperation,_2005.svg

OE Watch Commentary: On 19 July 2016, Russia's weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kurier* (Military-Industrial Courier) published an article citing several noteworthy announcements by the head of Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation Service (FSMTC) Alexander Fomin. The article references Fomin's interview with Russia's *Izvestiya*, a major newspaper that began as the Soviet Union's official newspaper of record. The article discussed Russia's positions on Armenia and Azerbaijan, and several Middle Eastern countries.

According to the accompanying excerpts, Fomin says Russia intends to maintain “parity” in weapons deliveries to Armenia and Azerbaijan. His statement came after an escalation between the two countries in early April over Nagorno-Karabakh, which the article references briefly but provides little context. The fighting that erupted was among the worst since war over this region between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended in 1944. According to Western sources, at least 30 people died, including a child.

Fomin stresses that the Russian arms sales is to maintain stability, wherever weapons are sold. “The system of military-technical cooperation in Russia is such that it implies to do no harm. This includes this particular region [the South Caucasus]. All decisions on deliveries to one country or another inherently take into account such acute situations in the region,” says Fomin.

In the past, regional analysts had described Russia's arms sales in the South Caucasus as geostrategic rather than economic. In this sense maintaining parity, as Fomin says, is accurate, but is likely more out of a desire to ensure a continued stalemate and the need for Russia's involvement in the region; as opposed to his stated Russian goal of ‘maintaining stability’.

In addition, other regional analysts had argued that Russia's policy in the Caucasus is connected to its Middle East policy. In this context it is not entirely surprising that Fomin's comments turn to the Middle East after Armenia and Azerbaijan. Fomin says that Syria and Iraq need Russian weapons, while Libya sends requests for military-technical cooperation with Russia. Syria and Iraq have difficulties financing weapons purchases while sanctions and lack of government unity hinder Libya according to the Russian official. Fomin's comments confirm the point about the connection between Russia's Caucasus and Middle East policy through weaponry and technology sales, and broader geo-strategic interests. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: “Россия сохраняет паритет в поставках вооружений Армении и Азербайджану” (Russia maintains parity in the supply of armament to Armenia and Azerbaijan) *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kurier* (Military-Industrial Courier), 19 July 2016. http://vpk.name/news.ru/159603_glava_fsvts_rossiya_sohranyaet_paritet_v_postavkah_vooruzhenii_armenii_i_azerbaidzhanu.html

Russia aims to maintain parity in supply of military equipment to Armenia and Azerbaijan in a situation where conflict has intensified between the two countries over Nagorno-Karabakh. Head of Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation Service (FSMTC) Alexander Fomin announced this in an interview with “Izvestiya” newspaper...

Fomin also underscored that the main purpose of military-technical cooperation is to maintain peace and stability in a particular country, the region and the world at large. “The system of military-technical cooperation in Russia is such that it implies to do no harm. This particular region [South Caucasus] included. All decisions on deliveries to one country or another inherently take into account such acute situations in the region,” he added.

In Nagorno-Karabakh on the night of April 2 the situation sharply escalated on the contact line between the conflicting parties: fierce military clashes began, after which the parties to the conflict have accused each other of violating the truce...

Earlier, deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin said Russia will continue to supply weapons to Azerbaijan and Armenia in accordance with contracts as a strategic partners...

Syria and Iraq are in need of Russian weapons supplies, but are experiencing difficulties with financing, Fomin said.

“These countries have needs, especially among supplies, which are ammunition, weaponry - light armored vehicles, armored vehicles, anti-tank weapons,” Fomin said, “On the other hand, it is clear that in these countries there are difficulties associated with financing. They have a need for deliveries. But there are no new contracts.”

In addition Fomin noted that Russia also receives requests for military-technical cooperation from Libya, but because of the sanctions imposed on the Middle Eastern country and the lack of a unified government, cooperation with it so far is difficult.



Russian Columnist on Putin's Meeting with Iranian, Azeri, and Turkish presidents

OE Watch Commentary: On 8 August 2016, the Presidents of Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan met in Baku, for a first ever trilateral summit. Azeri President Ilham Aliyev initiated the meeting. The next day, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Turkish President Erdogan in St. Petersburg and the two leaders mended ties, after relations between the two countries were severely strained following Turkey's downing of a Russian jet in November 2015.

The accompanying excerpt is from an article about the two meetings by the Russian language business daily *Vedomosti* columnist Pavel Aptekar, who argues that Putin intended for both events to signal to the West the rise of Russia's influence in the Middle East. "The Kremlin clearly seeks to take advantage of growing uncertainty in the region and show (especially the West) its influence in the Middle East," writes Aptekar. The author also highlights a persistent theme in Putin's involvement in the Syrian conflict—that it is a source of international authority, a desire to appear important.

On the political side, Russian, Iranian, and Azeri presidents discussed military cooperation in the Caspian Sea and the resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, according to the article. With regard to economic issues in Baku, Aptekar writes, the leaders made "loud but vague statements." In Russia-Iran relations this is usually indeed the case, but when it comes at least to Russian-Turkish relations, economic pronouncements tend to follow through. Soon after the meeting between Putin and Erdogan, the two leaders announced the resumption of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline, abandoned in December 2015 when Russia-Turkish relations deteriorated. Putin had first announced the pipeline in December 2014. If constructed, it would bypass Ukraine.

Aptekar's column came before the official announcement about resumption of Turkish Stream. He writes, "It would be excellent if it becomes possible to also remind Europeans of their fears about the 'Turkish stream.' Many high-level pronouncements—they exacerbate the already existing uncertainty. And uncertainty —is the trademark of the Russian president."

With regard to Iran and Turkey, Aptekar argues that Putin is trying to create a bloc that would enable him to confront Western influence in the Middle East. He writes, "But Putin, whose participation in the settlement of the Syrian conflict - the most important evidence of his international authority, will take advantage of the coincidence of a common position of the three countries on Syria, which could be presented to the West." Turkey's position on Syria historically had been the opposite of Putin's. Erdogan always maintained that Assad must go while Putin was Assad's top supporter. Yet indeed after the meeting Erdogan appeared to soften on Assad. While Erdogan is unlikely to reverse his position entirely, Aptekar's worrisome suggestion that Putin is trying to create a bloc with which to confront the West in the Middle East has merit. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

"Many high-level pronouncements—they exacerbate the already existing uncertainty. And uncertainty —is the trademark of the Russian president."

Source: Pavel Aptekar, "Ближневосточный экспресс. Владимир Путин играет в усиление влияния в регионе" ("Middle East Express. Vladimir Putin plays in growing influence in the region") *Vedomosti*, 9 August 2016. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2016/08/09/652210-vostok-blizhe>

... The Kremlin clearly seeks to take advantage of growing uncertainty in the region and show (especially the West) its influence in the Middle East.

The presidents of Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan have discussed political issues, in particular military cooperation in the Caspian Sea and the settlement of the Karabakh conflict. As for the economy, loud, but vague statements were voiced about the possibility of joint use of pipeline infrastructure to transport Caspian hydrocarbons and about creation of an energy corridor between the three countries.

Meeting with presidents of Iran and Turkey conveniently coincided in time. But Putin, whose participation in the settlement of the Syrian conflict - the most important evidence of his international authority, will take advantage of the coincidence of a common position of the three countries on Syria, which could be presented to the West. Tehran and Ankara, with significant divergence in views have a common interest - to prevent the creation of Kurdish autonomy, says Vladimir Frolov, an expert on international relations.

Moscow has its own goal: to inflict maximum damage to ISIS and "Jabhat al-Nusra" (banned in Russia) and to prevent an escalation near Damascus and the military base in Latakia, to extend the transitional period when Assad will remain Syria's leader. The parties may agree on the division of responsibilities in Syria, where Turkey will retain influence in the north in exchange for the ceasing to supply of rebel groups, Russia will reduce support for the Kurdish parties and militias, Iran will continue to support its traditional allies, including Assad.

... But Putin and Erdogan now needed strong statements addressed to the West. Erdogan is dissatisfied with the Western reaction to his suppression of the coup in the country. And for Putin it is important to show that he reached new agreements with key players in the region and has a greater effect on the situation in Syria (even if it is not so).

It would be excellent if it becomes possible to also remind Europeans of their fears about the "Turkish stream." Many high-level pronouncements—they exacerbate the already existing uncertainty. And uncertainty —is the trademark of the Russian president.



Russian Military Spending Remains Robust and Opaque

OE Watch Commentary: Reduced fossil fuel revenues combined with Western sanctions have weakened Russia's overall economy. Yet despite these constraints, the Kremlin leadership continues to place the highest priority on defense expenditures. The first excerpt from the moderate Russian newspaper *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye-NVO* (Independent Military Observer) spells out the Kremlin rationale for funding defense over other social priorities. The second excerpt, from the mildly opposition news source, *RBK Online*, describes the difficulty in ascertaining just how much the Kremlin is actually spending on defense.

The *NVO* article provides recent comments made by Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev regarding how the government will likely have to reduce spending in non-defense areas through 2019 in order to fully provide for defense requirements. The article maintains that the Kremlin leadership believes that conflict is on the horizon, pointing out that "additional defense-industrial complex funding came about because of nothing other than emergency circumstances," which can "be interpreted as the reinforcement of mobilization reserves in the event of war." As an example, it quotes a military official who claims that Russia will finish "the construction of 450 new munitions dumps by year's end." This excerpt goes on to claim that "Russia does not intend to go to war with NATO," but that the need to maintain robust defense spending is predicated upon "the exacerbation of the economic, political, and moral crisis in Ukraine." According to this article, the Ukrainian military has grown much stronger and Russia must do more to defend against "possible military provocations on the part of Ukraine."

The second excerpt comes from a longer article which analyzed a voluntary report that the Kremlin submitted to the UN, which purportedly spells out how much Russia spent on defense in 2015. While the report contains interesting data (e.g. the Kremlin claims to have spent 2.9 trillion rubles [about \$48 billion] on defense in 2015), the authors conclude that "it is impossible to say precisely... how much the state actually spends on defense; the budget figures and reports Russia presented to the UN are not transparent."

The UN report does not require detailed information and the excerpt points out that "Russia has not disclosed to the UN its expenditures on military research and development," which the authors suggest "have grown rapidly in recent years" and continue to grow. Nor is there any indication in the UN report regarding Russian expenditures associated with defense in non-military areas (e.g. healthcare, housing, education etc...). The figures in this report only contain defense information from the federal budget, and the authors point out that "some [defense spending] is included in regional and municipal budgets." According to one Russian source quoted in this article, "this information is useless."

Transparency, with regard to defense spending, has never been a Kremlin strongpoint. Evidence indicates, however, that though confronted with significant economic constraints, the current Russian leadership appears determined to continue strengthening its military prowess. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"Obviously Russia does not intend to go to war with NATO....But the exacerbation of the economic, political, and moral crisis in Ukraine is causing concern among the country's politico-military leadership."



Russian Rubles.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_rubles.jpg

Source: "Денег нет, но для оборонных предприятий найдутся," [There is No Money, But They Will Find Some for Defense Enterprises] *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye Online*, 5 August 2016. http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2016-08-05/2_red.html

Last week, Premier Dmitry Medvedev held a conference on federal budget spending for 2017-2019, as regards development of the defense-industrial Complex (OPK).... "The budget truly is, as in previous years, quite complex," said Medvedev. "In order to balance it, we need to make balanced, calibrated decisions." And so, they discussed the partial redistribution of financial resources, or as Medvedev put it, the partial correction of previous decisions....

...Against this backdrop, Medvedev's agreement to additional defense-industrial complex funding came about because of nothing other than emergency circumstances. "Priority measures" can be interpreted as the reinforcement of mobilization reserves in the event of war. The corresponding decision, obviously, has already been made. At the very least, Deputy Minister of Defense, General of the Army Dmitry Bulgakov has reported that plans call for finishing the construction of 450 new munitions dumps by year's end...

...Moreover, the parameters of mobilization measures dovetail with the international situation. Obviously Russia does not intend to go to war with NATO....But the exacerbation of the economic, political, and moral crisis in Ukraine is causing concern among the country's politico-military leadership. The processes underway in this neighboring country are laying the groundwork for the most reckless military adventures, about which Kyiv has announced its intentions repeatedly.... This is not nearly as many as some would have liked to send in, but it is sufficient to head off possible military provocations on the part of Ukraine. That is why additional defense-industrial complex funding is necessary. It is meant for the creation of mobilization reserves for the first few months of war.

(continued)



Continued: Russian Military Spending Remains Robust and Opaque

Source: Ivan Tkachev, Svetlana Bocharova, and Oleg Makarov, “Засекреченные триллионы: сколько Россия на самом деле тратит на армию,” [Secret Trillions: How Much Russia is Really Spending on the Military] *RBK Online*, 27 July 2016. <http://www.rbc.ru/economics/27/07/2016/5797ed069a79475ab72f84bb>

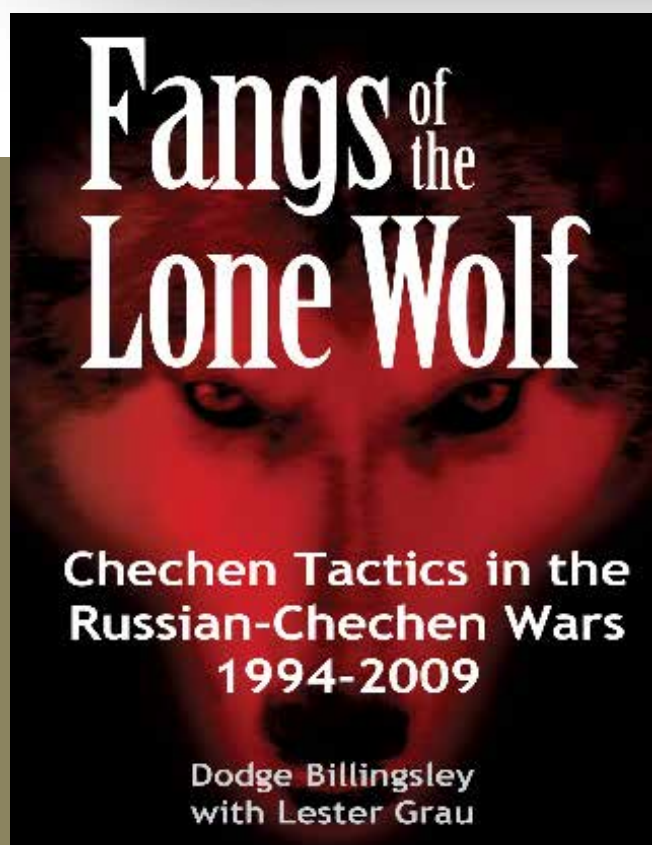
Russia has given an account of its 2015 military spending to the United Nations. It reached R2.9 trillion. It revealed its spending on the different branches of the armed forces; the Navy was the most expensive, but the Aerospace Forces posted the biggest growth.

...It is impossible to say precisely what the explanation for these expenditures is or how much the state actually spends on defense; the budget figures and reports Russia presented to the UN are not transparent.... Zatsepin states categorically, “This information is useless.”

Nearly R1 trillion fell under the “Other” category (other branches of the armed forces), meaning one-third of all declared military expenditures went to other, unspecified structures..... Last year, 67 percent of appropriations under the “National Defense” section, and 69 percent under the “Armed Forces” section were classified (described in secret addenda), ...

...In the last two years, Russia has not disclosed to the UN its expenditures on military research and development, even though they are reflected in the federal budget under “National Defense-related Applied Scientific Research.” Expenditures under this article have grown rapidly in recent years; in 2015, they increased by 30 percent relative to the previous year...

Russia’s actual military expenditures have always been higher than declared, believes the Gaidar Institute’s Zatsepin. By no means are all military expenditures to be found in the designated “National Defense” budget section -significant resources for military needs fall under “peaceful” articles, the expert’s observations show...Moreover, the federal budget does not contain all defense spending; some of it is included in regional and municipal budgets...



Books on guerrilla war are seldom written from the tactical perspective and from the guerrilla’s perspective. *Fangs of the Lone Wolf*: is an exception. These are the stories of low-level guerrilla combat as told by the survivors. They cover fighting from the cities of Grozny and Argun to the villages of Bamut and Serzhen-yurt, and finally the hills, river valleys and mountains that make up so much of Chechnya. Dodge Billingsley, the primary author was embedded with Chechen guerrilla forces after the first war, so he knows the country, the culture, the key actors and the conflict. Yet, as a Western outsider, he is able to maintain perspective and objectivity. *Fangs of the Lone Wolf* provides a unique insight into what is becoming modern and future war.

<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/E-Pubs/Epubs/Fangs-of-the-Lone-Wolf.pdf>



Russian Laser-Info Weapons

OE Watch Commentary: In early August, Deputy Defense Minister Yuriy Borisov caused quite a stir when he announced that the Russian military had gone beyond research and development and had already “put certain types of laser weapons into service.” Borisov did not elaborate as to the exact laser weapons he was referring and it was up to the Russian expert community to explain. In the accompanying excerpt from the pro-government source *RIA Novosti*, three of Russia’s more prominent (and anti-Western) military commentators provide their thoughts on the capabilities of Russia’s new laser weapons.

According to Igor Korotchenko, Deputy Defense Minister Borisov was probably referring to an “airborne laser...mounted on the base of an Il-76 military transport aircraft” capable “of destroying with radiation the optical-electronic systems and various kinds of weapon control sensors on combat aircraft, military satellites, and land-based and marine equipment of a potential enemy.” While Korotchenko provides no hard evidence for this assertion, he goes on to claim that the Russian prototype “has proven its ability to successfully address the challenges it is set.”

The next expert quoted, Konstantin Sivkov, suggests that the Russian military “could already have adopted lasers to forcibly suppress tank weapon control systems.” Again, without any proof, he goes on to posit that Russia may have already fielded “laser weapons for antimissile defense of ships in the near zone and systems to suppress optical-electronic surveillance and guidance equipment.” The next quoted expert, retired General Leonid Ivashov, posits that the “laser weapons adopted by the Russian Army will be used in the Ground Troops to blind enemy optical-electronic equipment,” and also “disrupt some command and control and communication systems.”

According to these Russian military experts, the Russian military has already fielded a wide array of laser weapons for air, sea and ground forces. Not surprisingly, some of their claims mimic actual laser developments announced by its chief geopolitical rival. While the Russian military has likely fielded some aspects of laser technology (e.g. range-finding), the extent of these developments remains unclear. Nevertheless, these Russian military commentators have once again demonstrated the ability to direct, amplify and employ their information arsenal. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Beriev A-60 Airborne Laser thought to be back in testing.

Source: <http://bastion-karpenko.ru/a-60-lazer/>

Source: Sergey Pyatakov, “Будущее наступило: эксперты рассказали об использовании лазерного оружия,” [The Future Has Arrived: Experts Speak about Use of Laser Weapons] *RIA Novosti*, 3 August 2016. http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20160803/1473506442.html

Deputy Defense Minister Yuriy Borisov announced that elements of laser weapons were supplied to the Armed Forces; and military experts polled by RIA Novosti claimed that these can be placed on aircraft, wheeled and tracked on combat vehicles, and ships.

Speaking at a solemn event dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Russian federal nuclear center, the All-Russian Research Institute of Experimental Physics (RFYaTs-VNIIEF, Sarov), Borisov noted that weapons based on new physical principles have now become a reality. According to him, “they are not exotic, not experimental, or prototypes; we have put certain types of laser weapons into service.”...

...Weapons based on new physical principles, including the airborne laser being developed in Russia, will reliably ensure the country’s security, RIA Novosti was told by Igor Korotchenko, member of the Russian Defense Ministry Public Council and chief editor of the journal Natsionalnaya oborona [National Defense].

“With regard to the statement by the deputy defense minister, this probably refers to an airborne laser, of which a prototype is currently being tested,” the military analyst said. He explained that a powerful laser mounted on the base of an Il-76 military transport aircraft makes it possible to ensure the destruction of the optical-electronic systems and various kinds of weapon control sensors on combat aircraft, military satellites, and land-based and marine equipment of a potential enemy, using radiation

...Another of the agency’s sources, Doctor of Military Sciences Konstantin Sivkov, president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, suggested that the Russian Federation Armed Forces could already have adopted lasers to forcibly suppress tank weapon control systems. “They could also be types of laser weapons for antimissile defense of ships in the near zone and systems to suppress optical-electronic surveillance and guidance equipment,” Sivkov said.

...Laser weapons adopted by the Russian Army will be used in the Ground Troops to blind enemy optical-electronic equipment, Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, president of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, believes. “These models will currently be used primarily in the Army as a blinding weapon. Lasers can illuminate optical reconnaissance and sighting equipment. Their emissions can also disrupt some command and control and communication systems,” Ivashov said....



Grozny-August 1996 Revisited

OE Watch Commentary: For those who followed the Russian-Chechen conflict of the mid-1990s, it is hard to believe it has been twenty years since the dramatic events of August 1996. Recall that despite Kremlin claims that a ceasefire was in place, Chechen fighters were able to wrest control and “seize” the capital city of Grozny. From a Russian military perspective, this bloody conflict, the shameful loss of Grozny to Chechen separatists, and the subsequent fragile peace treaty are often regarded as the nadir of their post-Soviet history. In the accompanying excerpt from the respected military journal, *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kurier* [Military-Industrial Courier] a Russian veteran of the August 1996 battle in Grozny recounts some of the painful details of this phase.

The author begins by describing the general atmosphere of that time period. President Yeltsin had just been re-elected, partially upon his promise to end the fighting in Chechnya. While the Russian military and security forces had withdrawn much of their heavy equipment from in and around Grozny by August 1996, the fighting against separatist forces (especially at night) had hardly ceased. As the excerpt points out, the overall Russian military commander at that time, General Konstantine Pulikovskiy suggested that the question regarding the disposition of Russian forces in Grozny had been a political and not a military decision.

The author describes his initial reception at the Severny airport outside of Grozny, when upon seeing the dead bodies of Russian soldiers, it became clear the rhetoric regarding “peaceful” Chechnya did not conform to reality. Although a reported ceasefire was in effect, Russian soldiers were engaged in major battles with Chechen separatists who were attempting to regain control of Grozny. The author heaps special blame on the Russian media, who reported that “the situation in the Chechen capital is normalized and is under control.” The author claims that such false reporting sapped the morale of those Russian soldiers literally fighting for their lives.

Russian soldiers were not the only ones who felt a sense of betrayal. The author describes the sense of treachery felt among those pro-Russian Chechen security officials once it became clear that Russian forces were going to withdraw under separatist terms. He includes the late General Alexander Lebed in the ranks of traitors, claiming that Lebed hoped to use the Chechen peace agreement (which he helped to write) as a springboard to the presidency. The author maintains that Lebed’s ambitions led not only to the “Russian Army’s retreat from Chechnya, but to the country’s loss of international prestige after the shameful Khasavyurt Accords...” He concludes the article by praising the current Russian leader who realized that it was “impossible to solve the ‘Chechen question’ without taking Chechen ideas into consideration.”

Russia, its military, and the region of Chechnya have come a long way since the dramatic events of August 1996. While much has been rebuilt and restored since then, this article suggests that many painful memories remain. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“...Treachery may be the keyword for understanding this war, the script for which seems to have been written in advance in the silence of the high government positions....”



A Chechen fighter during the battle for Grozny.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Urban_warfare#/media/File:Evstafiev-chechnya-soldier-fire.jpg

Source: Roman Ilyushchenko, “В августе 96-го: Сценарий войны был написан заранее в тиши высоких кабинетов,” [In August 96: The Script for the War was Written in Advance in High Quiet Offices] *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kurier*, 10 August 2016. <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/31765>

...In Grozny, it all started in the early morning of 6 August 1996, when gunmen suddenly attacked the railway station, the military headquarters of the city, the central government offices, the building of the Federal Security Service of the Republic, Ministry of Internal Affairs’ Coordination Center, and almost all of the city-entrance checkpoints. At the same time, by successfully bypassing the checkpoints, hundreds of armed men, reaching a level of 6000 fighters, travelled from suburban villages to the city for the independence of Ichkeria....

...It is difficult to give a chronology of those tragic days. Events moved with incredible speed. Today much about them is known, however, there is still much unclear, and shedding light on the dark spots remains...

...In Alexander Sladkov’s film “Shooting in August,” the commander of the Joint Group that time, Lieutenant-General *(continued)*



Continued: Grozny-August 1996 Revisited

Konstantin Pulikovsky admitted that he had neither the time nor energy to figure out the decision on the disposition of forces – as this disposition was approved at the top....

...The beginning of the last operation of the first Chechen campaign caught me in Rostov-on-Don, where I had arrived a few days before on TDY from a more 'peaceful' Chechnya. When I returned a couple days later, it had become a battle. The first thing I saw on landing at Severny airport were a number of vehicles carrying corpses wrapped in foil. There were many. I admit, it was scary ...

...In addition, the radio channels were filled with outright disinformation, with successive appeals by Maskhadov to the Chechen police federal forces demanding surrender. For example, they claimed that the Chechen police had fled or completely sided with the militants, which was a lie. There were traitors and cowards, but the majority remained faithful to their oath....

The Russian soldiers defending two strongholds near Minutka Square and Romanovsky Bridge [in Grozny] fought two weeks completely surrounded with a shortage of ammunition, medical supplies, food and water. Ten of their soldiers were killed in battle or died of wounds. The insurgents repeatedly asked them to surrender and promised their safety, but they continued to fight, hoping that they had not been forgotten, that the situation would change, and that their sacrifices had not been in vain. And when they heard on a TV (run off a tank battery) the country's main news of the day regarding the inauguration of the president, and that "the situation in the Chechen capital is normalized and is under control," the defenders began to doubt their cause. As a participant later put it "something snapped inside of us then"...

...The soldiers' morale was further weakened by the country's indifference to their fate, the unconcealed confusion of the command, the lack of will among senior political leaders and the treacherous position of much of the domestic media....

...Another deep memory from that period were the eyes of Chechen policemen who had remained faithful to Russia.... We had betrayed them. But we had also been betrayed....

...Treachery may be the keyword for understanding this war, the script for which seems to have been written in advance in the silence of the high government positions....

...The late Alexander Lebed stars in the role of one of the chief traitors of our country's interests. Though I believe he was sincerely trying to bring peace to our tired country. Alexander Ivanovich's tragedy was that he didn't want to share the laurels of peacemaker, because, it appeared to him, this was his path to the presidency. And to achieve this goal, he was ready to do much. And as time has shown – very much...

...The ambition of the Secretary of the Security Council [Lebed] not only led to the Russian Army's retreat from Chechnya, but to the country's loss of international prestige after the shameful Khasavyurt Accords...

...The new leader of Russia, after coming to power, quickly realized, ... that it was impossible to solve the 'Chechen question' without taking Chechen ideas into consideration...



A Chechen fighter near the burned-out ruins of the Presidential Palace in Grozny. .

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Urban_warfare#/media/File:Evstafiev-chechnya-palace-gunman.jpg



Islamic State Declares War against Russia

OE Watch Commentary: This month marks the one year anniversary of Russia's military intervention into Syria to combat Islamic State (IS) forces. Concerns that IS radicalism could spread into Central Asia and Russia served as part of the justification for Russian military involvement. At the end of July 2016, IS released a video which proclaimed that the "Islamic State has declared jihad against Russia." The accompanying excerpt from a moderately pro-Kremlin source, *Lenta.ru*, describes Russian expert opinion regarding the gravity of this threat.

The article begins by trying to ascertain the validity of this video. It points out that "the statement is the private opinion of an individual militant who in terms of his position in the ISIL structure is scarcely empowered to make addresses of this kind." Regardless of the credibility of the warning, the authors suggest that the Russian authorities have established "a structured system for collecting information and monitoring radical groups." However, one of the experts quoted in the article maintains that these measures are insufficient given that Russia has "83 muftiates and Muslim centers" recommending that "it is time to integrate them so that there is more state control."

The statistics quoted in the article would support additional security measures. Russian officials now claim that there are about 10,000 militants from the post-Soviet space fighting in Syria and Iraq. There are growing concerns among Russian experts that these militants may "return to Russia to disseminate their ideas." In 2013, "the MVD [Internal Affairs Ministry] and the National Antiterrorist Committee" registered 218 terrorist crimes in Russia; by "2015 the figure was already 1,560."

Since intervening militarily to defeat IS in Syria, Kremlin authorities have been successful in preventing a large scale IS terrorist attack on Russian soil. However, the statistics provided in this article indicate that terrorism remains a serious challenge for Russian security officials. While the data in the article does not specify the source or the nature of these attacks, there could be a correlation between Russian military pressure against terrorist targets in Syria and domestic acts of terrorism within Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"...But nevertheless there are still several thousand Russian citizens fighting in Syria on ISIL's side, experts urge us to remember. It is essential to ensure that they cannot return to Russia to disseminate their ideas..."



Russian Su-34, Latakia Airbase, Syria.

Source: By Mil.ru, CC BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=44061050>

Source: Seyfulla Shishanin, Konstantin Bogdanov, and Sergey Postnikov, "Накрыло войной: Действительно ли исламисты объявили России джихад," [Hit by War: Have the Islamists Truly Declared Jihad against Russia] *Lenta.ru*, 1 August 2016. <https://lenta.ru/articles/2016/08/01/jihad/>

"Islamic State has declared jihad against Russia," the world's leading media wrote on Monday [1 August]. What is actually happening on the video everyone is talking about? Lenta.ru has found out who may be behind the high-profile statements and how we should respond to them....

On the evening of 31 July international publications, followed by the Russian media, disseminated the statement that "Islamic State" (an organization banned in Russia) had called for jihad against our country. ...The remaining 30 seconds at the end are a hysterical "video appeal" from a Russian-speaking ISIL [the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] militant at the wheel of a "jihadmobil" threatening to travel to Russia for a "bloodbath."

It should be noted that the statement is the private opinion of an individual militant who in terms of his position in the ISIL structure is scarcely empowered to make addresses of this kind....

...Russia is ready to respond to serious challenges, Yuriy Pochta, head of the Russian Friendship of Peoples University department of comparative political studies, says: "There is in existence a structured system for collecting information and monitoring radical groups."...

...Specific actions are needed directed against unregistered mosques of every kind, Semen Bagdasarov, director of the Center for the Study of the Countries of the Middle East and Central Asia, believes. "We have 83 muftiates and Muslim centers—it is time to integrate them so that there is more state control," the expert believes.

...Finally, in June 2016 Collective Security Treaty Organization General Secretary Nikolay Bordyuzha assessed that the number of citizens of countries belonging to that organization fighting in Syria and Iraq on the extremists' side was at 10,000....

...The activation of the Islamist underground and of the Russian special services' preventive work is indirectly confirmed by the dynamic of registered crimes of a terrorist nature. According to the MVD [Internal Affairs Ministry] and the National Antiterrorist Committee, in 2008-2013 the number of these crimes declined consistently from 642 to 218. In 2014 we can see the first change to the trend, with over 700 instances being registered. In 2015 the figure was already 1,560....

...But nevertheless there are still several thousand Russian citizens fighting in Syria on ISIL's side, experts urge us to remember. It is essential to ensure that they cannot return to Russia to disseminate their ideas, Semen Bagdasarov, director of the Center for the Study of the Countries of the Middle East and Central Asia, is convinced....



Russia's Victorious Military Games

OE Watch Commentary: As expected, Russian military teams blew away the competition in the 2016 Army Games conducted last month on various training grounds in Russia and Kazakhstan. This was the third iteration of this competition, with a greatly expanded field of events and participating countries (for more details, see the July 2016 *OE Watch*, "International Military Games"). The brief excerpt from the government news source, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, provides an extensive set of details from this latest competition.

Russian military crews took first place in 20 of the 23 competitive events, coming in second in the remaining three. The excerpt points out that 121 different crews from 19 countries (more than 3,500 military personnel) participated in the games, including teams from Angola, Iran, Serbia, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. The top contenders were Russia, China, Belarus and Kazakhstan with "Russian crews taking part in all 23 different events, Kazakhstan and China in 21 events, Venezuela (9) Belarus (8) and Iran (7)."

15 countries took part in the tank biathlon, with Russia, Belarus, China and Kazakhstan as the four finalists. While tank crews were provided with a modified version of the T-72, the Chinese elected to use their own tanks (Type 96A Main Battle Tank). As the brief excerpt points out, the Chinese apparently had some problems engaging the target with their tank, and the Russian crew ended up winning this event.

According to the article, the games were visited by about half a million spectators and covered by "more than 1,000 media representatives from 20 countries, including 51 foreign media." The Russian military invested considerable resources into this competition (e.g. more than 70,000 troops took part, including 7,000 mechanics and drivers, 150 flight crews, more than 150,000 rounds of ammunition, 11 modernized training facilities, 2,500 meals prepared per day, etc...).

The competition was given significant coverage by the Russian media (readers can get a sample of the events at the following two links: https://youtu.be/qEaqQpQ_ulE and <http://bastion-karpenko.ru/world-military-games-2016/>). Russian defense officials claim that such competition is not only a great training opportunity, but also helps to build trust and cooperation between the competing countries

End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)

"Our country has initiated the first in the history of international war games, comparable to inflame passions and entertainment with the Olympics. They can even be called the joust of the XXI century. ..."



Logo-Army Games 2016. Source: mil.ru

Source: Sergey Ptichkin, "Международные армейские игры завершились победой России," [International Military Games End in Victory for Russia], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 13 August 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/08/13/mezhdunarodnye-armejskie-igry-zavershilis-pobedoj-rossii.html>

Russia's victory in all the major competitions ended the International military games. On Saturday, 13 August, the final competitions of the "ARMY-2016" at the Alabino range took place and the winners were awarded.

Our country has initiated the first in the history of international war games, comparable to inflame passions and entertainment with the Olympics. They can even be called the joust of the XXI century. ...

The first such event at the initiative of the Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu took place in 2013. Apart from Russia, teams from Armenia, Belarus and Kazakhstan participated. The idea was so wonderful and attractive, that after three years, ARMY-2016 was attended by 121 crew from 19 countries, a total of more than 3.5 thousand participants... Teams came from as far away as Angola, Iran, Serbia, Venezuela and Zimbabwe...

...Russian crews took part in all 23 different events, Kazakhstan and China in 21 events, Venezuela (9) Belarus (8) and Iran (7)....

In the most spectacular competition, the "tank biathlon," 17 teams from 15 countries took part. Even distant Zimbabwe sent soldiers.... The Chinese brought their own tanks. They had much more powerful engines than the T-72B3. And, the experts say, [they were] fitted with the best sights and computing systems. Initially, the Chinese team was leading, but they had problems engaging the targets and were penalized, nullifying the speed characteristics of the tank....

... "Army International Game 2016" took place from 30 July to 13 August at the same time at 20 separate training areas. 19 of them are located within the boundaries of the three military districts - Western, Southern and Central, while the other - in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Naval competitions [were] held in the waters of the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas.

In total, half a million spectators visited the game competitions... and was reported by the work of more than 1,000 media representatives from 20 countries, including 51 foreign media.

...More than 70 thousand Russian Armed Forces personnel were involved in the games..., with about 7000 mechanics-drivers...



Controlling the Arctic Ocean

OE Watch Commentary: In February 2016, at the United Nations, Sergei Donskoy, the Russian Minister of Natural Resources, formally presented Russia's claim to a large section of Arctic Ocean seabed including the area under the North Pole. This is a continuation of Russia's efforts to secure the territory and mineral rights underneath the polar ice cap. The United Nations rejected an earlier Russian claim in 2002. This current Russian claim cites their scientific evidence that the continental shelf extends north from the Eurasian land mass under the North Pole. Russia is claiming "the seabed beyond the 200 nautical mile zone along the entire Russian polar sector including the zone under the North Pole."

Under the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea, a nation may claim an exclusive economic zone over the continental shelf abutting its shores. If the geological shelf extends far out to sea, the nation can claim mineral resources in the seabed beyond that zone. If the United Nations committee accepts Russia's claim, the seabed under the North Pole would be subject to Moscow's oversight. This would include some 460,000 square miles of Arctic territory (about half of the Arctic Ocean) and ownership of the Northeast Passage shipping route above Russia's northern coastline.

Should the bulk of the Arctic Ocean become Russian internal waters, it may become difficult for non-Russian commercial, military and scientific vessels to transit their waters. Norwegian scientists have already encountered this (see "Polar Bears without Borders" in the October 2015 *OE Watch*). The integrated transport information and control system for operation in the Arctic zone can compound this difficulty. On the positive side, it can prove a boon for disaster relief, sea rescue and maritime communications. How the aviation tracking fits into this is a bit of a mystery. Don't Russia's air defense systems already do this? Clearly the Russian military will be a major player in this effort. The accompanying passage discusses Russian efforts to establish sovereign control over this zone, by designing an integrated information and control system.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

"Russia's Transport Ministry has drawn up a concept design for an integrated transport information and control system for operation in the Arctic zone. The secure system - known by the Russian acronym EZIS-TKA - is envisaged as consisting of satellites, cable and tropospheric communications systems operated by Russian companies."

Source: Ivan Cheberko, "Над Арктикой развернут Единую информационную систему," [They are Deploying a Unified Information System above the Arctic] *Izvestia Online*, 7 August 2016. <http://izvestia.ru/news/625830>

Sovereign control for Russia

The plan has been drawn up by the Transport Ministry's development department with the aim of "provision of conditions for intensive, expanded use of the Russian Federation Arctic Zone transport system in the national interest, by means of provision of integrated information from various users and the achievement for Russia of sovereign control of transport provision in this region."

"This system will integrate all the ministries' resources," said Alexei Semenov, the head of the Transport Ministry's development department. "We're creating an integrated information sphere for the transport system. We have to provide national sovereignty over the flow of information. This is very ambitious, but is achievable."

Satellite and cable network

In order to create such a system, the Transport Ministry says it needs a system of Gonets low-orbital communications satellites and the Luch re-broadcasting system based on geostationary satellites, the Inmarsat communications system with Russian ground-based infrastructure, and the Sever communications system based on tropospheric radio-relay (which was used by the military in the Soviet era). It is also planning the Arktika space system (the first element of which is planned to be launched at the end of 2017), as well as the Polarnet fibre-optic net (this project envisages construction of communications lines which will be put on the sea bed in the Arctic Ocean along the route Bude [Seacoast town in the southwest tip of England near Cornwall], Murmansk, Anadyr, Vladivostok, Tokyo). Implementation of the project was due to start in the first half of 2016 with Defense Ministry communications systems in the Arctic and the Russian GLONASS satellite navigation system.

EZIS-TKA is intended to be linked to an automated transport network control system, the integrated state transport security system, and also the MO-RE ship monitoring system. According to the plan, it will consist of centers for storage and processing of navigation, technical and meteorological data and specialized infrastructure for collecting and transmitting it. The EZIS-TKA telecoms infrastructure will have ancillary satellite communications points and a ground-based network of microwave and ultra-short wave stations interconnected with radio-relay lines, tropospheric communications channels and fibre-optic networks.

Arctic UAV testing

"A decision to set up EZIS-TKA has already been taken by the state commission on the Arctic", Semenov said. "It's there that creation of an Arctic proving ground is envisaged for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). The extreme conditions, sparse population density and great expanses of the area mean we can test UAVs at an adequate level."

One of the key parts of EZIS-TKA is a system of automated monitoring of airliners and general aviation planes by use of Russian technology, the report said. The system's infrastructure will also include deployment of a command system for movement of unmanned transport vehicles in the Arctic.



Far Northern Dirigibles

OE Watch Commentary: Dream big-spend big-using someone else's money. Russia is trying to develop its transportation infrastructure and there are some fairly dramatic proposals being floated. The proposal discussed in the accompanying article is long on promise and part of it involves the movement of cargo from the Northern Sea route of the Arctic Ocean to the Trans-Siberian railroad using dirigibles. The cost savings is based on the cost of moving an equal amount of cargo on transport helicopters—a very expensive option indeed. Not discussed is the cost versus barge traffic on the Ob, Yenisei and Lena rivers. Barges and steamships operate normally on these waters and, although some parts of the rivers require attention to improve the load-carrying capacity, they are most likely cheaper than dirigibles. Another option would be an additional north-south railroad line—like the Murmansk line to St. Petersburg and beyond. That would be expensive, but far more reliable than flying a dirigible in an Arctic gale. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Yelizaveta Kuznetsova, “Дирижабли поднимут \$200 млрд,” [They will Raise 200 billion with Dirigibles] *Kommersant Online*, 12 August 2016. <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3060944>

They will Raise \$200 billion with Dirigibles; Security Council Puts Forward New Megaproject

The Russian Federation Security Council has ordered Vice Premier Arkadiy Dvorkovich to examine the proposal of Academician Aleksandr Nekipelov of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Director of the Moscow State University School of Economics, for “the creation of extensive transport and logistical corridors” that would unite the EU and the Asia-Pacific region “while taking into account the interests and security of the Russian Federation.”

He proposes creating two transport and logistical corridors with a length of 9,600 kilometers backed by the Northern Sea Route; a new high-speed trunk railroad based on the Eastern Polygon of the Russian Railroads Open Joint-Stock Company (the Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Baykal-Amur Railroad); and a network of transport and shipment hubs. Thus, a transport and logistical infrastructure would appear in Siberia, the Far East, and the Arctic that would use water routes, aviation hubs, a network of takeoff and landing strips for small aircraft, and even dirigibles with a large carrying capacity and a long flight range. All this, the authors of the project believe, would make it possible to develop the territories, create high-tech production processes, develop labor migration and tourism, and to “nail down” the population via 7 million jobs.

The project is divided into three phases. The initiators hope to plan and to decide on the participants by 2018. The construction of the main logistical and infrastructure facilities is scheduled for 2018-2025, and the creation of the corridors is to be fully completed by 2035. The proposal hopes to attract China, the United States and the countries of Europe to the project; in exchange, the latter might be able to lift sanctions. The authors regard the project as “highly safe from the geopolitical point of view,” giving assurances that the new, mutually advantageous partnership of the EU and the United States “would have a firmer foundation.” The developers suggest that the scale of the project and the recoupment period (15-20 years) would interest business and make it possible to “carry out the repatriation of Russian capital from offshore accounts.”

So far, of all the components of the project, only transport dirigibles of the ATLANT (“aerostatic flying transport vehicle of a new type”) type have been described in detail. The dirigibles would convey cargo between the Northern Sea Route and the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The developer is the Avgur Aeronautical Center, the carrying capacity of the dirigibles is up to 16 tons, and their flight range is 2000-5000 kilometers. The approximate cost of the project is 3.2 billion rubles [\$500 million dollars], allowing for research and development. The project seeks investors to provide 2016 subsidies of 800 million rubles [12.5 million dollars]. The construction of a plant for the serial production of ATLANT is estimated at 8-10 billion rubles [125- 157 million dollars]; it could be built within two to two-and-a-half years and produce from two to 10 dirigibles per year. The project has received the support of the Skolkovo Foundation’s grant committee.

“Despite the economic crisis and the problems with the budget, the Russian Federation government is examining yet more futuristic megaprojects. Russian Federation Security Council and Academician Aleksandr Nekipelov of the Russian Academy of Sciences have proposed for discussion “United Eurasia”—a system of transport and logistical corridors uniting the Trans-Siberian Railroad Road, the Baykal-Amur Railroad, and the Northern Sea Route. The idea is that the project, which would cost \$220 billion-240 billion, would stimulate the development of Siberia, the Far East, and the Arctic, and the United States and the countries of the West would lift sanctions in exchange for participation. But so far, the only component of the project that is described in detail involves transport dirigibles by the name of ATLANT. To this day, all attempts to commercialize vehicles lighter than air have failed.”

Kirill Lyats, president of the Lokomoskay company, says that in the use of dirigibles the delivery of a heavy load to a hard-to-access region, rather than speed, is paramount. “The advantage of a dirigible over the railroad is its greater carrying capacity—up to 600 tonnes as opposed to 60 tonnes per wagon.” But Vladimir Karnozob, an expert with the Aviation Explorer portal, stresses that, although people have dreamed of using dirigibles and other flying vehicles that are lighter than air for commercial purposes since the moment of their invention, so far, no one has managed to realize such an idea with a positive financial result. It is difficult to build a permanently operating transport system from such vehicles; problems arise with the loading of the vehicles during movement in either direction, and for lengthy routes like Europe to Asia, the situation is complicated by the prevailing winds. In the upshot, Mr. Karnozov sums up, in reality, it is almost impossible for a dirigible to compete with the railroads.



Russian Ministry of Defense Company in Charge of Arctic Logistics

OE Watch Commentary: In Russia there is little separation between the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the nation's defense industries. According to the accompanying article, Oboronlogistika, a defense logistics company owned by the Russian MOD, is apparently going to be handling most Russian government logistics shipping in the Arctic. Not bad for a company that was accredited as a shipping company in March of this year. According to the second source, "Russia's Defense Ministry has integrated the resources of 95 civilian vessels with a total capacity exceeding one million tons and six seaports for logistic support in the Arctic. Oboronlogistika and other transport companies are working on a unified tariff policy for transport services." **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Company Oboronlogistika gets status as united logistics operator for Russian Arctic shipments. Oboronlogistika was established in 2011 and is 100 percent owned by the Russian Ministry of Defense. Now, the company is given a key role in state shipping operations in the Arctic.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “Ministry of Defense takes charge of Arctic shipping,” *The Barents Independent Observer*, 7 July 2016. <http://www.thebarentsobserver.com/security/2016/07/ministry-defense-takes-charge-arctic-shipping>

In a meeting in the Russian Arctic Commission in mid-May this year, the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Transport were requested to present proposals on the establishment of a joint logistics operator for the Arctic. That soon led to a deal with Oboronlogistika.

In June, the company signed agreements with several federal ministries, among them the Ministry of Defense, as well as with Arkhangelsk Oblast about the establishment of “a simple, understandable and economically efficient system for delivery of goods in the Arctic.” Head of Oboronlogistika, Anton Filatov, stated in a meeting with Arkhangelsk Governor Igor Orlov that

“The Ministry has decided to coordinate the efforts of all involved ministries in order to facilitate a joint tariff policy and work schemes for the Northern Sea Route, as well as in [the general] Arctic Zone”.

Company Oboronlogistika gets status as united logistics operator for Russian Arctic shipments. Oboronlogistika was established in 2011 and is 100 percent owned by the Russian Ministry of Defense. Now, the company is given a key role in state shipping operations in the Arctic.

Industrial & military shipments are increasing to the Russian Arctic. The governor of Arkhangelsk is pleased about the role of the new company. “Currently, there are four different companies which deliver industrial, military and municipal goods to the far northern territories, and each of the companies operate independently and with their separate solutions and technology”. Orlov added “This fragmentation is inconvenient and inefficient especially when considering the strategic tasks on the development and management of this territory”.

The company website states “In March of this year, Oboronlogistika received official status as a shipping company, and in April it received a state license for sea transportation of dangerous goods. The new role of the company comes as both industrial and military Russian Arctic shipments are picking up apace. Ship traffic to Yamal is growing in connection with the development of new oil and gas activities, and the Ministry of Defense is building new and upgraded bases along the coast and on the Arctic archipelagos.”

Source: “Russia Builds Arctic Logistics Capacity,” *The Maritime Executive*, 27 July 2016. <http://www.maritime-executive.com/article/russia-builds-arctic-logistics-capacity>

“Russia’s Defense Ministry has integrated the resources of 95 civilian vessels with a total capacity exceeding one million tons and six seaports for logistic support in the Arctic. Oboronlogistika and other transport companies are working on a unified tariff policy for transport services.”

When a River Runs Through It: Riverine Operations in Contemporary Conflict

By LTC (R) Lester Grau, LTC (R) Leroy Denniston

Waterways and population centers will be factors in future war. Frequently they will be collocated and will become operational key terrain. Riverine operations will be a part of future military actions and will be an Army problem. The best way to prepare for a future problem is through study, training, and equipment design and development.

http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/20150609_Grau_RiverineOpsInContempConflict.pdf



Turkey-Russia Ties: It's Complicated

OE Watch Commentary: On 9 August, Russian President Putin and Turkish President Erdoğan met in St. Petersburg to restore the relationship between Turkey and Russia. Their growing friendship had come to an abrupt end when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet in November 2015. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss the significance of this visit, and what it may mean for Turkey and its regional policy going forward. While the visit may help to normalize trade and economic ties, most analysts agree that it will not lead to a quick thawing of the complex relationship. They note that this is because the key issue between them is Syria—an issue where the two countries have been on opposite sides.

As award-winning journalist Kadri Gürsel points out in the first passage, a lot of meaning has been attributed to the Putin-Erdoğan meeting. He points out that many ‘exaggerated commentaries’ have claimed that Turkey is detaching from the West and leaning towards Eurasia in search of a strategic partnership with Russia. However, Gürsel disagrees with this assessment. He also notes that the main criteria in bilateral relations will be Turkey’s Syria policy, which he claims is the main reason for the crisis in relations.

Similarly, as respected journalist and academic Soli Özel points out in the second passage, the current rapprochement is based more on necessities and interests, rather than any kind of strategic alignment. He notes that it does not make sense to conclude that a new alternative power block is emerging as a result of this meeting. Özel also notes that Turkey is trying to find ways to ensure that it gets included in the game in Syria; and claims that the only way to achieve this is to get closer to Russia’s positions on Syria.

The two leaders agreed to improve economic relations and restart some projects that had been frozen after November 2015. However, as the third passage claims, the future of the Turkey-Russia rapprochement is based more on agreeing on Syria than on trade issues. Thus, the author notes that, if Turkey wants to get closer to Russia, it will have to abandon its old Syria policy. As the final passage notes, another notable result of the meeting was the creation of a bilateral working group on Syria, composed of representatives from the respective foreign, defense and intelligence services. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

For more information see, “Russia-Turkey Tensions Peak in Syria,” in the March 2016 issue; “Russia’s Expanding Presence in the Mediterranean,” in the January 2016 issue; and “Realpolitik Drives Turkey-Russia Relations,” in the January 2015 issue of *OE Watch*.

“The main criteria in bilateral relations will be Ankara’s Syria policy.”

Source: Kadri Gürsel, “Rusya’yla Uçak Krizi Öncesine Dönülemez (It is not Possible to Return the Pre-Jet Crisis [Period] with Russia),” *Cumhuriyet.com*, 12 August 2016. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/583192/Rusya_yla_ucak_krizi_onesine_donulemez.html

“A lot of meaning has been attributed to... Erdoğan’s meeting [with Putin] in St. Petersburg. Exaggerated commentaries were made saying that Erdoğan’s Turkey is detaching from the West and leaning towards Eurasia, in search of a strategic partnership with Russia. [But] it takes two to tango. In St. Petersburg, Putin did not appear interested in a ‘Eurasian tango’ with Erdoğan...”

What brought Turkish-Russian relations into crisis is [Turkey’s] Syria policy... The main criteria in bilateral relations will be Ankara’s Syria policy.”



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Source: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Putin_and_Erdoğan.jpeg

Source: Soli Özel, “Rusya ziyaretinden sonra (After the Russia visit),” *Haberturk.com*, 14 August 2016. www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/soli-ozel/1281581-rusya-ziyaretinden-sonra

“It does not make sense to conclude that alternative power blocks will emerge in the world system based on a rapprochement that is... based on necessities and mutual interests. ... Under the current circumstances, it seems that Turkey will stay within the Atlantic alliance. But there is no doubt that it is trying to open up a larger area of maneuver for itself. To achieve this, it must ensure that it gets included in the game in Syria... The only way for this is to get closer to Russia’s positions [on Syria] by limiting the support it gives to opposition groups and playing a more active role in the campaign against ISIS.”

Source: Nuray Mert, “Rusya ve dış politikada değişim (Russia and change in foreign policy),” *Cumhuriyet.com*, 12 August 2016. http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/583196/Rusya_ve_dis_politikada_degisim.html

“The future of the Turkey-Russia rapprochement is based more on agreeing on Syria, than on trade issues... To the extent that Turkey gets closer to Russia..., it will have to abandon its old Syria policy.”

Source: Fehim Taştekin, “Rusya ile ikinci baharın diyeti: Suriye (The cost to a second spring with Russia: Syria),” *Al Monitor.com*, 11 August 2016. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2016/08/turkey-russia-second-spring-what-will-be-the-toll.html#ixzz4I1z6RLhh>

“According to... [the Foreign Minister] Çavuşoğlu, a mechanism will be established with the participation of the military, foreign service and intelligence units.”



The Russian Take on Russian-Turkish Reconciliation: Avoiding Another Incident in the Air

OE Watch Commentary:

According to Russian media, the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Erdogan that took place on 9 August resulted in some reconciliation after several months of poor relations. The excerpted article from popular press reports on a Russian proposal to establish mechanism to avoid another incident like the downing of the Su-24 bomber last November. The proposal appears to have been accepted alongside economic agreements. Also the author notes what he describes as an earlier “apology” from Erdogan and the arrest of both the Turkish pilot who shot down the Su-24 aircraft and the man who allegedly shot the surviving Russian pilot. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“[The agreement] includes channels for exchanging information as well as protocols for engagement in the air...”

Source: Surkov, Nikolay. “Турецких пилотов научат взаимодействовать с российскими (Turkish pilots will learn to interact with Russian counterparts),” *Izvestiya*, 8 August 2016. <http://izvestia.ru/news/625665>

Russia is offering to establish a special mechanism with Turkey to prevent incidents like the one that took place last fall with the shooting down of the Su-24 bomber. According to a source in the Russian Defense Ministry, a set of documents has been put together and if agreed upon in the August 9th negotiations with the Russian and Turkish Presidents, the proposal will be forwarded to the Ministry of Defense of Turkey...(the agreement) includes channels for exchanging information as well as protocols for engagement in the air...

Russia already has agreements with Israel and the United States on preventing incidents in the skies over Syria. According to observers, it has helped avoid casualties and damage to equipment several times...Even before the coup (attempt) the military disagreed with the politics of Erdogan, and now that most of the generals and senior officers have been dismissed, the Army lacks command...this means that the Turkish Army has basically stopped being an independent force and will completely carry out the government’s orders, but it is not clear who to speak with on the Turkish General Staff on certain issues...In June Erdogan wrote a letter to Vladimir Putin, which apologized for the downed Su-24 and Turkish [authorities] later arrested the alleged murderer of the Russian pilot on a weapons possession charge. According to Turkish officials, the pilot who made the final decision to shoot down the Russian bomber was arrested.



“A Russian Su-24 bomber sits at Khmeimim Air Base near Latakia, Syria. The recent reconciliation between Russia and Turkey includes an effort to coordinate Russian air operations with Turkish Armed Forces in order to avoid another incident like the downing of the Su-24 in November 2015.”
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Будни_ВКС_РФ_на_авиабазе_Химеймим_в_Сирии_\(2016\)_\(10\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Будни_ВКС_РФ_на_авиабазе_Химеймим_в_Сирии_(2016)_(10).jpg)



Sri Lanka: Iran's New Strategic Partner?

On 25 July 2011 Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei visited Bandar Abbas, Iran's chief Persian Gulf port, to promote the role of both the Iranian Navy and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) corollary. "Both the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and the Revolutionary Guards' Navy are the symbols of the might of the Iranian nation in defending the interests of the country in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman," he declared.¹ His comments might have seemed to be normal political rhetoric—politicians and even political ayatollahs often butter-up their audiences—but in this case there was something more. With the IRGC increasingly looking inward to defend against internal threats, Khamenei was emphasizing a new mission by which Iran's regular and IRGC Navies would become a chief mechanism for Iran to project power.

Indeed, five months earlier Iranian warships made their first transit of the Suez Canal since the Islamic Revolution.² The Suez transit became a repeating occurrence, and Iranian ships also began making regular port calls at Port Sudan, Sudan's main Red Sea port.³ Both an Iranian warship's passage through the Suez Canal and into the Mediterranean on 22 February 2011 and Iranian warships paying port calls in Sudan a year later have reinforced the fact that the Iranian Navy has expanded its operational reach.

Western officials have charted Iran's increasing involvement eastward with alarm, especially as the IRGC has grown increasingly involved in Syria and Yemen. However, that is only half the story of Iran's growing operational reach. In February 2013 Iran deployed its first naval flotilla to the Pacific Ocean since the tenth century.⁴ While the Iranian press focused on the ships' arrival in the Chinese port of Zhangjiagang, near Shanghai, of equal importance was its port call in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Why Sri Lanka?

The island nation of Sri Lanka is strategically located in the Indian Ocean, approximately 2,500 miles as the crow flies from both Iran and China. At first glance, Sri Lanka might not seem a natural ally for the Islamic Republic. Its Muslim population numbers only 10 percent of its more than 22 million people, slightly fewer than the number of Hindus and far fewer than the 15.4 million Buddhists.⁵

The Islamic Republic, though, has never had any qualms about cultivating close strategic ties to non-Muslim countries. It has reached out to African countries serving as either nonpermanent members of the United Nations Security Council or members of the International Atomic Energy Agency's board of governors, as well as countries with exploitable uranium reserves or port facilities which Iranian shipping might use.⁶ Iran also cultivates countries—even those like Russia which repress local Muslim populations—if Tehran can derive military benefit from the relationship.⁷

Iranian outreach to Sri Lanka also takes advantage of Sri Lankan frustration with the West. Between 1983 and 2009 Sri Lankan forc-

es fought a brutal civil war against the Tamil Tigers, who sought to create an independent Tamil state in the north and east of the island. The conflict resulted in the deaths of perhaps 100,000 fighters and civilians both, according to the United Nations.⁸ Throughout the years of civil war the United Nations, India, and various countries sought to facilitate peace talks. These largely broke down upon Tamil Tiger insincerity.⁹ Finally, after 26 years of fighting the Sri Lankan Army did what hundreds of diplomats and UN officials had tried but failed to do: end the conflict. Sri Lankan forces overran Ananthapuram and the Jaffna Peninsula and killed Velupillai Prabhakaran, leader of the Tamil Tigers. The final battles were bloody, however. Accusations of human rights abuses and summary executions swirled.¹⁰ The UN Human Rights Council sought an investigation, a move supported by the US State Department.¹¹ The European Union followed suit.¹²

As Sri Lanka felt embattled, if not betrayed by many Western countries, it was perhaps ripe for cultivation by Iran. After United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon agreed to appoint a special panel to



Ebrahim Rohani, Iranian Defense Attaché to Sri Lanka, visiting Vice Admiral Ravindra Wijegunaratne, commander of the Sri Lankan Navy, on July 29, 2015.

Source: <http://www.navy.lk/eventnews/2015/07/29/201507291235/>

investigate human rights violations by Sri Lanka during its final military drive to eradicate the Tamil Tigers, Iranian Minister of Transportation and Housing Ali Nikzad lambasted the UN panel, describing it as a "paper tiger" and a "pet of the Western nations." He added that "if any organization or country takes action that will harm Sri Lanka, we [Iran] will always very strongly oppose such a move."¹³ Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki called his Sri Lankan counterpart to congratulate him and remind him that Iran had always supported Sri Lanka's unity, implying that Western countries which sought a negotiated peace were willing to sacrifice Sri Lanka's territorial integrity.¹⁴

More recently, Iranian Attorney General Ebrahim Raeesi visited Sri Lanka for consultations with his counterpart. According to his office's website, during the meeting "he praised Sri Lanka's recent efforts to block imperialist countries' efforts to interfere in their affairs,"¹⁵ a state-

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Continued: Sri Lanka: Iran's New Strategic Partner?

ment meant to capitalize on Sri Lankan frustration about the United States, Europe, and the United Nation's continued pursuit of human rights investigations into the conclusion of Sri Lanka's multidecade terrorist conflict.

Military Ties and More

Perhaps one of the reasons why Iranian-Sri Lankan relations have seemingly accelerated so quickly has been the groundwork laid in the first decade of the millennium. Both countries issued numerous joint statements supporting nuclear nonproliferation, a boon to Iran's diplomatic position, as it was depicting itself as a victim of cynical and predatory nuclear powers rather than a country in violation of its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty safeguards agreement.¹⁶ "Ours is a friendship based on mutual trust and understanding," then-Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottakki said, adding, "Iran is sincerely committed to the development of Sri Lanka, whom we consider to be a true friend." In April 2008 Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited Colombo and declared that Iran and Sri Lanka both sought "justice and fair play in the world," and pledged further cooperation.¹⁷ Over subsequent months and years similar discussions occurred among other officials: Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and his Sri Lankan equivalent Wijesinghe Jayaweera Mudiyansele Lokubandara and Mottakki and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, among others.¹⁸ Certainly, such declarations of cooperation and strong ties are a staple of diplomatic rhetoric but, in the case of Tehran and Colombo's developing friendship, there seems real substance to back the statements of Iranian leaders.

Consider military ties: as Iran began to project naval power more widely, it grew increasingly in need of logistical support. The Red Sea and Mediterranean are relatively narrow; no ship is ever more than a few hours from land and, regardless, Iran had long-term allies in the region, like Sudan and Syria. The Indian Ocean, however, is huge, and logistical options more limited. Iran and Pakistan may be neighbors, but, despite having more than 250 million people between the two countries, bilateral trade is little more than a quarter billion dollars.¹⁹ India might be a trading partner, but, with China looming, while India has welcomed an occasional Iranian port call in Mumbai in exchange for similar services for the Indian Navy in Bandar Abbas, India is loathe to antagonize the West by offering much more.²⁰

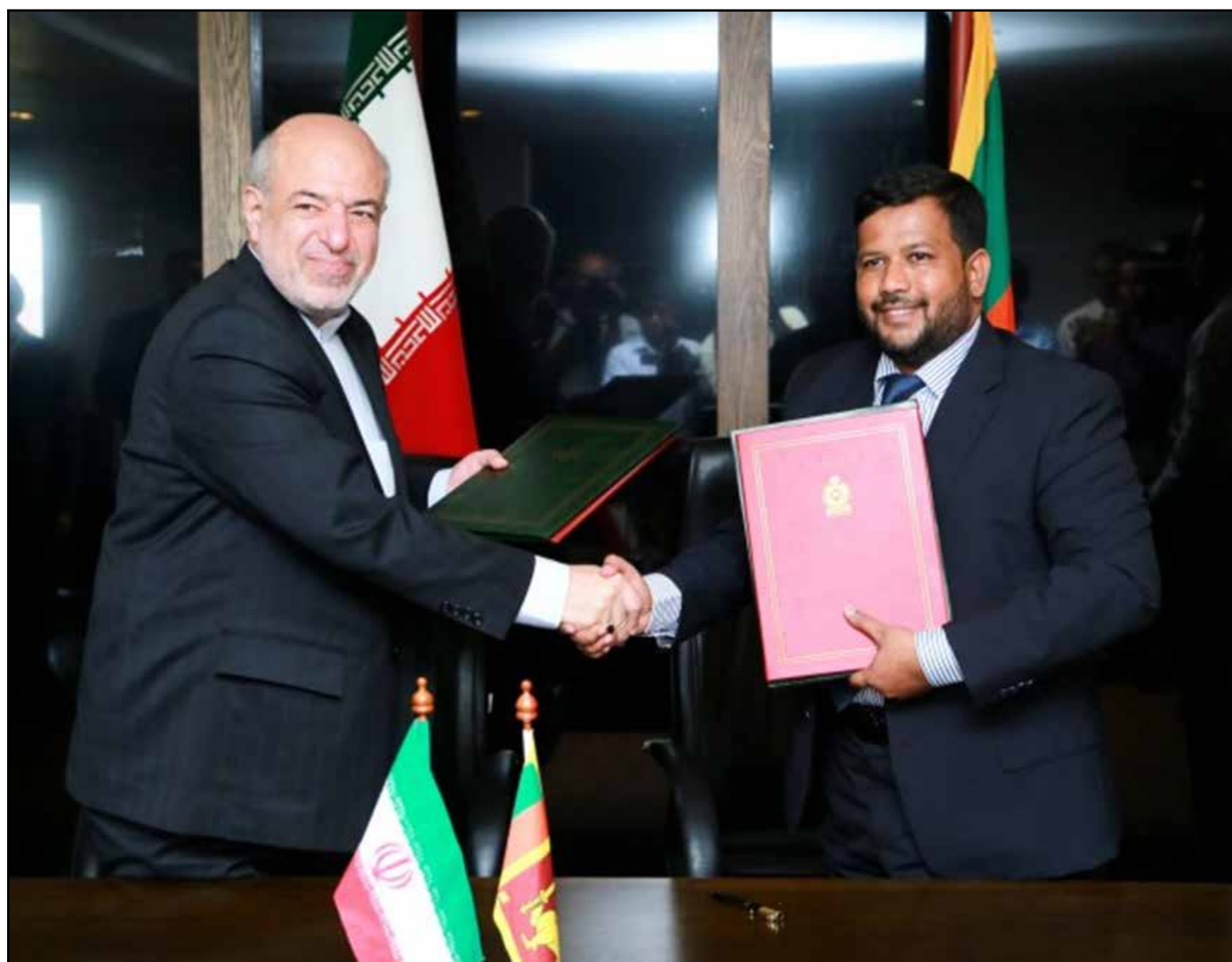
The first Iranian flotilla docked in Colombo in February 2013. Then, on 20 December Iran's 28th Naval Flotilla, comprising two warships, a submarine, and a combat helicopter, arrived in Colombo.²¹ The Sri Lankan naval commander subsequently visited the Iranian submarine.²² Rear Admiral Siavash Jareh explained that a goal of the deployment was "to show the Islamic Republic's power and wave its flag in the southern hemisphere and to prepare for forthcoming operations to secure sea lanes in critical regions, especially the Strait of Malacca and Bay of Bengal."²³

In 2015 Iran sent a destroyer and an auxiliary ship to Sri Lanka.²⁴ "The presence of the flotilla of warships in Colombo port shows our good relations with Sri Lanka," Colonel Ebrahim Rouhani, Iran's defense attaché to Sri Lanka, said.²⁵ During the meeting Ahmad Ker-manshahi, the visiting Iranian commodore, offered to take the relationship to a new level by training Sri Lankan cadets in Iran.²⁶ Iranian commanders and students also visited the Sri Lankan Naval College.

Jayantha Perera, the Commander of Sri Lanka's Navy, reportedly said that Sri Lanka's relationship with Iran "is not just military but also political," and said that the Iranian port visit at Colombo would strengthen the bilateral partnership.²⁷

Iranian officials, however, are seeking to expand the relationship beyond simply the military. When Ahmadinejad became president in 2005, Sri Lanka was the first stop in his inaugural Asian tour.²⁸

There have always been low-level economic ties. Iran and Sri Lanka signed (but never implemented) a preferential trade accord in 2004. In 2007 Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa visited Iran and signed more than \$1.5 billion worth of development projects. The following year Ahmadinejad visited Sri Lanka and inaugurated a \$750 million project to upgrade Sri Lanka's Sapugaskanda Petroleum Refinery,²⁹ the important of which lies in the fact that Iranian refinery servicing



Iranian Energy Minister Hamid Chitchian meeting Sri Lankan Minister of Industry and Commerce Rishad Bathiudeen in Colombo, February 25, 2016.

Source: <http://nation.lk/online/2016/02/25/sri-lanka-vying-for-mou-on-tea-with-iran-to-boost-exports.html>

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companies not only were dominated by the IRGC's economic wing, but they were also, from a quality perspective, far behind European, American, and East Asian companies. That same year, the State Department expressed concern about the growing economic relationship between Colombo and Tehran.³⁰

Outreach has been consistent. In November 2013, Sri Lankan Oil Minister Anura Priyadarshana told the island-nation's Hiru News portal that "Sri Lanka will have a huge advantage as a result of relaxing Iran sanctions."³¹ In 2014 Iranian Finance Minister Ali Taieb Nia met Sarath Amunugama, his Sri Lankan counterpart on the sidelines of World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings to discuss accelerating growth of commercial ties.³² In the wake of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the lifting of sanctions, trade—especially in the energy sector—has taken off. Susil Premajayantha, a member of the Sri Lankan parliament (mistakenly referenced in the Iranian press as minister of oil), said that Sri Lanka favored Iran's oil to that of Saudi Arabia. Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Roknoddin Javadi suggested that Iran is prepared to provide 40,000-45,000 barrels per day, enough oil to supply Sri Lanka's main oil refinery.³³ Both countries seem ready to update and reinvigorate a preferential trade agreement signed in 2004 but never ratified.³⁴

In recent months economic relations have moved from the theoretical to the real. Sri Lankan tea exporters applauded the lifting of currency sanctions and hope Iran will return to its pre-sanctions status as Ceylon tea's largest overseas market.³⁵ In February 2016, for example, Iranian Energy Minister Hamid Chitchian visited Sri Lanka with

an Iranian delegation to discuss not only partnerships with regard to electricity and water, but also greater cooperation among Iranian and Sri Lankan banks.³⁶ In 2016 Iran used some of its post-JCPOA hard currency windfall to lease Sri Lankan Airlines airplanes, effectively helping Sri Lanka's national carrier to reduce its \$1 billion debt.³⁷

Iran also remains very cognizant of soft-power. An Iranian cultural delegation visiting Sri Lanka met with Ravi Jayawardena, Chairman of Sri Lanka's Rupavahini Corporation, the country's national television network, to discuss airing Iranian films and television shows on Sri Lankan media because of "similar cultural values."³⁸ Sayyid Hassan Khomeini, the grandson of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, visited Sri Lanka in July 2016 to meet both political and religious officials. During his meeting with Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the head of the Sri Lankan Catholic church reportedly praised Khomeini for "promoting human values."³⁹

It is natural that with many international sanctions lifted, Iran would seek to expand its relations globally. While Iran continues to explore new commercial opportunities in Russia, China, Europe and—at least when it comes to Boeing—with the United States, Sri Lanka appears to be the subject of special focus inside Tehran. While international concern focuses on Iran's activities in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, the growing Iranian outreach toward Sri Lanka appears to remain largely under the diplomatic radar. However, as Sri Lanka continues to feel unjustly criticized, if not besieged by Western diplomats, Iran appears willing to solidify its ties and, with it, Iran's operational reach into the Indian Ocean basin.

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