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SPECIAL ESSAY:

The Changing Face of Chinese Peacekeepers in South Sudan



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| <p>TURKEY</p> <p>3 After Islamic Military Alliance, an Antiterrorism Islamic Interpol</p> <p>4 Turkey, Russia and the Caucasus</p> <p>6 Turkey Opens Cyber Defense Center</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST</p> <p>7 Khamenei: "Missiles are Necessary"</p> <p>8 Iran Joins Satellite-Guided Armed UAV Club</p> <p>9 Iran: IRGC-Navy to Deploy Faster Speedboats</p> <p>ARAB PENINSULA</p> <p>10 Women in Arab Armies: Recent Trends</p> <p>11 Iranian Army Special Forces in Syria</p> <p>12 ISIS: Alive and Kicking in the Sinai</p> <p>AFRICA</p> <p>13 The Chibok Girls: 2 Years Later</p> <p>15 Nigerian Army Being Investigated by ICC</p> <p>16 New Waves of Violence in Ethiopia</p> <p>17 Chibok Kidnapping Investigations Show Response Gaps</p> <p>18 After Setbacks, Mali Scores a Victory against Ansar Dine</p> <p>LATIN AMERICA</p> <p>19 A Consequence of Forum of Sao Paulo Success</p> <p>19 A Communist Conspiracy!</p> <p>20 Colombian Convocation Tests</p> <p>20 Land Restitution Fraud?</p> <p>21 Woman Guerrilla Leader</p> <p>22 A Look at Megacities in Latin America</p> <p>23 Perceived Security Concerns in Mexico Fuel Purchase of Armored Vehicles by the Country's Elite</p> | <p>24 Mexicans Arrested for Involvement in Nigerian Super-Meth Lab</p> <p>25 Mexican Navy Accused of Human Rights Violations, but Record Is Improving</p> <p>27 Navy Assuming Responsibility for Mexican Ports</p> <p>28 Weapons Factory Found in Michoacán</p> <p>29 Criminals Disguise Themselves as Police in Michoacán</p> <p>INDO-PACIFIC ASIA</p> <p>30 Microsatellite Marks Milestone in Philippine Space Program</p> <p>31 The Hazards of Thailand's National Commission for Peace and Order No 13/2016</p> <p>32 Indonesia and China are Playing Rough Over the South China Sea</p> <p>33 Terrorism Expert: Sulu Sea is Becoming a Terror Haven</p> <p>34 Uighurs Increase their Presence in Southeast Asia and Authorities are Worried</p> <p>CHINA, KOREA, JAPAN</p> <p>35 China's Overseas Missions: Fostering a Strategic Advantage</p> <p>36 PLA's New Overseas Operations Office to Strengthen Overseas Rapid Reaction</p> <p>37 A Pakistani Perspective on China's "String of Pearls"</p> <p>EUROPE</p> <p>38 Montenegrins Wary of NATO Membership</p> <p>CENTRAL ASIA</p> <p>39 An Incident on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz Border</p> <p>40 A New Kind of CSTO Exercise?</p> | <p>RUSSIA, UKRAINE</p> <p>41 Conscription and Contract Service in the Russian Federation</p> <p>43 Russia Fielding 'Sixth Generation' Tactical Radios</p> <p>44 Russia Forms 'National Guard'</p> <p>46 More on Russia's New National Guard</p> <p>47 Russian Reactions to Putin's Announcement of Syria Withdrawal</p> <p>48 Naryshkin: Spirituality and Tradition Bind Armenia with Russia</p> <p>49 Kudrin's NGO Proposes Democratization in the North Caucasus</p> <p>50 Russian Joint Exercises in Indonesia</p> <p>51 Moscow Military Conference</p> <p>52 Putin's German Judo Move?</p> <p>53 Spring 2016 Draft: Turning Away Conscripts?</p> <p>54 Arctic Lanyard; Yankers on Ice</p> <p>55 Lessons from the 2015 Arctic Riverine and Amphibious Landings</p> <p>56 Update on the 80th Arctic Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade</p> <p>57 New Formations on Russia's Western Borders</p> <p>58 Developing Hypersonic Cruise Missiles</p> <p>59 Russian Experts Comment on the Future Use of Robots in War</p> <p>SPECIAL ESSAY</p> <p>61 The Changing Face of Chinese Peacekeepers in South Sudan</p> |
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ON THE COVER: A pipeline, Peacekeepers, UN Vehicle.

Sources: http://xuan.news.cn/cloudnews/qgjb/20150409/2241220_c.html; <http://cdn.securitytalkafrica.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/oil-pipeline-ps.jpg>; <http://defencetalk.net/attachments/2-jpg.18357/>

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After Islamic Military Alliance, an Antiterrorism Islamic Interpol

OE Watch Commentary: In mid-April more than 40 heads of state representing the Muslim world met in Istanbul for the 13th gathering of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The meeting yielded many new initiatives, including a decision to establish an antiterrorism Islamic police organization, similar to Interpol, to be based in Istanbul. Another important outcome was harsh criticism of Iran for its regional activities. The accompanying passages from the Turkish and Middle Eastern press discuss regional perspectives on these issues.

The first passage, from Turkish daily *Hürriyet*, points out Turkish President Erdoğan's comments, in which he discusses the importance of international cooperation in fighting terrorism. He notes that his proposal to establish an OIC Center for Police Cooperation and Coordination, which would be based in Istanbul, was accepted. This is envisioned as a structure that would strengthen and institutionalize cooperation among OIC members on matters related to terrorism and other crimes.

The second passage, from *Al-Arabiya*, by Maha Akeel, Director of the Information Department at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, notes that the Conference invited member states to join the Islamic Military Coalition to combat terrorism. He points out that since Muslims are the biggest victims of terrorism, it is Muslims who should be most motivated to do the most to fight it. He also notes that an "Islamic Interpol," to be based in Istanbul, was also agreed on to fight terrorism.

The third passage, from the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, discusses the OIC communiqué's critical comments on Iran. It notes that Iran was harshly criticized for its continued support of terrorism and its interference in the internal affairs of regional countries and member countries, such as Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and Somalia. It particularly focuses on Iran's actions towards Saudi Arabia, labeling them "provocative" and as "violating international agreements."

Turkey's proposal for an antiterrorism "Islamic Interpol" follows an earlier Saudi Arabian initiative, made in December 2015, for a new Islamic military alliance against terrorism, made up for 34 Muslim countries. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

"At the summit, an 'Islamic Interpol' was ... agreed on to fight terrorism, headquartered in Istanbul."

Source: "Erdoğan: Teklifimiz kabul gördü (Erdoğan: Our proposal was accepted)," *Hürriyet.com.tr*, 14 April 2016, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/islam-isbirligi-teskilati-13-islam-zirvesi-basliyor-40088077>

"Erdoğan, who noted the importance of international cooperation in fighting [terrorism] said, 'It will be appropriate to establish a structure that would strengthen and institutionalize the cooperation among OIC members on matters related to terror and other crimes. As such, our proposal to establish an OIC Center for Police Cooperation and Coordination based in Istanbul, was accepted. I thank you for your support for this.'"

Source: Maha Akeel, "The OIC's 10-Year Strategic Plan for the Muslim World," *Al Arabiya.net*, 16 April 2016, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2016/04/16/The-OIC-s-10-year-strategic-plan-for-the-Muslim-world.html>

"The Conference invited member states to join the Islamic Military Coalition to combat terrorism. Since Muslims are the biggest victims of terrorism, it is Muslims who should be motivated to do the most to fight it. At the summit, an 'Islamic Interpol' was also agreed on to fight terrorism, headquartered in Istanbul. At the intersection of Europe and Asia, and with input from various member states, this will be a game changer in fighting the roots and branches of terrorism."

Source: "İstanbul zirvesinde İran'a şok uyarılar," *Milliyet.com*, 16 April 2016, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/istanbul-zirvesinde-iran-a-sok/siyaset/detay/2227945/default.htm>

"The OIC communiqué expressed criticism over Iran's continued support for terror and for its interference in the internal affairs of regional countries and member countries such as Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and Somalia. Iran's comments regarding the executions in Saudi Arabia were found to be provocative and an open interference in internal affairs. It was noted that the attacks on Saudi Arabian missions in Tehran and Mashhad were clear legal violations of international agreements and of the immunity of diplomatic missions. In the statement, the administration in Tehran was accused of interfering in the internal affairs of Saudi Arabia, clearly violating international agreements, the UN, and the OIC."

"The OIC Communique expressed criticism over Iran's continued support for terror and for its interference in the interenal affairs of regional counrtires and member countries such as Baharain, Yemen, Syria and Somalia"

Turkey, Russia and the Caucasus

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss the April 2016 flare up of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, noting that this conflict has the potential to turn into a Russian-Turkish problem at a time when relations between the two countries are already very tense.

The first passage, written by noted foreign policy expert Soli Özel for the Turkish daily *Habertürk*, notes that even though a cease-fire was declared, it is just a matter of time before the conflict heats up again. He points to claims that Moscow is behind the latest crisis, mentioning that the cease-fire was only possible after both countries' army chiefs went to Moscow. He also reminds readers that Russia sells weapons to both sides, and that the brief battle caused the greatest losses for the two sides since 1994. He claims that if Russia is behind the latest conflict, this could be evaluated as a message to the U.S. to stay away from the Caucasus. He warns that, at a time when Turkish-Russian relations are already critical, there is a risk that the tensions could spill over to neighboring regions.

The second passage, by a Turkish security expert, claims that Russia triggered the conflict in the Caucasus. By bringing the two sides together, Russia tried to renew its standing in the international stage.

The third and fourth passages discuss Turkish and Russian positions on the matter. The third passage notes that Turkey took Azerbaijan's side, while the fourth passage discusses Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's comments that the latest conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was stirred by foreign meddling, saying that "there is a Turkish factor in this conflict." The third passage warns that "there is a danger that this issue will be turned into an Armenia-Russia block and an Azerbaijan-Turkey block, and then turned into a Turkey-Russia problem. And... this is very dangerous."

Relations between Russia and Turkey have been deteriorating since 24 November 2015, when Turkey shot down a Russian jet which violated its airspace. Tensions have escalated dramatically since then, including Russian sanctions on Turkish businesses, travel and trade. Russian air strikes in Syria have complicated Turkey's position and effectively turned the region into a no-fly zone for Turkey. Russia's increasing military presence in countries surrounding Turkey, its bases in the Black Sea, and its presence in the Mediterranean create concern in Turkey that Russia has encircled it from both north and south. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“There is a danger that this issue will turn into an Armenia-Russia block and an Azerbaijan-Turkey block, and then into a Turkey-Russia problem. And... this is very dangerous.”

Source: Soli Özel, ‘Kafkaslar’da donmayan çatışma (An unfrozen conflict in the Caucasus),” *Haberturk.com*, 8 April 2016, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/soli-ozel/1221629-kafkaslarda-donmayan-catisma>

“Last week’s crisis between Azerbaijan and Armenia can be considered ‘a close call’. But ... it is just a matter of time before the conflict heats up again. There are some who believe that Moscow is behind the latest crisis, as in previous crises. The ceasefire was only possible after both countries’ Army Chiefs went to Moscow. So, when it comes to the Caucasus, Russia....has the most to say, and sells weapons to both sides.

In this short battle, which saw the most loss since 1994 between the sides, heavy weapons, UAVs, GRAD missiles and new weapons systems were used....

If Russia is behind the latest conflict, this could be evaluated as a Russian message to the U.S. to ‘stay away from the Caucasus.’ This could lead to many more conflicts in the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Particularly at a time when Turkish-Russian relations are bad, and there is increasing competition among different groups in Azerbaijan, we have to see that the tensions could spill over to neighboring regions.

It is probably obvious that this is a crisis that Turkey needs to be very careful of.”

Source: Mustafa Akin, “Azerbaycan-Ermenistan Krizi (The Azerbaijan-Armenia Crisis),” *StratejikDerinlik.com (Strategic Depth)*, 13 April 2016, <http://stratejikderinlik.com/?p=12>

“Russia, who couldn’t find what it was seeking in Syria, is now shifting its focus to other regions, in an effort to regain some of its image. Russia, who realized that it wasn’t going to get what it wants in Ukraine, has turned its attention to another cooling problem in the east-- the Karabakh problem. Russia has plans to trigger the conflict among the two countries here, and then will bring them together, thus renewing its image in the international stage.”

(continued)

Continued: Turkey, Russia and the Caucasus

Source: Ceyda Karan, “Azeri-Ermeni krizinin Türkiye-Rusya krizi haline getirilme tehlikesi var (There is a danger that the Azeri-Armenian crisis will be turned into a Turkey-Russia crisis),” *Sputniknews.com*, 6 April 2016, http://tr.sputniknews.com/ceyda_karan_ksen/20160406/1021967556/azerbaycan-ermenistan-turkiye-rusya.html#ixzz46ISgkfAb

“The Turkish government took Azerbaijan’s side in the crisis. This led to Moscow’s criticism. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov criticized Turkey for being ‘one-sided’.

There is a danger that this issue will be turned into an Armenia-Russia block and an Azerbaijan-Turkey block, and then turned into a Turkey-Russia problem. And... this is very dangerous.”

Source: “Russia Rushes to Mediate Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” *Asia Times*, 11 April 2016, <http://atimes.com/2016/04/russia-rushes-to-mediate-in-nagorno-karabakh-conflict/>

“As the Kremlin moved to settle the renewed conflict in Azerbaijan’s breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia lost little time in accusing Turkey of fueling the hostilities. Meanwhile, Russian officials pledged to continue arms sales to both sides of the conflict — Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev publicly speculated on April 9 that the latest conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was stirred by foreign meddling. There is a Turkish factor in this conflict, he said in televised remarks.”



Turkey Opens Cyber Defense Center

OE Watch Commentary: In late 2010 the Turkish National Security Council added cyber-threats into its National Security Policy Document, its official policy paper defining security threats. Since then Turkish government officials and security experts have taken steps to develop a national cyber defense strategy and establish institutions to deal with cyber threats. As part of this effort, in late March 2016 Turkish military giant HAVELSAN, a specialist in military electronics and software, launched a Cyber Defense Technology Center. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss this center, describing it as a milestone in national security.

The first passage discusses the opening ceremony and points to comments by Turkish National Defense Minister Izmet Yilmaz, who said that cyber wars are the latest version of war, adding that a cyber attack is a reason for war. He also points out that cyber attacks are the second most dangerous attack on a country, following nuclear attacks.

The second passage, from Havelsan's own website, discusses the operation center, which functions within the new Center, similar to a 24/7 watch center. It notes that the operation center monitors, analyzes and, if necessary, issues alerts of cyber events, while also conducting cyber threat intelligence analysis. It identifies cyber anomalies based on analyzing big data and huge information databases.

The Center is envisioned as a technology, research-development, testing and surveillance center, which will also double as a cyber threat intelligence analysis center. In addition, it is also meant to reduce dependence on foreign sources regarding cyber security. This is part of a broader effort which aims to reduce Turkey's dependence on foreign countries for its national security needs. Other steps that Turkey has taken in this field include the following: the Turkish Armed Forces has established a Cyber Defense Command; and the government has established a Cyber Defense Council and issued a National Cyber Defense Strategy, including its most recent 2016-2019 Action Plan, which focuses on this issue.

Academia and the private sector in Turkey have also been conducting important studies in this field. There is an increased awareness of the fact that a new war domain has emerged in the form of cyber space, in addition to the traditional domains of land, sea, air and space. Many of these plans note that, since cyber attacks are asymmetric, borderless and hard to attribute, Turkey is focusing its efforts on cyber-defense. For more information please see "Turkey's Efforts in National Cyber Defense," OE Watch, February 2015, http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201502/Turkey_01.html **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“This operation center monitors, analyzes and alerts of cyber events; in addition to conducting cyber threat intelligence analysis.”

Source: “Siber Savunmada Yepyeni bir Mekrez: SISATEM (A Brand New Center in Cyber Defense: SISATEM),” *Havelsan's Monthly Cyber Security Bulletin*, April 2016, http://www.havelsan.com.tr/files/files/folders/442016103114815_HAVELSAN_SiberGuvBulteni_Say2Nisan2016.pdf

“The opening ceremony for the Cyber Defense Technology Center (SISATEM)... was held on 23 March 2016. Many high-level government officials, including the National Defense Minister Ismet Yilmaz... attended the ceremony. The National Defense Minister Yilmaz... said, ‘In the old days, wars were conducted on land. Then they moved to the sea, and later to the air... This was followed by space wars. But the latest one is probably cyber wars. I also said this in NATO. A cyber attack is a reason for war. Cyber attacks follow nuclear attacks in the level of damage they can do to a country. It is not possible for every country to have nuclear capabilities, it requires a long time and a lot of resources. But this is not like that. It requires much less time, less resources and very little risk [yet] you can do the same damage that a nuclear war can do. Turkey needed a center like this.’”

Source: “Siber Güvenlik Operasyon Merkezi Hizmeti (Cyber Defense Operation Center Service),” *Havelsan.com*, Undated, <http://www.havelsan.com.tr/a/Main/urun/780/siber-guvenlik-operasyon-merkezi-hizmeti>

“Havelsan's Operation Center functions as part of the Cyber Security Technology Center and works according to the 7 [day]/ 24 [hour] principle with its talented and experienced personnel. This operation center monitors, analyzes and alerts of cyber events; in addition to conducting cyber threat intelligence analysis.... In addition, it has the capability to identify anomalies based on ‘Big Data’ analysis of huge information databases.”



Khamenei: “Missiles are Necessary”

OE Watch Commentary: Iran’s ballistic missile development has rapidly become one of the most contentious issues in the post-Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) era. Whereas international sanctions in place prior to the JCPOA and corollary UN Security Council Resolution 2231 prohibited Iranian ballistic missile development, Iranian authorities argue that UNSCR 2231 does not explicitly prohibit such ballistic missile work and also suggest that so long as a missile is not specifically designed to carry nuclear warheads it is permissible. The dispute shot to the forefront in the UN and diplomatic debate after Iran launched several ballistic missiles, on one of which was painted in Hebrew a slogan calling for Israel’s destruction.

In the wake of the controversy, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei delivered a speech in which he doubled down on Iran’s commitment to continue to expand its ballistic missile work. In the excerpt here, he even seemed to suggest that any Iranian who sought to compromise in order to further develop relations with the West would be guilty of treason. At the same time, he furthered the argument that absent a missile capability, Iran would be subject to bullying from even tiny nations. This concern, if legitimate, perhaps has less to do with his Israel obsession, but may signify more a belief that the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia may soon see rapid proliferation of such technology. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“How can we say...that the days of missiles have passed?”

Source: “Ham Mozakereh Ham Mushak Hangam Aqdam va ‘Amal baraye Behbood Vaza’ Ma’ishti Mardom Ast” (Both Talks And Missiles Are Necessary to Improve the Lives of Men), *Leader.ir*, 30 March 2016. <http://goo.gl/qUr1tP>

Khamenei: Missiles Improve the People’s Livelihood

Khamenei said, “Repeating slogans and chants may become boring, so it is time for practical steps to improve the people’s livelihood....” His Excellency Ayatollah Khamenei offered sharp criticism of those who see the world of tomorrow as a world of negotiation and not missiles. “If such comments are made out of ignorance, that is one issue but if it arises from knowledge, then it is treason...” The enemies are continuously strengthening their own military and missile power. How can we say in such conditions that the days of missiles have passed...? They should not be propagandizing as if we are opposed to negotiations. We are saying that we must negotiate powerfully and intelligently to avoid being cheated... In the jungle-style circumstances in the world, if the Islamic Republic seeks only negotiation, economic exchanges, and even science and technology, but does not have missile capabilities, even petty governments would be able to threaten the Iranian nation.



Khamenei Speaks About Missiles to Professional Mourners Gathered on the Birthday of Fatimah, the Prophet Muhammad’s Daughter
Source: *Leader.ir* (http://leader.ir/media/album/news/46924_381.jpg)

Iran Joins Satellite-Guided Armed UAV Club

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian drone development continues apace, as Iran not only develops new models, but also upgrades its existing drones. In the latest development, the command of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Air Force has suggested that Iran has upgraded its drones in order to take advantage of satellite-based GPS technology, putting Iran in the same category as China, the US, and Israel, and ahead of other regional countries like Turkey and Pakistan. Should his statement, excerpted here, be true, then it suggests that Iran's satellite program is also continuing apace. This ironically may bolster Iran's negotiating position with regard to its ballistic missile development: as Western powers argue that Tehran only uses its space program as cover to develop even more advanced missiles, Iranian officials can bolster their claims that it serves a broader purpose.

If Iranian UAVs now include GPS technology, it also suggests that Iran may soon broaden its capabilities to other platforms. If it has developed its own indigenous GPS network, this not only erodes the quantitative military edge of other regional states like Israel, but also could enhance the operational ability of both Iranian forces present in Iraq, Syria, and perhaps Yemen, and those of Iranian proxies, such as Hezbollah, should the IRGC transfer its technology. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The new drones are also able to deliver bombs and missiles with much greater accuracy”

Source: “Iran Chaharmen ‘Aziz Bashgah Sazandgan ‘Pehpad Masaleh’ ba Hadayat Ma Havareha-ye dar Jahan Shod” (Iran is the Fourth Member of the Satellite-Guided ‘Armed UAV’ Club), *Mashegh*, 1 April 2016 <http://goo.gl/WA4qj9>

Iran Joins Satellite-Guided Armed UAV Club

Discussion of satellite navigation systems is one of the most important issues in the military field. With the use of such systems, not only are commanders able to have much better insight into such matters such as the presence of friendly forces, but they are also able to communicate better with them, but they are also able to deliver bombs and missiles with much greater accuracy... America, China, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, and the Zionist regime are the only countries which produce such operational drones, but if we talk about satellite navigation, Turkey and Pakistan are removed from the list... Gen. Hajizadeh, commander of the IRGC Air Force, at the beginning of 2016, said that changes in the nose of the “Shahed-129” UAV add to the ability of the drone to communicate with satellites, and added that the UAV is now operational for the IRGC and during the February 11 demonstration, the new model of the drone was unveiled which had a different design on the front end of the drone.



The basic Shahed-129.
Source: Mashregh, <http://goo.gl/OERG5K>

Iran: IRGC-Navy to Deploy Faster Speedboats

OE Watch Commentary: Ever since Operation Praying Mantis in 1988, Iranian naval doctrine has been geared to asymmetrical warfare. Cognizant that it cannot defeat the US or any other advance naval power head-on, it seeks to harass and potentially cause enough casualties to compel a withdrawal from the Persian Gulf and northern Indian Ocean, where Iran seeks to be the predominant influence.

The speedboat has been a central component to Iran's naval strategy. According to the article excerpted here from Iran's premier and official defense website, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has significantly upgraded the speed of its small boats to 80 knots (92 miles per hour), more than twice the speed of the Nimitz-class aircraft carriers which the U.S. Navy uses in the region.

Elsewhere in his talk, IRGC-Navy Commander Ali Fadavi said that the IRGC expects to mount anti-ship cruise missiles and cannons on its new speedboats, and that the IRGC is already working at its naval research laboratory to develop boats capable of reaching top speeds of 120 knots.

Because of its relative shallowness, the narrowness of international waterways, and high traffic, the Persian Gulf has always been a difficult place in which to operate. That Iran may soon deploy enhanced and armed speedboats may pose a threat both to littoral states and commercial traffic, undercut the security of off-shore international oil workers in zones contested commercially by IRGC-affiliated companies, and complicate the operational environment for U.S. forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“We are looking to increase production of new speed boats.”

Source: “Monasha Na Amani-ha dar Montaqeh Amrika Ast” (America is the Source of Instability in the Region), *Defapress.ir*, 3 April 2016. <http://goo.gl/fTiLIn>

New Speed Boats on the Horizon

The Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)-Navy stated, “The Americans are the source of instability in the region and so if we are ahead of them, all of the problems in the region will be resolved.... Therefore, everyone who takes effective action is taking a step in the right direction.” The Commander of the IRGC-Navy also referred to the mass production in the past year of speed boats capable of reaching 80 knots, and said that we are looking to increase their production.



Ali Fadavi, commander of IRGC Navy, announcing new speedboats.
Source: IRNA, <http://img7.irna.ir/1394/13941220/81997653/81997653-70582658.jpg>

Women in Arab Armies: Recent Trends

OE Watch Commentary: Two years ago an Egyptian woman challenged her exclusion from the army on the grounds that it violated Egypt's constitutional protection of equality between men and women. Though her appeal was denied, the constitutional argument for allowing women to volunteer is being made with growing frequency in both Egypt and Tunisia. When the Tunisian military launched a major volunteer recruitment drive in mid-February 2016, the director of its recruitment branch hinted at a similar campaign directed specifically at women, as the first accompanying excerpted article explains.

In March 2016 controversy erupted after Egyptian soldiers were accused of regularly asking women in the Sinai to remove garments at a checkpoint in the flashpoint town of Shaykh Zuwaid. Having women available to conduct physical searches of other women has proven to be strategically smart in areas where gender mixing is restricted by traditional social practices. Saudi Arabia, for instance, has begun incorporating women into its security institutions for this very purpose. The Saudi Border Guard has used women in this capacity since 2013, and, as the second excerpted report explains, Saudi Arabia's Facilities' Security Forces are seeking to follow suit.

Women have been especially active in the Syrian battlefield, including as part of the national military forces. The third accompanying excerpted article describes a female commando battalion in the Syrian Army's Republican Guard. According to the article the unit is made up of 800 women particularly skilled as sharpshooters. Their impact on the battlefield may be inflated for propagandistic reasons, but this should not detract from the fact that women are playing a role in the Syrian Army's surprising resilience. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



“...We have the top sniper in the Republican Guard, her name is Jawaher. ...”

Source: <http://assafir.com/Article/5/341103/AuthorArticle>

Source: هل سيتم تنفيذ خطة تجنيد النساء في تونس؟

“Will the Plan to Recruit Women in Tunisia Be Carried out?” Jawhar FM. 16 February 2016. <http://goo.gl/xECWum>

The plan to recruit Tunisian women mentioned today by an official in the defense ministry is not in fact new, as the recruitment of women was officially announced in December 2002... if this “renewed” project is carried out, it will be done in accordance with article 21 of the Tunisian constitution which stipulates that: “male and female citizens are equal in rights and duties.”



Members of a campaign to recruit women into Egypt's military meeting with officials
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/277549869084782/>

Source: أمن المنشآت يدرس تجنيد وتدريب السعوديات كعسكريات أمن

“Facilities’ Security Studies Recruitment and Training of Saudi Women,” al-Arabiya. 23 February 2016. <http://goo.gl/hyBdeH>

The Facilities’ Security Forces disclosed that they are studying the possibility of recruiting Saudi women in various petroleum, industrial and vital facilities that they protect... the role of the women soldiers will be to conduct security searches of female employees of these facilities and ensure that nothing forbidden is smuggled inside...

Source: كتيبة المغاوير للبنات: قديسات الحرب... وقناصاتها

“‘Female Commandos Battalion’: Saints and Sharpshooters,” al-Arabiya. 31 March 2016. <http://al-akhbar.com/node/255170>

The “secret” of this female battalion, consisting of 800 fighters, came to light after they were targeted twice by fighters from the “Islamic Ajnad al-Sham Union”... [one of the women] described their duties as follows: “We use scopes and cameras to monitor the front lines. If we detect a strange movement we deal with it in accordance with appropriate military measures after consulting with leadership”... The officer in charge of the women’s battalion spoke of their battlefield superiority: “We have the top sniper in the Republican Guard, her name is Jawaher. She has topped all men in terms of marksmanship.” He added: “Women volunteer as sharpshooters due to their ability to be patient and observe and monitor.”

Iranian Army Special Forces in Syria

“... The main goal is to gain actual experience, which cannot be obtained through exercises ...”

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' Quds Force (IRGC-QF) has been the dominant presence in Iran's Syrian campaign. Its strategy has focused on helping the Syrian Arab Army (SyAA) fill its infantry manpower gap by levying and organizing a coalition of volunteer militias, both foreign and domestic. The nature of Iran's involvement, however, appears to be shifting in tandem with Russia's announced withdrawal of military assets from Syria. In early April an Iranian defense official revealed that special forces units from Iran's regular army (the 65th Special Forces Brigade and others) were now operating in Syria.

The Iranian Army's announcement can be interpreted in many ways. The first accompanying excerpted article illustrates the Syrian opposition's viewpoint. The author, who is a defected staff brigadier from the SyAA, contends that Iran is bolstering its military presence to compensate for both the withdrawal of Russian air support and the failure of QF-aligned militias to secure the Syrian battlefield. More broadly, the author argues that with the new deployments Iran is sending Russia the message that it has plenty of military capital left to expend in Syria and will use it to foil any political settlement reached behind its back.

The Iranian perspective, represented by an “anonymous high-level Iranian source” quoted in the second accompanying excerpted article, holds that the deployment of Iranian Army forces is a response to changes in the strategic landscape. Iranian intelligence concluded it would face “unconventional threats along its border,” and the decision to deploy Iranian Army units to Syria stems from the need to better understand how these threats are manifested on the battlefield. In addition to gaining valuable experience, the source adds, these forces will assist their Syrian counterparts in urban combat training, while also keeping an eye toward preparing for an Iranian peacekeeping role in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source: خرائط جديدة في سورية وإيران المشاغب الأكبر

Staff Brigadier Ahmed Rahhal. “New Map in Syria and Iran the Biggest Agitator,” All4Syria. 7 April 2016. <http://all4syria.info/Archive/305186>

The deployment of Iranian ground troops shows that the militias have failed to perform their role of protecting the Assad regime... The other meaning of sending these troops into the battlefield is as a response to Russia, after Russian aircraft have (thus far) been forbidden from supporting the military operations of Assad's militias and their allies in the latest battles with rebels... where Iranian militias and Hizbullah lost many fighters and Assad lost several strategically important military positions...

Iran has turned to sabotage any political solution in Syria and prevent any steps toward this. The announcement that it was sending ground troops from the Iranian Army's 65th Brigade is a message directed more to Russia than to the West, saying that it still has military and material support to provide Assad and that the absence of Russian air support can be compensated with more ground troops and more weapons being brought in via Iranian civilian and military planes to airports in Damascus, Aleppo, Qamishli and Hama.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Republic_of_Iran_Army#/media/File:IRI.Army-Badge.svg

Source: لهذا دخلت قوات النخبة الإيرانية المعركة السورية

“This Is Why Iranian Elite Troops Entered the Syrian Battle,” al-Akhbar. 13 April 2016. <http://al-akhbar.com/node/255999>

“The army has protected Iran's border in a conventional military fashion. It recently realized that these borders will soon face unconventional threats... a decision was made some time ago to move from conventional to asymmetric fighting”... “Iranian leaders see in the elite forces' participation in the Syrian battlefield an important training in confronting the new threats directly on the field. The main goal is to gain actual experience, which cannot be obtained through exercises... The Syrian war has become an urban combat zone, and these forces are able to help the Syrian Army in this regard. A third, long-term goal of this deployment, is to “survey the Syrian landscape in preparation for the post-stability period, when the need for peacekeeping forces rather than fighting forces will be needed. This is a task that may be assigned to the Iranian Army.”

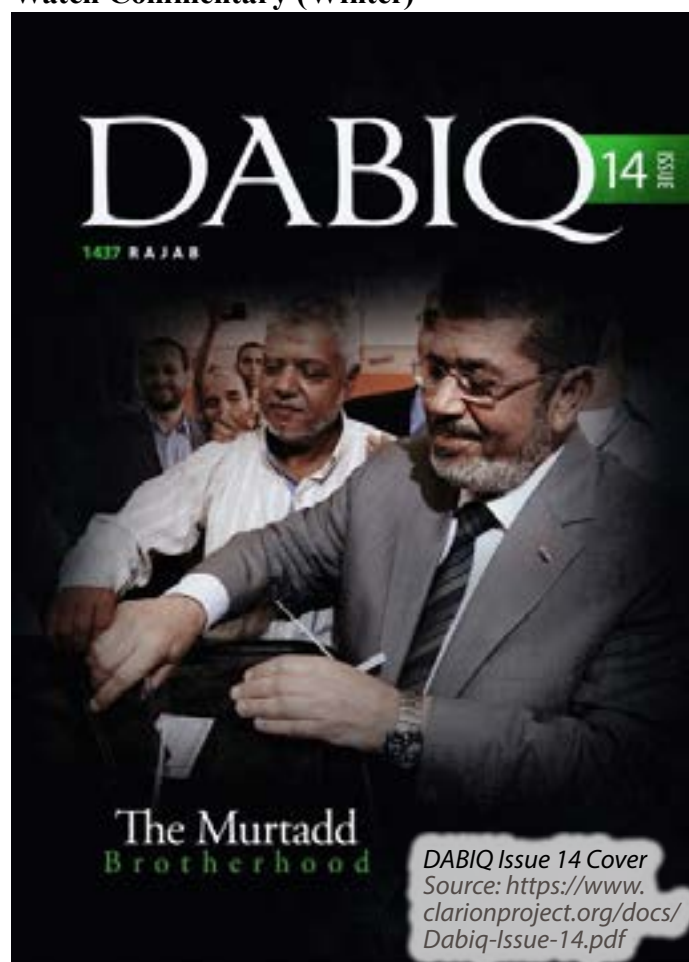
ISIS: Alive and Kicking in the Sinai

OE Watch Commentary: After several months of relative calm, the Wilayat Sinai or “Sinai Province” (SP) of ISIS’s self-proclaimed caliphate has resumed its attacks against the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF). The lull in fighting should not be mistaken for inactivity: over the past six months, according to the first accompanying excerpt, SP has swelled in numbers and begun acting as a state in the sparsely populated areas under its control.

The Egyptian government’s counterinsurgency efforts are premised on the false assumption that it is in control of the narrative. While the Egyptian government has ensured that domestic print and TV media toe the line, it has been unable to engage – much less control – critical reports in foreign media, not to mention SP’s own statements and video. The second excerpted article is illustrative: published in the respected Qatari daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, it gives voice to “tribal sources” who question the credibility of EAF statements on Sinai in no uncertain terms.

SP’s heartland is in North Sinai Province, home to less than 1% of Egypt’s population. Its current expansion strategy banks on recruiting disgruntled Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members in the Nile Valley, where the bulk of the population resides. On the five-year anniversary of Egypt’s January 2011 uprising, SP called on MB supporters to renounce pacifism and join the caliphate. The feature story in the latest issue of ISIS’s online monthly e-zine, *Dabiq*, concludes a pedantic exegesis on why the MB are apostates with a subtle recruitment pitch to disgruntled Brothers: “It should be clear now... why the Brotherhood is a party of extreme apostasy and why it is thus obligatory upon the Muslims to declare the stance of takfīr, barā’ah, animosity, and enmity towards this group and its members...”

It is also obligatory upon every member of the party to abandon it and renounce its kufrī tenets. Likewise, it is obligatory upon all Muslims to perform hijrah to the Khilāfah, which is the only body standing in the way of the Murtadd Brotherhood...” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



“... The military campaigns against the “Salafi-jihadists” in Sinai have had limited results...”

Source: ساسة بوست يستقصي: كيف تشكلت الحاضنة الشعبية لـ«ولاية سيناء»؟
“Sasa Post Investigates: How was Sinai Province’s Popular Base Formed?” *Sasa Post*. 30 March 2016. <http://www.sasapost.com/how-was-formed-popular-front-for-state-of-sinai/>

The military campaigns against the “Salafi-jihadists” in Sinai have had limited results. Evidence of this is the major increase in the number of militants, which according to an anonymous source went from no more than 300 people six months ago to around 3,000 now. All six centers in North Sinai are in the sights of the group’s line of fire... “These groups have replaced the state in terms of providing services, security and protecting property...”

Source: أين تذهب جثث مسلحي “ولاية سيناء” بعد قتلهم؟
“Where Do the Bodies of ‘Sinai Province’ Fighters Go After They Are Killed?” *Al-Araby al-Jadid*. 1 April 2016. <https://goo.gl/eR3Dob>

The sources asked: “Where are the bodies of those the army claims to kill?” They doubted the Egyptian authorities’ narrative, affirming that the number of killed by the government was being greatly inflated... The sources noted that the violent aerial campaign can’t compete with “Sinai Province,” whose fighters find hiding places in barren mountainous regions, where they are hard to track... This is not the first time the Egyptian Army has claimed to kill a large number of gunmen without having any bodies to prove it, which raises several question marks and leaves plenty of room for doubt.

Source: “The Murtadd Brotherhood,” *Dabiq*, Issue 14. 13 April 2016. <https://www.clarionproject.org/docs/Dabiq-Issue-14.pdf>

“It should be clear now... why the Brotherhood is a party of extreme apostasy and why it is thus obligatory upon the Muslims to declare the stance of takfīr, barā’ah, animosity, and enmity towards this group and its members... It is also obligatory upon every member of the party to abandon it and renounce its kufrī tenets. Likewise, it is obligatory upon all Muslims to perform hijrah to the Khilāfah, which is the only body standing in the way of the Murtadd Brotherhood...”



The Chibok Girls: 2 Years Later

OE Watch Commentary: 14-15 April marked the two-year anniversary of the kidnapping the so-called “Chibok Girls,” a group of some 276 school-aged girls abducted by Boko Haram in the village of Chibok, in Borno state. The incident gained Boko Haram global infamy, with a viral internet campaign called “Bring Back Our Girls” receiving global support. Yet, two years after the capture the vast majority of the girls have yet to be located, despite repeated promises by the Nigerian government and military that they know their whereabouts. Thus, two years on, it bears investigating just how Nigerians from all points of view understand the capture of the Chibok Girls in the context of Nigeria’s civil-military relationship.

As the first excerpted article details, average Nigerians seem to be at a loss for just how little the Nigerian military seems to have been able to accomplish. From a severely slow initial response by former President Goodluck Jonathan, to the calls by his wife that the girls had actually not been abducted, to the continued cycles of misinformation perpetrated by the government and military, to ridicule of the parents seeking to get back their girls, to a disappointing response from new president Muhammadu Buhari, who had campaigned on his ability to get them back, the author sums up much of Nigerian civil society’s reactions.

As the second article relays, for his part, former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo has been one of the few members - past or present - of the Nigerian government who has been deeply pessimistic about the return of the girls. As he has been quoted as saying in various iterations: “We will never be able to get those girls again. And the story of those girls will go on for the next 30 years... Some of them will come out when they are adults or they will be sent back when they are pregnant by those who have captured them. If anyone is thinking of being able to get those girls released intact, he must be day dreaming.” Indeed, in a government culture full of promises that come and go, Obasanjo provides a more realistic perspective that has long been absent from conversations about the girls.

Finally, the last accompanying excerpted article details the ways in which Boko Haram itself seems to be marking the two-year anniversary of the kidnapping: by releasing a video showing some members of the group still alive. However, many in and out of the military doubt the veracity of the video, and instead believe it to be a diversionary tactic by Boko Haram to remind Nigerians just how impotent the government actually is. Despite the proliferation of Boko Haram attacks and atrocities committed since 2009, the capture and disappearance of the Chibok Girls continues to serve as a microcosm of the group’s reign of terror and the Nigerian government’s often-insufficient means to address it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

“We will never be able to get those girls again. And the story of those girls will go on for the next 30 years”

Source: Odunga, Yomi. 2016. “Opinion: Chibok Girls; for How Long Will We Live with This Shame?” *YNaija* (Lagos, Nigeria). April 16. <http://ynaija.com/yomi-odunuga-chibok-girls-our-shame/>.

...Hardly had we buried the mangled body bags of the Nyanya bomb blast when these blood-sucking terrorists hit the Girls Senior Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State on April 14, 2014. In what was reported to be a six-hour operation, they herded over 200 young girls into trucks and carted them away. They ruthlessly crushed the sole resistance on their way – a lone soldier – and soullessly went away with the bounty of a senseless attack.

For the parents, it has been two years of sorrow, tears and blood. In contrast, a community of pessimists sees the abduction story as nothing but a sham. They said it was a packaged political propaganda aimed at ridiculing and ousting the then government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. The erstwhile President and Commander in chief of Nigeria’s armed forces sang danced and vibrated political notes at a rally in Kano while the affected parents and family members were wailing, praying and hoping that it was just one bad dream that would soon fizzle out. Well, it never was. The Chibok girls are still missing as those who still care to give a thought about them hold on to hope, in spite of the poignant hopelessness that dampens the spirit of millions who live very far away from Chibok,,

.... Abuja may continue to delude itself with its dud promissory notes of ‘ensuring that terrorists are made to pay’ for their odious monstrosities. Even when such empty promises are being repeated ad infinitum, it does not obliterate the fact that this country is sick – so sick that it requires the best expertise in the Intensive Care Unit for it to wobble through this harvest of doom after gloom.....

The current government took over when it was already a year plus of the abduction but if after seven months of the new government, we met with the President and the response to us was that no credible intelligence, for whatever that meant it just didn’t come out the right way...

(continued)

Continued: The Chibok Girls: 2 Years Later

Source: Sotubo, 'Jola. 2016. "Obasanjo: 'Anyone Saying Chibok Girls Will Return Is Telling Lies,' Ex-President Says." *The Pulse (Lagos, Nigeria)* <http://pulse.ng/local/obasanjo-anyone-saying-chibok-girls-will-return-is-telling-lies-ex-president-says-id4660647.html>.

Former President, Olusegun Obasanjo has said that the abducted Chibok girls might never return. Obasanjo made the comment on Friday, February 5, 2016, while speaking at an event organized by the Staff Club of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Premium Times reports....

"Anyone saying they (Chibok girls) will return is telling lies, maybe some of them will return to tell their story," he added.

"We will never be able to get those girls again. And the story of those girls will go on for the next 30 years," he said. "Some of them will come out when they are adults or they will be sent back when they are pregnant by those who have captured them. If anyone is thinking of being able to get those girls released intact, he must be day dreaming," he added.

President Muhammadu Buhari had recently said, during a trip to France, that his government would rescue the missing girls alive...

Source: Tsokar, Karls et al. 2016. "Government Cautious over 'Proof of Life' Chibok Girls Video, Sends Delegation to Chibok." *The Guardian (Lagos, Nigeria)*. 15 April. <http://guardian.ng/news/government-cautious-over-proof-of-life-chibok-girls-video-sends-delegation-to-chibok/>.

The Federal Government yesterday said it was studying a "proof of life" video showing 15 of the more than 200 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram, as parents and their supporters marked the second anniversary of the abduction.

Meanwhile, three ministers yesterday led a high-powered Federal Government delegation to Chibok town to commemorate two years anniversary of the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Government Girls Secondary School (GGSS) by Boko Haram insurgents...

Three mothers and a classmate of the 219 schoolgirls still missing confirmed the identities of the girls in the images broadcast on Wednesday night.

A senior government source told Agence France Press (AFP) it had received the video, which shows the girls in black hijabs, stating their names, that they were abducted from Chibok and saying they were "all well".

The video was said to have been shot on December 25 last year.

But the source said they were keen to avoid the problems encountered by the previous administration, which prematurely announced talks with Boko Haram elements and even a ceasefire....



April 15th marked the two year anniversary of the kidnap of the "Chibok Girls" in Nigeria by the Islamist group Boko Haram. The girls' abduction has come to serve as a microcosm of the struggles that Nigeria faces in its counterterrorism efforts.

Source: <http://lensng.com/>

Nigerian Army Being Investigated by ICC

OE Watch Commentary: It was recently announced that the International Criminal Court (ICC) is coming to Nigeria to investigate the possible perpetration of crimes against humanity. While observers might be unsurprised to learn that six of the eight crimes that the ICC will investigate relate to alleged atrocities perpetrated by Boko Haram, perhaps more unexpectedly, the Nigerian Army itself will be under investigation - with two cases under scrutiny - as per the first accompanying excerpted article.

While the cases against Boko Haram are to be expected, the ICC's impending investigation of the Nigerian Army itself comes as somewhat of a surprise. On one hand, the army has staunch supporters in the country, who vaunt the work that it is doing in the service of ending the reign of terror of Boko Haram, especially given the army's somewhat limited resources and formidable adversary. On the other hand, however, groups around the country - especially those in Islamic north, Boko Haram's primary area of operation - have long asserted that the Nigerian Army's draconian tactics to stop Boko Haram have come at the cost of the respect of human rights in the region. Claims against the Nigerian military include its tendency for extrajudicial detention, torture, and killings, as well as rape and theft. As per the second excerpted article, Islamic-centered human rights groups in Nigeria and London have filed the complaint against the Nigerian Army, particularly for crimes that they allege that the military committed in December 2015. For its part, Amnesty International has corroborated to some extent these claims: to that end, it released a critical report of the Nigerian Army in 2015, claiming that since 2011 some 1200 citizens have been killed unlawfully by the Nigerian military, with an estimated 7000 dying while in military detentions.

For its part, the Nigerian government has vehemently denied all allegations contained in the complaints filed to the ICC, asserting that the military upholds the highest possible standards for human rights and respects international standards for rules of engagement. Yet, rather than backlashing against the news of the ICC investigations, president Muhammadu Buhari has been said to have been compliant, having promised in his 2015 campaign for the presidency to take seriously complaints by Nigerians of poor behavior by the Nigerian Armed Forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

Source: "ICC Commences Investigation of Nigerian Army, Boko Haram for Human Rights Abuses." 2016. *Premium Times Nigeria (Lagos, Nigeria)*. April 14. <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/201774-icc-commences-investigation-nigerian-army-boko-haram-human-rights-abuses.html>.

The International Criminal Court, ICC, has started the process of investigating human rights abuses by the Nigerian military. The Netherlands-based court will also investigate abuses by Boko Haram, the terror group whose activities have caused the death of about 20,000 people in Nigeria since 2009.

The military has been accused of illegal killings and incarceration by local and international groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

However, on Wednesday, the Nigerian government expressed commitment to upholding the highest standards of human rights in the conduct of all international affairs including counter insurgency operations in the country....

Mr. Malami said that the Nigerian Army has conducted its operations in the North East region of the country in a highly professional manner, imbibing best practices in the areas of international human rights.

He also said that he was aware of the eight case files opened against Nigeria by the ICC which the prosecutor intended to investigate in her next stage of assessment of the Nigeria situation.

According to him, six of the alleged cases were committed by the Boko Haram sect while the remaining two are by the Nigerian Armed Forces.

The minister insisted that Nigeria had the prerogative rights in handling the alleged crimes referred to in the prosecutor's 2015 report of activities in the country.

"Let me reiterate that Nigeria retains the sovereign capacity to investigate and punish the alleged crimes referred to in the report and will therefore continue present efforts in the above direction."

He further added that the government was committed to ensuring that troops were guided by the rules of engagement, promising that any infractions would be severely dealt with. He solicited the support and understanding of ICC and the international community especially in regards to the conduct of the affairs of the Nigerian Armed Forces....



A Shiite citizen in Zaria, Nigeria, clashes with the Nigerian army. The ICC has announced that it will begin investigating complaints about crimes of humanity perpetrated both by Boko Haram, as well as the Nigerian army.
Source: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/03/imn-drags-nigeria-army-icc-genocide/>

(continued)

Continued: Nigerian Army Being Investigated by ICC

Source: Biniyat, Luka. 2016. "IMN Drags Nigeria Army to ICC for Genocide." *Vanguard News (Lagos, Nigeria)*. March 22. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/03/imn-drags-nigeria-army-icc-genocide/>.

The Islamic Movement of Nigeria, IMN, (Nigerian Shiite) has dragged the Nigerian Army to the International Criminal Court of justice, ICC, over allegation of genocide. The Spokesman of the IMN, Ibrahim Musa made this known at a briefing to mark the 100th day of the clash between the Islamic sect and the Nigeria Army in Zaria last year. Spokesman of the IMN, Ibrahim Musa said the case was filed on behalf of the IMN by the Islamic Human Right Commission, IHRC, Commission based in London. He quoted the IHRC as writing the ICC as thus: "The crimes committed between December 12th and 14th, 2015 in Zaria, Kaduna State, by the Nigerian army amount to crimes against humanity. The crimes committed by the Nigerian army meet all the necessary legal requirements to warrant a preliminary investigation by the ICC prosecutor."

New Waves of Violence in Ethiopia

OE Watch Commentary: Despite its presence in a relatively dangerous region, Ethiopia itself has, in general, been free from widespread violence in recent years. However, two new rounds of violence have wracked the country. The first is the ongoing clashes between members of the Oromo ethnic group and the federal government of Ethiopia, the former having strongly decried plans by the latter to expand the footprint of the federal capital into its lands. While clashes between the government and the Oromo - who comprise approximately one-third of Ethiopia's 95 million population - have generally died down after policymakers rescinded the plan, a new front of violence has come to wrack the country.

As the story below relays, on 15 April thousands of individuals wearing the uniforms of the South Sudanese military entered ten villages in the remote Gambella region of Ethiopia, stealing some 2000 cattle and killing an initially estimated 142 civilians. Additionally, dozens of children were said to have been kidnapped, eerily echoing the tactics employed by Boko Haram in relation to the abduction of the so-called "Chibok Girls." Yet, as time has progressed, updated figures at the time of this writing suggest that some 204 have been killed, with an estimated 108 children abducted. As the excerpted article details, cross-border raids are not uncommon, though this one was far more severe than other iterations, particularly for the large-scale death and destruction. The South Sudanese government has disavowed its participation in the attacks, while the Ethiopian government has let it be known - though with typical secrecy - that it is addressing the attacks dutifully, including killing some 60 members of the South Sudanese cattle raiders soon after they entered. Moreover, Ethiopia and Sudan are in talks to potentially collaborate in a joint force to address the raids. In short, the Ethiopian state is increasingly facing new challenges to its authority - through civil society and informal rebel groups - that will likely continue into the future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

Source: Addis Standard. 2016. "Ethiopia: More Than 200 Killed in Gambella After Attacks By 'Heavily Armed Group.'" 16 April. *Addis Standard (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)*. 2016. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201604170005.html>.

Heavily armed grouped attacked the Jakawa area in Gambella Regional State Friday and claimed the lives of 142 civilians.

As of now, there is no information linking the armed group with any of the oppositions or neighboring South Sudan, reports the state affiliated Fana Broadcasting Corporation.

However according to Sudan Tribune the "massive and coordinated" attack was carried out by combined military and armed Mulre civilians from South Sudan's Boma State, a claim confirmed by Getachew Reda, Minister of the Ministry of Government Communication Affairs.

Thousands of heavily armed men, mostly in South Sudanese military uniform crossed the Ethiopian border and attacked 10 villages inhabited by the Nuer ethnic group according reports the Tribune. Most of those feared dead are women and children.

Government Communication Affairs Office states that the Ethiopian National Defense Force(ENDF) is responding by "taking measures on the perpetrators," according to Fana BC, which might bring the death toll higher.

Eyewitnesses who talked to the Sudan Tribune claimed that more than 50 Mulre attackers were killed. Fana BC puts the number of Mulre attacker killed by ENDF at 60, a number confirmed by Getachew.

Speaking to Addis Standard, Getachew states that in addition to the killings, 32 children have been abducted. Even though the perpetrators were in South Sudanese military uniform, the South Sudanese government has disassociates itself from the attackers according to Getachew.

"We are currently under discussions with the South Sudanese government and if necessary we might as well take joint military actions across the border against the perpetrators," he says.

Chibok Kidnapping Investigations Show Response Gaps

“After the Chibok abduction of over 200 schoolgirls in April 2014, it took 19 days for me to receive a call from the Presidency.”

OE Watch Commentary: Boko Haram’s kidnapping of more than 250 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria in April 2014 was a disaster from many angles, including human rights, protection of civilians and emergency response. Two years later, none of the girls have been found (only a few dozen escaped within the first weeks). As the accompanying excerpted article in Nigeria’s *Premium Times* on 2 April shows, the key decision-makers and political figures in Nigeria are now becoming publicly accountable for what happened in April 2014. Their statements show both confusion and lack of coordination in the government, but there has not been significant improvement on the situation since then, as kidnappings continue to occur.

The article focuses on Kashim Shettima, Governor of Borno State, who now admits that he did not speak with then president Goodluck Jonathan until 19 days after the Chibok kidnapping. Shettima says he assumed the president was receiving briefings from advisors and that the protocol was for the president to reach out to him and not the other way around. He also explains that the government’s trigger to respond to the kidnapping was when in May 2014 U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama held up a sign saying “Bring Back Our Girls,” which was widely shared on social media in Nigeria and internationally. By then, however, it was evidently too late for Nigeria to spring into action and recover the girls.

The article reveals the ineffectiveness of Nigeria’s emergency response in 2014. Now that a new administration has been in office since 2015, details about what happened during the Chibok kidnapping are coming to light. Despite this, Boko Haram continues to kidnap youths, particularly girls, in northeastern Nigeria. Thus, whatever lessons are being learned from reviewing the country’s setbacks in 2014 are still yet to be fully addressed and incorporated into a new emergency response strategy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



As seen in the adjacent image, the anguish of the parents of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls was exacerbated by the Nigerian government’s slow and ineffective response to the crisis.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/bring-back-our-girls-continues-to-demand-return-of-chibok-girls/3224347.html>

Source: “Why I Didn’t Call Jonathan after Chibok Girls Were Abducted by Boko Haram — Borno Governor, Shettima,” *Premium Times*, 2 April 2016.

Why I didn’t call Jonathan after Chibok girls were abducted by Boko Haram — Borno governor, Shettima

Governor Kashim Shettima of Borno State has said he did not call former President Goodluck Jonathan to brief him after Boko Haram abducted over 200 school girls from Chibok because he knew that security agencies must have briefed the president of the development the day it happened. The governor had said recently that Mr. Jonathan took 19 days to telephone him to ask about the abduction. Analysts have accused the governor of not also taking the security of his state serious enough to have to wait for the president to call, and not contact him immediately.

On allegations that he was complicit in the abduction of the girls because he ordered officials to proceed with the exams in defiance of all security warnings, Mr. Shettima dismissed the allegation as “malicious”. “The issue of saying there were reports against holding [the exams] in the Chibok School was just a propaganda orchestrated by actors under the Jonathan administration in order to shift blame on Borno State Government and if you cast your mind back, you would understand that the whole propaganda only began in May, 2014, when wife of President Barack Obama was shown participating in the ‘Bring Back Our Girls’ global protest which made the Jonathan Presidency to come under criticism from the international community.

After Setbacks, Mali Scores a Victory against Ansar Dine

“[Suleiman Keita’s] arrest in the Segou region (southern Mali) was made possible, especially thanks to the arrest of one of his allies in the last few months in central Mali.”

OE Watch Commentary: Three years after the French-led military intervention in northern Mali in 2013 ousted Al-Qaeda affiliates and allies from towns they controlled, the situation in Mali is far from stable. There are still frequent attacks on UN and Malian forces in the country, while al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has also struck high-profile international targets not only in Bamako (Mali’s capital), but also in Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast since late 2015. Despite this, as the accompanying excerpted French-language article from *Jeune Afrique* on 31 March shows, there may be reason for optimism about Mali’s counterinsurgency operations.

The article discusses how Malian intelligence officers were able to follow a trail of arrests of mid-level militants in Mali and other countries in West Africa to Suleiman Keita, the leader of Ansar Dine’s operations in southern Mali. As an ally of AQIM, Ansar Dine has been instrumental in recruiting among southern Malian ethnic groups and tribes, such as the Fulanis, to extend AQIM’s reach from the desert into the greener southern part of the country. Thus, the arrest of Keita near the Mauritanian border could disrupt the expansion of AQIM activities in southern Mali and the border regions with countries such as Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

Nonetheless, Keita’s movements before his arrests show the extent of Ansar Dine’s operational range. He had reportedly been in Guinea and Sierra Leone and was planning on heading to northern Mali to meet with overall Ansar Dine leader Ag Ghaly. Keita’s son, who doubles as his assistant, had also been arrested in Ivory Coast. The article does not mention whether Mali received support in locating Keita from any of the other security forces in West Africa, but Keita’s movements make clear that such cooperation is needed, as AQIM and Ansar Dine operatives travel throughout the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**



As seen in the adjacent image, Ansar Dine controlled parts of northern Mali in 2012 and 2013 and remains active in carrying out terrorist attacks today, including in southern Mali.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/ap-7-suspected-in-mali-attacks-arrest-in-ivory-coast/2943728.html>

Source: “Les renseignements maliens annoncent avoir arrêté le chef d’Ansar Eddine Sud, Souleymane Keïta” [Malian intelligence services announced Thursday the arrest of the leader of Ansar Eddine South, Souleymane Keita], *Jeune Afrique*, 31 March 2016

Les renseignements maliens annoncent avoir arrêté le chef d’Ansar Eddine Sud, Souleymane Keïta

Malian intelligence services announced the arrest of the leader of Ansar Dina in southern Mali, Suleiman Keita, near the Mauritanian border. He was transferred to Bamako. Suleiman Keita is the head of the katiba (combat unit) Khalid Ibn Walid, one of the franchises of Ansar Dine in southern Mali. His arrest in the Segou region (southern Mali) was made possible, especially thanks to the arrest of one of his allies in the last few months in central Mali, according to the security services. According to this source, Suleiman Keita was preparing to return Timbuktu in the north to meet Ag Ghaly, leader of the Islamist group Ansar Dine in Kidal.

The Malian authorities accuse Ansar Dine of involvement in attacks against towns in southern and central Mali and Bamako in 2015. After the attacks, Suleiman Keita had fled to Guinea. In June, he was reported in Sierra Leone. His right arm man, Amadou Niangadou (who is also his son) was arrested in Ivory Coast after the battle in the forest of Sama, and transferred to Mali on 19 August 2015. In early September, Ivorian and Malian security sources had announced the arrest of seven jihadists in Ivory Coast, all from southern Mali.

A Consequence of Forum of Sao Paulo Success

“The Latin American leftist mafia is now disrobed in front of international public opinion.”

OE Watch Commentary: From facts surfacing in the past couple of years from, among others, investigations in Brazil and Argentina, the “Panama Papers,” US federal investigations, and WikiLeaks, many regional observers have noted that there seems to be one astounding correlation between organizations (mostly political parties that had risen to government dominance in their respective countries) affiliated with the Forum of Sao Paulo and massive embezzlements. The amounts of money in secret foreign accounts, in money laundering operations and shady international deals is astounding. It appears that the Latin American far left reached back to consider the comparative advantages of the national socialist model and decided to embrace its crony capitalism with a vengeance. One of the titles referenced here is ‘Corruption Devours the Forum of Sao Paulo,’ but, while the Forum of Sao Paulo might be stained by the corruption, it is the economies of member countries that have been devoured. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Alfredo Michelena, “La corrupción devora al Foro de Sao Pablo” (Corruption devours the Forum of Sao Paulo), *El Nuevo País*, Caracas, 24 March 2016, <http://lasarmasdecoronel.blogspot.com/2016/03/la-izquierda-ladrona-de-america-latina.html>

“The Latin American leftist mafia is now disrobed in front of international public opinion: Hugo Chávez, Nicolás Maduro, Lula da Silva, Cristina Kirchner, Daniel Ortega, Evo Morales and their respective gangs are denounced, with abundant data, for immense corruption...”

Source: Gustavo Coronel, “La izquierda ladrona de América Latina” (The thieving left of Latin America), *Las Armas de Coronel*, 29 March 2016, <http://lasarmasdecoronel.blogspot.com/2016/03/la-izquierda-ladrona-de-america-latina.html>

“And it is not that it is an evil that belongs to them alone, as it appears intrinsic to human nature and all societies, but they have presented themselves as the defenders of the poor and the fiercest fighters against that corrosive ill. In our case the amounts robbed are phantasmagorical. Vice-ministers are known to risen from a poor barrio and ended up with thousands of millions of dollars in Andorra Banks.”

A Communist Conspiracy!

OE Watch Commentary: From Eduardo Mackenzie, a Paris-based Colombian journalist widely regarded as the foremost expert on the FARC (at least outside of the FARC itself and Colombian intelligence), comes a report on a recent meeting in Bogota. A full array of far-left organizations, mostly of Marxist-Leninist origin and universally anti-American, came together to coordinate messaging and activities in favor of the FARC and the Army of National Liberation (ELN) in those organizations’ efforts to gain political power through negotiated concessions from the government of Colombia.

Mackenzie wonders aloud about how such a meeting was allowed to occur more-or-less openly in Bogota. He reports that the attendees coursed through a panoply of positions to include total support for the Maduro regime in Venezuela, categorizing Dilma Rousseff’s problems in Brazil as an attempt at a coup by the reactionary right, and a long etcetera -- much of it couched in terms reminiscent of 1930s Stalinism. In short, the group asserted the entire gamut of radical Marxist-Leninist goals and positions on a single plate. The expansive suggestion seems to be that open support of communism is about to go back in style. If one were looking for that seminal smoke-filled confab of communist agents plotting against the United States, its interests and allies, this might be as close as it gets as far as public reports go. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“The government [Santos Administration] must yield to the demands of the FARC in order to sign the agreement...”

Source: Eduardo Mackenzie, “Curiosa reunión semi secreta en Bogotá” (Curious semi-secret meeting in Bogota), *TopAdlesse*, 15 April 2016, <http://www.top.adlesse.com/en/i/.../curiosa-reunion-semi-secreta-en-bogota>

“The dozen foreign activists who came to lay out the platform of the PD [Democratic Pole -- a leftist Colombian political party aggrupation] were people from the Communist Party of Cuba and the National Sandinista Liberation Front from Nicaragua... Also there were representatives of the Farabundo Martí Front in El Salvador, and of the Brazilian PT [Workers Party], the PRD [Party of the Democratic Revolution] from Mexico, of the Country’s Alliance of Ecuador and even SORTU, the legal front group of the ETA [Spanish]...The Communist Party of Colombia and its variants, the Socialist Coordinator and the Progressivist Movement, were also hosts... Romenio Pereira was the representative of the FSP [Forum of Sao Paulo] in the Bogota seminar....they packaged it thusly: The Government [Santos Administration] must yield t the demands of the FARC in order to sign the agreement...”

Colombian Convocation Tests

OE Watch Commentary: The ability to convoke crowds and marches using organizational techniques that incorporate social media, broadcast media and traditional organizing forms has now become a major test of influence. Colombians would have to be considered leaders in this phenomenon, with the full field of political and ideological interests able to motivate crowds. In Colombia, at least in the last decade or so, the surprise has been the convocational power of organizers unfriendly to the radical left.

On 2 April huge peaceful marches were staged to protest against the FARC and against the current Colombian government administration with whom the FARC has been holding negotiations in Cuba. The before, during, and after stages of the convocation process are now revealed as distinct organizational efforts, each with unique opportunities for advantage. Organizing large rallies and marches has to be done in such a way as to reach a large audience of potential participants, but simultaneously provide some secrecy and deception in order to avoid countermeasures. A march or meeting must itself be large but also able to contain counter demonstrations and diversionary news-making. Then the reporting of a convocation has to make the size and duration of the convocation, as well as the focus of the message, appear favorable to audiences beyond those who directly experience the convocation.

According to regional observers, the 2 April anti-government Colombian assemblage was expertly organized, with the aggrupations themselves substantial and well administered. The aftermath, especially among official and broadcast media, however, may have been more of a victory for the Santos administration, which was able to minimize the image of the event to some degree. Nevertheless, it was again made apparent to many Colombians that opposition to the FARC and to government concessions to that organization are widely disfavored by a considerable, motivated segment of the society. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“The march ‘No more Santos, No more FARC’, to give it a name, was a complete success.”

Source: Alfonso Monsalve Solórzano, “La marcha que marchó” (The march that marched), *Periódico Debate*, 10 April 2016, <http://periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/11361-la-marcha-que-marcho>

“The march ‘No more Santos, No more FARC’, to give it a name, was a complete success. Hundreds of thousands of Colombians inside and outside the country went out to protest against the administration and the way in which they are conducting the negotiations in Cuba...The information of the results of the day’s events were minimized by the same media, which, like Radio Caracol, dared to assert, against all evidence, that in Medellín 500 hundred persons marched at the moment when more than 150,000 did...But the power of these media and the infiltration of the social networks were unable to detain the massive repudiation by Colombians, that left a clear message to [Colombian President] Santos, to his administration and to his associates in that guerrilla group that is co-governing the country, that the citizens are fed up not only with the ‘dialogs’ but with the polarization of justice system, ...and a long etcetera.”

Land Restitution Fraud?

“...the FARC and ELN guerrillas are exploiting land claimants.”

OE Watch Commentary: Some Colombian journalists are claiming that the government of Colombia has been downplaying, if not outright hiding what some legislators and many Colombian citizens have been decrying for some time -- that the government’s flagship land restitution program is not popular among many rural citizens and might be a huge fraud favoring the leaders of the FARC. See also, “Crosscurrents in Colombia’s Irregular War” in the August 2015 OE Watch and “A Real Property Note from the Colombian War” in the February 2016 OE Watch. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Editor, “Restitución de Tierras: imágenes que el Gobierno pretende censurar” (Land Restitution: images that the Government ties to censor), *Colombian News*, 7 April 2016, <http://periodicodebate.com/index.php/nacion/politica/item/11370-cnews-2016-04-13>

“During a debate in the House of Representatives on the 15th of September 2015, the representative of the opposition, María Fernanda Cabal explained that the FARC and ELN guerrillas are exploiting land claimants [in the reconciliation program]. Using pressure and threats, the guerrillas oblige thousands of campesinos to pass themselves off as ‘victims of the conflict’ so that official organizations deliver properties to them, which have to pass through the hands of the armed organizations. The parliamentarian of the Democratic Center party denounced that, ‘Those groups create movements for the recuperation of lands and conduct hundreds of forced occupations throughout the national territory under a policy of usurpation of properties and artificial populating.’”

Woman Guerrilla Leader

OE Watch Commentary: Here we have who is likely to become a legend among female guerrillas, at least in this hemisphere, and deservedly so. Comandante Paula, or Gladys Blanco, is a remarkable woman if half the stories about her are true -- and most are well documented.

Comandante Paula is responsible for numerous violent crimes against people and property. She has, however, carved out her own impunity and that of many followers within what is Colombia's runner-up guerrilla organization, the Army of National Liberation (ELN). She has been caught and escaped from prison twice, had kids, and led diplomatic missions for the ELN, and now shows up in Caracas to join the team of ELN peace negotiators. The team in which she will play be a leading role might extract concessions from the Colombian government just as has the larger FARC. In any case, Comandante Paula is doing better than just surviving. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...Gladys Teresa Blanco Torres, the oldest, most feared and brazen female guerilla in the country.”

Source: Investigative Unit, “La historia de la jefa del Eln que se apareció en Caracas” (The history of the ELN *jefa* who showed up in Caracas), *El Tiempo*, 10 April 2016, <http://www.eltiempo.com/politica/proceso-de-paz/historia-de-alias-paula-guerrillera-del-eln/16559600>

“Although later it was said we were dealing with Omaira Elena Vásquez or ‘Commander Paula’, her real name is Gladys Teresa Blanco Torres, the oldest, most feared and brazen female guerilla in the country. ‘She studied engineering in the 70s at the Industrial University of Santander (UIS) and at 18 joined the clandestine structures of the ELN [Army of National Liberation] in Bucaramanga. At that time, nobody recognized her face because she always came to the meetings wearing a head mask....In fact, she is the only woman to have risen to the level of the national directorate of the ELN (Dinal), the ante-room for ascendancy to the central command (Coce), the top tier of that group...’Although she is 63 years old - and is a mother of two children over 30 and a grandmother - when she goes into the countryside she still wears camouflage and carries a rifle...”



A Look at Megacities in Latin America

OE Watch Commentary: Urban military operations pose unique challenges to Army forces, as they involve civilians, constantly changing conditions, and unique obstacles not commonly seen on the traditional open battlefield. Still, they are nothing new, as US forces have been exposed to this type of environment on multiple occasions (think Hue and Baghdad). What has changed is that urban centers are growing in size and in some cases are being classified as “megacities,” which by definition are cities with over 10 million inhabitants. These same cities commonly serve as centers of economic, political and social activity and pose special threats to US military forces, especially if the megacity is located in a third-world country, as infrastructure and chaotic urban growth hinder movement and capabilities.

At present, megacity studies in terms of military relevance do not focus heavily on Latin America, as the US is not currently involved in any major military operations south of the border. However, this region is home to four megacities: Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires. Furthermore, according to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Lima and Bogota are on a fast track to achieving megacity status within the next decade. In looking at these cities, future studies from a military perspective should focus on mass migration from rural to urban areas, slums, widespread insecurity, limited infrastructure, poor resource allocation, governmental corruption, and economic disparity, as these factors have the potential to adversely affect humanitarian and military missions in the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “Megacity Slums and Urban Insecurity.” *ISN*. Accessed from <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=175893>

“Megacity slum vulnerabilities contribute to the world’s most significant security challenges, including “anarchy, governmental collapse, ethnic rivalry, cultural grievances, religious-ideological extremism, environmental degradation, natural resource depletion, competition for economic resources, drug trafficking, alliances between narco-traffickers and terrorists, the proliferation of ‘inhuman weapons’ and the spread of infectious diseases.”

Source: “Latinoamerica es la area mas urbanizada del mundo (Latin America is the Most Urbanized Area in the World).” *El Universal*. Accessed from <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/865540.html>

Mass migration from rural to urban areas means 80 percent of Latin America’s population of around 600 million now live in cities -- a higher number than in any other region in the world. Currently, some 113 million people in Latin America -- or nearly one in five people -- live in sprawling slums which are fueling inequality and social exclusion.

Source: “Mega-Cities & Infrastructure in Latin America: What Its People Think.” *IDB*. Accessed from <https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/6415/MegacitiesSurvey.pdf?sequence=3>

Open source information collected as part of an IDB study indicates that current concerns within Latin America’s megacities include safety, transparency, transport, electricity, pollution, and water availability, amongst others. This source further indicated that within Latin America, urbanization rates are the highest in the world and is evidenced by the fact that the urban population in this region accounts for 82% of the total population. This number is expected to rise to 90% by 2050 according to the IDB.

Source: “El repunte de la violencia en las favelas inquieta a Río (Violence Plagues Favelas in Rio).” *El Pais*. Accessed from http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/04/10/actualidad/1428629383_051422.html

“In the Rio metropolitan area, one-third of the cities’ 7 million inhabitants live in more than 800 favelas. Here, they lack basic sanitation facilities, schools, and health centers.”

Source: “How Gangster Warlords Came to Rule Latin America’s Slums.” *Insight Crime*. Accessed from <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/how-gangster-warlords-dominate-latin-america-slums>



Rio’s Santa Teresa neighborhood.
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/59/1_rio_de_janeiro_slum_2010.JPG

Slums in Latin America are physical spaces with hard boundaries, entrances and exits that take you into a world that suffers marginalization and contrasts to the society outside. Inside they can be overwhelming, the lives and problems of thousands on top of each other and entwined. And they can be exciting, the explosive growth of young people with an insatiable energy. They are the source of cutting-edge culture that sets trends in global music and fashion; the scene of raging gun battles; the home to children who have become seasoned murderers; and the setting for people showing warmth, compassion, and perseverance. Day after day.

Perceived Security Concerns in Mexico Fuel Purchase of Armored Vehicles by the Country's Elite

OE Watch Commentary: In the earliest years of Mexico's raging drug war, relocation to less violent regions of the country resulted in mass migration movements. The only variance to this phenomenon was that the wealthiest families were sent abroad to ensure the absolute safety of loved ones. Today, families are still relocating because of violence and kidnapping threats, but Mexico's most affluent families and politicians are fueling a new personal safety trend in the form of armored vehicles. As reported by *El País*, the sale of bulletproof vehicles in Mexico rose 10% in the last two years, with a growing demand from the private sector. The highest overall sales were noted in Monterrey (Mexico's industrial epicenter) and the Federal District, where common street cars can be retrofitted into certifiable armored vehicles for \$25,000-\$55,000.

Ballistics Group CEO Fernando Echeverri indicated that armored cars are indeed effective, as the work done by his company has thwarted attempted murders and kidnappings on multiple occasions in Mexico. Apart from being an interesting phenomenon, the perceived necessity of armored vehicles raises at least two separate but equally important points. First, it highlights that insecurity concerns remain, despite the fact that the Mexican government is reporting the lowest levels of violence since the end of the Calderon administration. Second, it reiterates the idea that safety is a novelty that can be purchased only by the most elite, when in essence it should be available to all citizens. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: "El negocio de detener las balas crece en México (Bullet Deterring Businesses Thrive in Mexico)." *El País*. Accessed from http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2016/02/18/actualidad/1455818852_628648.html

"Last year 75 percent of our business was private sales. As well as top businessmen and wealthy families, customers looking for armoured vehicles now include people from medium-size businesses and workers who spend the entire day on the streets and are concerned for their safety," according to Fernando Echeverri, the CEO of Ballistics Group in the Federal District.

"Mexico's armoured car industry generates around \$150 million per year and 10,000 jobs, reported El País. Bulletproofing a vehicle costs between \$25,000 and \$55,000, leaving it an option only for Mexico's wealthy."

Source: "La inseguridad en México aumenta la venta de autos blindados (Insecurity in Mexico Fuels Sale of Armoured Vehicles)." *Foro de Seguridad*. Accessed from <http://www.forodeseguridad.com/articulo/discipl/4179.htm>

"In the Federal District alone there are more than 30,000 armoured cars circulating the streets according to the Intercontinental Association of Armoured Vehicles. This source also points out that Mexico is the largest producer of armoured vehicles in the Latin America followed by Brazil and Colombia."



Source: Mspvarmored, "Armored vehicles for sale," Wikimedia Commons, 30 December 2015, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armored-vehicle-sale.jpg>. (Permission to remix and share granted under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.)

Mexicans Arrested for Involvement in Nigerian Super-Meth Lab

*“...West Africa
is a
smuggler’s dream”*

OE Watch Commentary: Mexico domestically produces heroin and marijuana, but starting around 2006 the Sinaloa Cartel and La Familia Michoacana delved into the synthetic drug market. Worldwide demand for this product subsequently prompted Mexican cartels to produce mass quantities in super-labs capable of churning out up to 3000 kg per week. In response to increasing production, Mexico limited the importation of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine (two precursors commonly used to produce meth), but cartels still manage to procure their precursors from predominantly Asian-based distributors.

The Mexican government has also cracked down on meth production by targeting super-labs, but cartels have remained resilient by moving them closer to the US/Mexican border, setting up operations in remote access areas and even by moving labs abroad, where counterdrug operations are lax and restrictions on precursor importation are not as tight. The last point is highlighted by the March 2016 arrests of four Mexican nationals in Nigeria who were supposedly collaborating with a local criminal organization to get the country’s first-ever synthetic super-lab up and running, as reported by *Vice News*. The involvement of Mexican nationals in this instance is significant because it highlights cartel willingness to outsource production in order to maintain high profit margins and to mitigate risk of seizure.

Why West Africa?

Mexican and South American cartels have been using West Africa as a jumping-off point to traffic cocaine, heroin, and synthetic drugs into Europe and Asia for years. The move to actually produce synthetic drugs closer to the European market makes sense, as lax laws and corruption facilitate the importation of chemicals and free up logistics routes to ensure their safe passage out of Africa. In the coming months/years it is likely that super-labs similar to the one dismantled in Nigeria will pop up in other West African countries if at least three factors remain: demand must continue in Europe and Asia; lax laws and corruption must remain in place in West Africa; and authorities in Mexico must continue targeting super-labs. If not, Mexican-based cartels would prefer to produce locally in order to maintain higher profit margins and control over operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “Detienen mexicanos en narcolaboratorio desmantelado en Nigeria (Mexicans Arrested in Conjunction with Drug Lab Bust in Nigeria).” *Vice*. Accessed from <https://news.vice.com/es/article/detienen-mexicanos-en-narcolaboratorio-desmantelado-en-nigeria>

“Rusty Payne, a spokesman for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, said one sign of the growing importance of West Africa was the arrival of Latin American producers, including Mexicans. Mexican drug gangs play a central role in the meth industry in North America. Payne said Mexicans have helped set up clandestine labs - known as “clan labs” - in Nigeria.

“They are not just mom and pop labs, they are big labs,” Payne said. “Mexicans aren’t going to come over and train (people) unless they are dealing in large amounts.”



Nigerian authorities bust four Mexican cartel members who helped build a super meth lab
Source: <http://db3ulju1ay1a8.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/drug-cartel.jpg>

Source: “El futuro mercado de las drogas es África, dice la ONU (Africa as a Future Drug Market).” *Informador*. Accessed from <http://www.informador.com.mx/internacional/2015/587839/6/el-futuro-mercado-de-las-drogas-es-africa-dice-la-onu.htm>

“West Africa is a smuggler’s dream, suffering from a combination of factors that make the area particularly vulnerable. It is among the poorest and least stable regions in the world. Governments are weak and ineffective and officials are often corrupt.”

Mexican Navy Accused of Human Rights Violations, but Record Is Improving

OE Watch Commentary: Among the issues highlighted by Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in its annual report were accusations against Navy Department (SEMAR) personnel. Prominent among the accusations is the case of an individual arrested by Mexican marines in 2013, only to be found dead two months later. CNDH has recommended that, in addition to compensation to the family of the alleged victim, SEMAR should implement department-wide human rights training (first excerpted article).

SEMAR is addressing accusations head-on by embracing these recommendations, at least officially, and CNDH has admitted that SEMAR's record (and the government's as a whole) has improved significantly in recent years (second excerpted article). When SEMAR has countered criticism, the department has done so by turning the problem on its head – by emphasizing the human rights of accused military personnel to presumption of innocence. This has largely been successful, as criticism generally remains directed at government use of military for law enforcement, rather than against the military itself (third excerpted article). Culture is also a factor. Mexicans as a whole are very supportive of the military – especially the Navy – as being professional and trustworthy, but have deeply-rooted distrust of law enforcement.

The real question for SEMAR is whether public support can be maintained over the long run. Mexican cartels are adept at information operations and often have localized support. With the Navy at the forefront of counternarcotics operations, cartels will likely divert more energy to tarnishing the Navy's reputation. Moreover, the increased operational tempo increases opportunity for mistakes and violations, which cartels will, in turn, exploit. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Astrid Rivera, “CNDH emite recomendación a Semar por desaparición y ejecución [CNDH issues recommendation to SEMAR for disappearance and execution],” *El Universal*, 21 March 2016, <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2016/03/21/cndh-emite-recomendacion-semar-por-desaparicion-y-ejecucion>.

The National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) issued a recommendation to Navy Secretary Admiral Vidal Francisco Soberón Sanz regarding the arbitrary detention, forced disappearance, and arbitrary execution of a person in Anáhuac, Nuevo León ... evidence received indicated that [the alleged victim] was arrested arbitrarily by approximately eight Navy personnel and that these individuals were the last persons seen with him while he was alive ... [the CNDH] reminded that the victim's father filed a complaint stating that on 30 August 2013 ... three Navy trucks intercepted [the alleged victim], removed him from his vehicle, and took him to [the Navy vehicle] that was drive by the captain in command ... on 04 October 2013 ... the body of the victim was found on a ranch eight kilometers from the Naval base in Anáhuac, along with this vehicle and personal documents. The CNDH asked the Navy Secretary for full compensation for damages, including medical and psychological care to the victim's family members ... also that Navy personnel be trained in human rights ...

Source: Octavio García, “Acata SEMAR recomendaciones emitidas por la CNDH [SEMAR complies with recommendations issued by CNDH],” *Noticias MVS*, 09 April 2016, <http://www.noticiasmvs.com/#!/noticias/acata-semar-recomendaciones-emitidas-por-la-cndh-348>.

During a breakfast with media representatives, Vidal Francisco Soberón Sanz said that armed forces members should be the first to comply with these recommendations ... to maintain absolute respect for human rights ... It was he director of [the CNDH] ... who noted that in the past three years the number of complaints against the armed forces and federal security services decreased from 31 in 2012 to eight in 2015

“...In the past three years the number of complaints against the armed forces and federal security services decreased from 31 in 2012 to eight in 2015...”

(continued)

Continued: Mexican Navy Accused of Human Rights Violations, but Record Is Improving

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Militares y presunción de inocencia [Soldiers and the Presumption of Innocence],” *La Jornada*, 22 March 2016, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2016/03/22/opinion/002a1edi>.

Navy Secretary Admiral Vidal Francisco Soberon stated yesterday [21 March 2016] that the marines mentioned by human rights organizations for alleged violations should benefit from the legal principle of presumption of innocence ... in late 2013, Umberto del Bosque Villarreal was found dead, having been shot in the neck, near the Navy facility in the municipality of Anáhuac, two months after he was allegedly detained by Navy personnel ... Two years later, a judge ruled an auto de formal prisión [Comment: There is no direct equivalent in the U.S. legal system – it roughly means that the suspects are guilty but pending final conviction and sentencing] against five marines ... It is important to note, however, that society’s suspicions are automatic in the matters of military personnel revealed to have possibly participated in a crime ... None of the ... three aforementioned circumstances is ... the responsibility of the military institutions ... but of the Executive and Legislative branches of government.



Mexican Marines conducting zodiac training during Exercise Dawn Blitz 2015.

Source: Pfc. Devan Gowans USMC, “Marines with Zodiac Battalion, Mexican Naval Infantry Force,” I Marine Expeditionary Force, 07 September 2015, <http://www.imef.marines.mil/photos.aspx?igphoto=2001287709>. Image in public domain.

Navy Assuming Responsibility for Mexican Ports

OE Watch Commentary: In March 2016 Vice Admiral José Luis Arellano Ruiz, Mexican Navy Department's (SEMAR) Director of Port and Strategic Installation Protection, gave a newspaper interview describing plans to transfer Mexico's port authorities from the Communications and Transportation Department (SCT) to SEMAR. The transfer is a complete move of personnel from one executive department to another, not just transfer of security authority (first excerpted article).

SEMAR is emphasizing that this does not constitute militarization of the ports. The official purpose of the transfer is to improve security and efficiency, because SEMAR is better situated than SCT to operate the ports (first and second excerpted articles). Transferring port control to SEMAR is not unprecedented. In the past, SEMAR has assumed control of several major ports for security purposes, although the SCT retained administrative authority at those times (third excerpted article).

The transfer of authority reflects Mexico's confidence in SEMAR (and lack of confidence in SCT), as well as the strategic importance of port operations to Mexico. The exploitation of Mexico's ports by smugglers has been a factor. Perhaps more importantly though, SEMAR has a strong track record of working with international partners and a proactive culture of cooperation, while Mexico's national vision includes a more prominent international role. Furthermore, Mexico is a maritime nation. Its ports support Mexico's primary export – oil – and Mexico profits from being a major conduit for shipping from Asia to the United States. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

“The ports are not being militarized, definitely not.”

Source: Roberto López and Pilar Juárez, “La Marina está lista para tomar el control de los puertos [Navy Ready to Assume Control of Ports],” *Milenio*, 29 March 2016, http://www.milenio.com/policia/Marina-control_de_puertos-vicealmirante_Jose_Luis_Arellano_Ruiz-seguridad_maritima_0_709729044.html.

During an interview with Milenio, [Vice Admiral José Luis Arellano Ruiz, SEMAR Director of Port and Strategic Installation Protection] explained reform initiative through which the Port Authorities would be transferred to SEMAR, which would strengthen national maritime authority to prevent confusion and authority vacuums ... there are 103 Port Authorities in the country that answer to the Department of Communication and Transportation (SCT), where 1300 people work ... 80% of these are unionized ... [Admiral Arellano Ruiz] noted that until 1976, the Port Authorities fell under the Navy ... [SEMAR] has the capacity and resources to comply with national and international regulations ... “The ports are not being militarized, definitely not.”

Source: Francisco Rivera Cruz, “Reducir los focos de corrupción y no militarizar puertos: Semar [SEMAR: To reduce centers of corruption and no to militarize ports],” *Gente de Balsas*, 30 March 2016, http://www.gentedelbalsas.mx/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=13640%3AReducir-los-focos-de-corrupcion-y-no-militarizar-puertos-semar&Itemid=122.

... [Vice Admiral Arellano Ruiz] emphasized that the Navy will have capacity to take command ... the project is to improve protection and maritime and port security, but also to resolve deficiencies ... because of lack of resources, as well as transparency in port operations ...

Source: Juan Carlos Flores, “A la Marina, el control total de puertos principales [To the Navy: Total Control of the Major Ports],” *La Jornada*, 01 April 2014, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2014/04/01/semar-toma-el-control-de-operaciones-del-puerto-de-manzanillo-701.html>.

Container Ship at Lázaro Cárdenas port facility

Source: Wikimedia Commons contributor SEKVO, “Contenedores arivando al puerto,” Wikimedia Commons, 2009, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Puerto_L%C3%A1zaro_C%C3%A1rdenas.jpg. Image licensed under Creative Commons-Share Alike 3.0 Unported.



... the operation, conservation, and maintenance of the naval units of port protection will be conducted with Navy Department resources authorities in the Fiscal Year 2014 Budget ... SEMAR took control of the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán in November 2013, because of poor security in the region. Other terminals, such as Ensenada, Baja California, La Paz, Baja California Sur, Guaymas, Sonora, Mazatlán, Sinaloa, Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, and Acapulco, Guerrero, also have been placed under SEMAR control ... he emphasized that the SCT will retain total management of the ports of as chief of administrators.

Weapons Factory Found in Michoacán

OE Watch Commentary: On 4 April 2016 Mexican Federal Police served a search warrant and uncovered an illicit arms factory in Puruándiro, Michoacán. The factory seems to have been used for manufacturing unspecified types of firearms (first excerpted article) and included what appears to be professional-grade machinery (second excerpted article).

This is not the first weapons factory discovered – authorities found an illicit firearms factory in the nearby state of Jalisco in 2014 – but it is still unusual. The implications are either very positive or very negative. Its existence could be an indicator of progress in multinational efforts to mitigate illicit arms trafficking, forcing criminal gangs to improvise and manufacture their own, presumably inferior, weapons. Alternatively, it could also be an indicator of the degradation of the security situation in Michoacán. Michoacán is situated in the so-called Tierra Caliente, a lowland region west of Mexico City that has been associated with high criminality for decades. Numerous criminal organizations still operate in Michoacán, and Michoacán is the epicenter of various self-defense groups. The factory could therefore be an indicator of logistic standardization by one or more criminal groups. In either case, the factory represents the resolve, sophistication, and ingenuity of the criminal groups that Mexico is facing. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Catean domicilio y localizan fábrica de armas, en Michoacán,” *Noventa Grados*, 05 April 2016, <http://www.noventagradados.com.mx/seguridad/catean-domicilio-y-localizan-fabrica-de-armas-en-michoacan.htm>.

A residence used as a firearms factory was located and seized yesterday [04 April 2016] by Federal Police officers ... among the seized [items] were metal tubes, metal structures, pieces of wood, metal magazines, and live and spent cartridges, as well as machinery ...

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Asegura PGR fábrica de armas en Puruándiro [PGR seizes arms factory in Puruándiro],” *Provincia*, 05 April 2016, http://www.provincia.com.mx/web/Asegura_PGR_f%C3%A1brica_de_armas_en_Puru%C3%A1ndiro-40788.

... Inside the residence were seized ... a metal augur, different sized drill bits, metal files, metal presses, and various documentation ...



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

Criminals Disguise Themselves as Police in Michoacán

OE Watch Commentary: On 4 April 2016 Mexican soldiers on patrol in Michoacán stopped and searched a vehicle marked “Rural Police,” and discovered that the vehicle had been reported stolen and the armed occupants were actually not police (first excerpted article). The soldiers had stopped the vehicle after becoming suspicious because of an orthographic error on the vehicle’s logo (second excerpted article).

The tactic is nothing new – Mexican cartels have been impersonating police and soldiers for years in order to move armed groups without drawing suspicion or simply to mask their true affiliations. In this case, it is more complicated because the suspects were impersonating Rural Police, a relatively new police force created in an attempt to assimilate and regulate various self-defense militias that have been popping up across western Mexico. Since the Rural Police is comprised of diverse groups, civilian clothing or non-standardized weapons are to be expected. Had the soldiers not been alerted by the spelling error, they may have been more vulnerable to ambush.

Police impersonators also pose strategic concerns for Mexican authorities. One of the motivations for citizens to create the self-defense groups was lack of confidence in the security forces to protect them from criminals, because of perceived incompetence and corruption. When criminals look like police and commit crimes, they further erode public confidence in the legitimate forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

“... the vehicle drew the attention of the soldiers because it was emblazoned with orthographic errors ...”

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Consignan a falso policías rurales que viajaban en patrulla clonada en Michoacán [False Rural Police Arrested in Michoacán while Traveling in Fake Police Vehicle],” *Noventa Grados*, 06 April 2016, <http://www.noventagrados.com.mx/seguridad/consignan-a-falsos-policias-rurales-que-viajaban-en-patrulla-clonada-en-michoacan.htm>.

Four armed individuals that were arrested Monday [04 April 2016] while traveling in a fake patrol car ... were detained for their alleged involvement in violating the Federal Weapons and Explosives Law ... They were arrested by Army personnel who were conducting reconnaissance ... Near the municipality of Paracuaro ... four suspects with high-caliber weapons wearing civilian clothing in a blue Ford Ranger, with the logo “Michoacán Police” ... moreover, verification of vehicle information revealed that it had been reported stolen

Source: Unattributed author(s), “Detienen a falsos policías; error ortográfico los delata [Police impersonators arrested; orthographic error betrayed them],” *Zócalo* redaction from *Reforma*, 6 April 2016, <http://www.zocalo.com.mx/seccion/articulo/caen-4-con-patrulla-clonada-en-michoacan-1459866242>.

... the vehicle drew the attention of the soldiers because it was emblazoned with orthographic errors ... the arrested individuals identified themselves as members of the Rural Force, a police body established by the government in 2014 to absorb self-defense groups who were fighting organized crime



Mexican Army Log
Source: Wikimedia Commons User Sarumo74, “Logo of the Mexican Army on the basis of the official image of the Mexican Army to ground weapons,” Wikimedia Commons, 17 May 2010 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Logo_de_Ej%C3%A9rcito_Mexicano.svg. Image not subject to copyright.

Microsatellite Marks Milestone in Philippine Space Program

OE Watch Commentary: On 22 March 2016 the Philippines' first domestically-built satellite, the Earth-imaging microsatellite Diwata-1, launched on a resupply mission to the International Space Station. The satellite is soon to be followed by a ground receiving station in the Philippines (first excerpted article). Although the Philippines already has operated two satellites since the 1990s, it had acquired them by purchasing them abroad, whereas the new microsatellite is a step towards a national space program (second excerpted article). The satellite's official mission is to monitor environmental conditions in disaster-prone areas, but it also will be used to collect information on border regions (third excerpted article), suggesting that the Philippine government envisions military applications for the future.

Because it was domestically-built, the satellite is generating national pride. Presidential spokesman Herminio Coloma even described the launch as demonstrating the "ability to launch [the Philippines'] own satellite" (third excerpted article). Although this is an exaggeration – the Philippines did not actually launch the satellite – the statement reveals that the Philippines now sees itself as a space actor. Consequently, the Philippines may very well approach international strategic negotiations on space operational environment as a stakeholder rather than just a bystander. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Jose Bimbo F. Santos, "First Pinoy-made Satellite Diwata-1 Goes to Space," *InterAksyon.com*, 23 March 2016, <http://interaksyon.com/article/125562/first-pinoy-made-satellite-diwata-1-goes-to-space>.

The first-ever Filipino-made microsatellite ... has been successfully launched into space onboard the Cygnus spacecraft as propelled by the Atlas-5 rocket from the Cape Canaveral Air Station ... which is on a resupply mission to the International Space Station ... The 50-kg Diwata-1, which is about the size of a balikbayan box [Comment: This is a standardized shipping box Filipinos traditionally use to ship personal items from overseas] and is outfitted with four cameras, is set to scan the country twice a day ... Led by the DOST-PCIEERD, Diwata-1 was built by two teams of Filipino scientists in Japan with the assistance of their Japanese counterparts. The satellite's software algorithms, on the other hand, were written by a group of Filipino scientists based at the University of the Philippines ... The DOST will next put up a ground receiving station

Source: Jovic Yee, "PH Sends 3rd Satellite to Space Wednesday," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 March 2016, <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/138025/ph-sends-3rd-satellite-to-space-wednesday>.

... The Philippines first had a satellite in space, the privately owned Agila 1, in 1996. It was acquired from Indonesia, which launched it from Cape Canaveral in 1991. The second Philippine satellite was Agila 2, also for communications, privately owned and launched from Sichuan, China, in 1997. It is now called ABS-3, after Mabuhay Satellite Communications, a subsidiary of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co., sold it to Bermuda-based Asia Broadcast Satellite Holdings Ltd. for P400 million in 2009 ... Diwata is the first of two microsatellites to be launched into space until 2017. It is part of a three-year, P840.82-million program, seen as the foundation for a possible Philippine space agency ...

Source: Genalyn Kabiling, "Palace Lauds PH's First Microsatellite Launch," *Manila Bulletin*, 25 March 2015, <http://www.mb.com.ph/palace-lauds-phs-first-microsatellite-launch/>.

Malacañang is very proud of the country's latest historic feat in the science and technology sector — the launch of its first microsatellite into space ... "We are proud of this milestone that demonstrated the Filipino's capability in the field of science and technology. We are now able to launch our own satellite on a global platform," [Presidential Spokesman Herminio] Coloma said ... the low earth orbit satellite will remain on board the International Space Station until the end of April. It will then ... monitor weather detection and forecasts, agricultural growth patterns, monitoring of forest cover, as well as extent of disasters. It may also provide images on the territorial borders of the Philippines



Diwata-1 microsatellite
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diwata-1.jpg>.

“...the foundation for a possible Philippine space agency...”

The Hazards of Thailand’s National Commission for Peace and Order No 13/2016

OE Watch Commentary: On 29 March Thailand’s National Commission for Peace and Order (NCPO) issued a new order as part of the crackdown on “influential figures.” According to the first excerpted article, NCPO Order 13/2016 “gives state officials and their assistants [commissioned officers]... wide ranging powers to prevent and suppress 27 categories of crime, including human trafficking, narcotics, and illegal firearms.” It also grants officers the power to conduct inquiries and arrest and detain individuals without a court warrant in certain situations.

Human rights groups have since criticized the new order, fearing that it shields members of Thailand’s military because it grants immunity to those

officers acting under it. However, according to an NCPO

spokesman quoted in the first article, the regime took special measures to enforce laws more efficiently and “fast-track solutions to meet people’s expectations.” He added that Thailand is not yet running under normal situations.

Thailand has been under military rule since the Royal Thai Armed Forces, led by General Prayut Chan-ocha, launched a coup d’état in 2014. While there has been talk of the military relinquishing power one day, so far the end does not appear to be in sight, as the military continues to tighten its control. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Emblem of Royal Thai Police
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/e5/Emblem_of_the_Royal_Thai_Armed_Forces_HQ.svg/2000px-Emblem_of_the_Royal_Thai_Armed_Forces_HQ.svg.png



“The order is yet another example of the pernicious removal of powers from the judicial system to review the military’s actions, to the detriment of rights protection.”

Source: Wassana Nanuam, “NCPO Unfazed by US Human-Rights Criticism,” *Bangkok Post*, 14 April 2016, <<http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/933433/>>.

NCPO Unfazed by US Human-Rights Criticism

NCPO order 13/2016, issued on March 29 as part of the crackdown on “influential figures”, gives state officials and their assistants, drawn from the commissioned ranks of the armed forces, wide-ranging powers to prevent and suppress 27 categories of crime, including human trafficking, narcotics and illegal firearms.

It also grants the officers broad powers to conduct inquiries and proceed with arrests and detentions without a court warrant in certain circumstances.

Source: “Rights Groups Slam Military Arrest Powers,” *Bangkok Post*, 6 April 2016, <<http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/922821/>>.

Rights Groups Slam Military Arrest Powers

Six international human rights groups have issued a joint call for the revocation of a National Commission for Peace and Order (NCPO) order conferring sweeping law and order powers on the military as part of the crackdown on mafia influence.

The order contravenes the rule of law and human rights principles, they say.

“The order is yet another example of the pernicious removal of powers from the judicial system to review the military’s actions, to the detriment of rights protection,” said Champa Patel, AI’s interim director, South East Asia and Pacific Regional Office.

Indonesia and China are Playing Rough Over the South China Sea

OE Watch Commentary: Following the 20 March incident between Indonesian maritime patrol ships and the Chinese coast guard, both countries have spiraled into a rare territorial dispute, with Indonesia taking an uncharacteristically hard stance. According to excerpts in the accompanying article in *The Jakarta Post*, the incident occurred when the Chinese coast guard intercepted Indonesian patrol boats towing the 2000-gross-ton Kway Fey 10078, a Chinese fishing boat caught operating illegally near the Natuna Islands. Indonesia's naval base in Natuna said the Chinese vessel was found operating within an 83,515-square kilometer area at the intersection of Indonesia's economic exclusion zone, its continental shelf boundary and China's so-called nine-dash line, which purports to delineate Chinese territory. After this escalation Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu then reported a plan to deploy a fleet of F-16 jet fighters and to increase the number of navy vessels and troops in the Natuna Islands.

According to excerpts in the accompanying article from Singapore's *The Straits Times*, the captain of the Chinese fishing boat will be charged with poaching, along with his chief engineer and fishing master, said Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister Susi Pudjiastuti. She has also been the main driver behind the president's plan to revive the shipbuilding and fisheries industries in a bid to re-establish Indonesia as a maritime power.

In her comments about the standoff, she said, "I do believe China is a great country, with good law enforcement, and they do not back illegal fishing, even if it is done by Chinese vessels. I do believe they will honor me, by handing over this (illegal fishing) vessel. I think as a big country you cannot bully small countries."

Following this, Ryacudu also said that F-16 fighter jets would be deployed to help defend the fish-rich Natunas in the far northwest fringe of the archipelago as part of an ongoing military build-up around the islands. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz).**



The image shows the territorial claims in the South China Sea that form the basis for the disputes.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Territorial_disputes_in_the_South_China_Sea#/media/File:South_China_Sea_claims_map.jpg. State_%28IS%29_insurgents,_Anbar_Province,_Iraq.jpg

Source: "Indonesia Urged to Adopt Stronger Stance with China," *The Jakarta Post*, 30 March 2016. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/03/30/indonesia-urged-adopt-stronger-stance-with-china.html>

... the Chinese coast guard intercepted Indonesian patrol boats towing the 2,000 gross-ton Kway Fey 10078, a Chinese fishing boat caught operating illegally near the Natuna Islands.

Indonesia's naval base in Natuna said the Chinese vessel was found operating within an 83,515-square kilometer area at the intersection of Indonesia's EEZ, its continental shelf boundary and China's so-called nine-dash line, which purports to delineate Chinese territory.

Source: "Indonesia to Charge 3 Chinese Nationals with Poaching amid Tensions with China" *The Straits Times*, 2 April 2016. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-to-charge-3-chinese-nationals-with-poaching-amid-tensions-with-china>

The captain of the Chinese fishing boat that sparked the latest tensions between Indonesia and China will be charged with poaching, along with his chief engineer and fishing master, said Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Minister Susi Pudjiastuti ...

Indonesian Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu reiterated on Friday a plan to deploy a fleet of F-16 jet fighters as well as increase the number of navy vessels and troops in the Natuna Islands.

Ms Susi has been the main driver behind the President's plan to revive the shipbuilding and fisheries industries in a bid to re-establish Indonesia as a maritime power.

Source: "Indonesia Demands 'Bully' China Hand over Fishing Boat" *Channel News Asia*, 1 April 2016. <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-demands-bully/2657458.html>

"I do believe China is a great country, with good law enforcement, and they do not back illegal fishing, even if it is done by Chinese vessels," she told AFP in an interview. "I do believe they will honour me, by handing over this (illegal fishing) vessel."

And she added: "I think as a big country you cannot bully small countries."

Indonesia's defence ministry also said Friday that F-16 fighter jets would be deployed to help defend the fish-rich Natunas, in the far northwest fringe of the archipelago, part of an ongoing military build-up around the islands.

Terrorism Expert: Sulu Sea is Becoming a Terror Haven

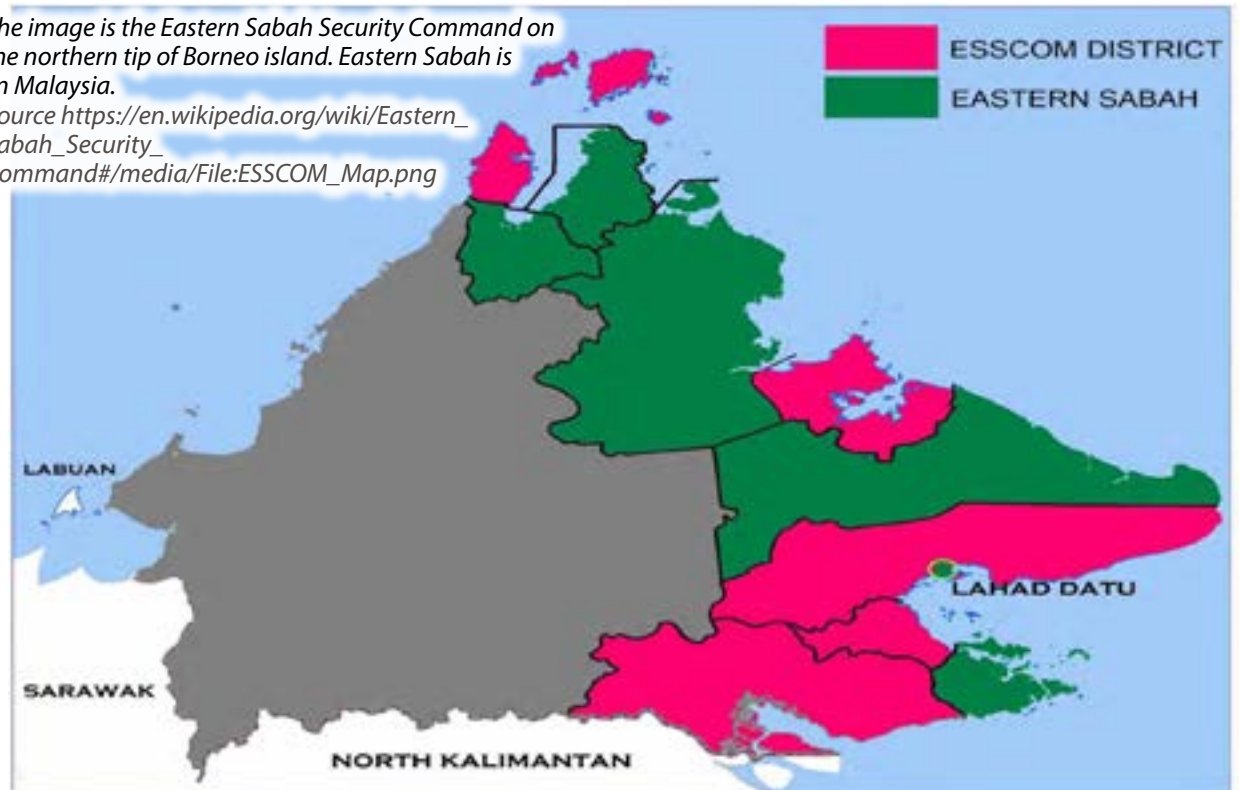
OE Watch Commentary: Following the latest kidnapping of four Malaysian crew members from a tugboat off the coast of Tawau, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) are under the spotlight for failing to secure the area after previous similar incidents, says a terrorism expert. According to excerpts from the *Malay Mail Online*, International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research head Rohan Gunaratna said the countries in the area failed to understand and respond to the nature of the threat. ESSCOM is a Malaysian security area that covers 1400 kilometers of the east coast of Sabah from Kudat to Tawau.

As the excerpt from the accompanying article indicates, Gunaratna said the three governments needed to develop a strategy to dominate, control and secure the Sulu Sea or face a destabilized border zone: “ESSCOM cannot stand alone as the problem is transboundary. It must be understood it is one component in a broad security zone. The tri-border area between Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia is overrun with various criminal and terrorist elements. The terrorists are engaged in hostage taking with the aim of eventually turning the area into a ‘safe zone’ to conduct attacks against these countries.”

As the excerpt points out, Rohan stressed the need for a military solution, as the threat is serious and dealing with it is beyond the means of other agencies, such as the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and marine police operating under ESSCOM, the latter of which has several hundred fighters who have been trained to strike anywhere in Southeast Asia. Some of these fighters have been linked to the Islamic State. “Attacks will become increasingly severe unless these groups are dismantled with military force, specifically the Malaysian Navy. There are no other options. Only a strong military response will stabilize the situation,” he said. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz).**

The image is the Eastern Sabah Security Command on the northern tip of Borneo island. Eastern Sabah is in Malaysia.

Source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Sabah_Security_Command#/media/File:ESSCOM_Map.png



Source: “Tri-border Cooperation Vital to Securing East Sabah, Terrorism Expert Says” *Malay Mail Online*, 5 April 2016. <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/tri-border-cooperation-vital-to-securing-east-sabah-terrorism-expert-says>

The latest kidnapping of four Malaysian crew members from a tugboat off the coast of Tawau has put three countries and the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) under the spotlight for failing to secure the area after previous similar incidents, says a terrorism expert.

International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research head Prof Rohan Gunaratna said the countries in the area also failed to understand and respond to the nature of the threat.

“ESSCOM cannot stand alone as the problem is transboundary. It must be understood it is one component in a broad security zone,” he said.

“The tri-border area between Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia is overrun with various criminal and terrorist elements.”

Rohan said the three governments needed to develop a strategy to dominate, control and secure the Sulu Sea or face a destabilised border zone.

“The terrorists are engaged in hostage taking with the aim of eventually turning the area into a ‘safe zone’ to conduct attacks against these countries,” he said.

Rohan also stressed the need for a military solution as the threat was serious and dealing with it was beyond the means of other agencies such as the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency and marine police operating under ESSCOM.

“Attacks will become increasingly severe unless these groups are dismantled with military force, specifically the Malaysian Navy. There are no other options. Only a strong military response will stabilise the situation,” he said.

“These groups ... are capable of striking anywhere in South-east Asia and represent a serious threat to the region.”

Rohan said several hundred fighters had been trained for such a purpose and some were known to be linked to the Islamic State.

Uighurs Increase their Presence in Southeast Asia and Authorities are Worried

OE Watch Commentary: In early April, according to a leaked intelligence warning, two Uighur militants from Turkey were plotting terrorist attacks on foreign interests in Thailand. According to excerpts from *Khaosod*, the warning identified the two Turkish men by name in a threat warning originally issued by the National Intelligence Coordinating Center, the kingdom's intelligence information agency. This comes just before Malaysian authorities were put on high alert following information from Thailand that two Uighurs of Turkish descent were heading to Malaysia, according to excerpts from *The Star Online*. Prior to this, in late March, according to excerpts from *The Jakarta Post*, Indonesian police put four Chinese Uighurs on their latest most-wanted list after determining that the Uighurs had joined the Eastern Indonesia Mujahidin terrorist group in Central Sulawesi. This all comes eight months following the 17 August bombing of Bangkok's Erawan Shrine, killing 20 people and injuring 130, with two Uighur men charged with plotting the bombing.

According to the intelligence warning, two Uighur men entered Thailand through Phuket on 23 March and the pair "may stage attacks on Chinese targets and interests in Southeast Asia." According to the article, following their departure from Malaysia the two Uighurs then entered Malaysia, where authorities were on high alert. An intelligence source reported that the two could be headed to Malaysia en route to Turkey, Indonesia or Singapore.

The movement of Uighurs through Thailand and Malaysia follows Indonesian police putting four Chinese Uighurs on their latest most-wanted list in late March. As the excerpt indicates, Central Sulawesi Police Chief Rudy Sufahriadi said the four militants were part of a group of six ethnic Uighurs to infiltrate the country. He said that the Uighurs had left Xianjiang province in China and crossed into Bangkok, then to Malaysia, before heading to Pekanbaru, Riau. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz).**

Source: "Uighur, Chechen Militants in Thailand to Stage Attacks, Memo Warns" *Khaosod*, 7 April 2016. <http://www.khaosodenglish.com/detail.php?newsid=1460112616§ion=11&typecate=06>

Four militants – two from Turkey and two from Russia – are plotting terror attacks on foreign interests in Thailand and the region, a leaked intelligence warning claims.

The memo, ... identified the two Turkish men by name as Uighurs ... in a threat warning originally issued by the kingdom's intelligence information agency, the National Intelligence Coordinating Center

According to the memo, two Uighur men ... The pair "may stage attacks on Chinese targets and interests in Southeast Asia," the memo said.

Source: "Uighur, Chechen Tourists Placed under Surveillance," *Bangkok Post*, 7 April 2016. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/924901/uighur-chechen-tourists-placed-under-surveillance>

Earlier two Uighur Chinese men were charged plotting the Erawan shrine bombing in Bangkok on Aug 17. The explosion killed 20 people and injured 130 others.

Source: "IGP: Malaysia on High Alert for Terrorists," *The Star Online*, 10 April 2016. <http://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2016/04/10/igp-malaysia-on-high-alert-for-terrorists-duo-suspected-of-plotting-attacks-in-thailand-heading-here/>

Malaysian authorities are on high alert following information from Thailand that two Uighurs of Turkish descent, suspected of plotting terrorist attacks in Thailand, are heading to Malaysia.

An intelligence source told Bernama the two could be headed to Malaysia en route to Turkey, Indonesia or Singapore.

On Friday, Thai newspaper Khaosod leaked an intelligence memorandum from Wongsiri which claimed that two Uighurs and two Russians of Chechen descent were plotting terror attacks in Thailand.

Source: "Uighur Militants Infiltrating Indonesia," *The Jakarta Post*, 18 March 2016. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/03/18/uighur-militants-infiltrating-indonesia.html>

The police put four more Chinese Uighurs on their latest most-wanted list on Thursday after determining that the Uighurs had joined the Eastern Indonesia Mujahidin (MIT) terror group led by Santoso, alias Abu Wardah, in Poso regency, Central Sulawesi.

Central Sulawesi Police chief Brig. Gen. Rudy Sufahriadi said the four militants were part of a group of six ethnic Uighurs to have infiltrated the country.

Rudy said that the Uighurs had left Xianjiang province in China and crossed into Bangkok, then to Malaysia, before heading to Pekanbaru, Riau.



Erawan Shrine after the bombing on August 17th.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2015_Bangkok_bombing#/media/File:2015_Bangkok_bombing_VOA.jpg

China’s Overseas Missions: Fostering a Strategic Advantage

“The 23rd Chinese naval escort taskforce consists of the guided-missile frigates Xiangtan and Zhoushan as well as the comprehensive supply ship Chaohu, which will carry two ship-borne helicopters and more than 700 naval servicepersons including dozens of special troops.”

OE Watch Commentary: China has increased its role overseas in recent times. Chinese officials and the media are quick to point out that the country’s expanding role in international missions is due to its growing commitment to world peace and a desire to be seen as a more responsible global player.

China has much to gain from its increased global presence. The following excerpts originate from an article that offers an overview of China’s continued commitment to patrolling the waters off the coast of Africa. According to the article, China recently sent its 23rd naval escort task force from a naval port in Zhoushan, Zhejiang Province, to conduct escort missions off the coast of Somalia.

These missions have been ongoing since 2008. In all, the task forces have escorted 6139 Chinese and foreign merchant ships in 922 batches. In addition to escort duties, on at least two occasions one or more ships from past missions have been pulled to evacuate Chinese nationals from Libya and Yemen during times of crisis.

During a speech at a ceremony marking the departure of the 23rd task force from China, Wang Hai, Deputy Commander of the People’s Liberation Army Navy, explained that China’s growing overseas operations are “conducive to upgrading the PLA Navy’s capabilities of effectively dealing with multiple security threats...”

These missions offer a win-win strategy for China. Along with increasing its military capabilities, they serve as an excellent means to gain experience in military operations. Additionally, as China increases its presence overseas, it manages to strengthen its strategic advantage through positioning and diplomacy as more and more countries look to it for its various contributions.

End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)

Source: “23rd Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Leaves for Mission,” *China Military*, 8 April 2016, <english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china.../content_6997675.htm>.

23rd Chinese Naval Escort Taskforce Leaves for Mission

All these operations are conducive to upgrading the PLA Navy’s capabilities of effectively dealing with multiple security threats and performing diverse military missions, Wang Hai noted in his speech.

The 23rd Chinese naval escort taskforce consists of the guided-missile frigates Xiangtan and Zhoushan as well as the comprehensive supply ship Chaohu, which will carry two ship-borne helicopters and more than 700 naval servicepersons including dozens of special troops.

During the escalating and complicated military conflict in eastern Ukraine, UAVs have become increasingly common and important to operations for either side. Ukrainian forces are at a considerable disadvantage, mainly because Ukraine’s armed forces were ignored and underfunded. After ten months of conflict in the eastern states of Luhansk and Donetsk, technical overmatch is becoming the deciding factor in battle. This article pertains to the conflict’s UAVs tactics, Russia’s emphasis on UAVs, and counter-UAV techniques.

Source: http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/products_regionalSecurity_PACOM/20151222%20Harvey-Rebel%20Drones-UAV%20Overmatch%20in%20the%20Ukrainian%20Conflict%20%28final%20with%20cover%20and%20background%20page%29.pdf

Rebel Drones: UAV Overmatch in the Ukrainian Conflict
James Harvey, U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer and FMSO Researcher



PLA's New Overseas Operations Office to Strengthen Overseas Rapid Reaction

“In recent years, with the increase of overseas interests, the Chinese military faces increasing overseas tasks including naval escort, international aid and rescue, joint military exercises and evacuation. Chinese military’s overseas operations have become the norm.”

OE Watch Commentary: As China has increased its overseas interests, it has had to make adjustments to its organizations and policies. Most recently, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) set up its Overseas Operations Office, which, according to the first excerpted article, is responsible for directing and coordinating actions carried out by Chinese troops overseas. This is expected to enhance the Chinese military’s rapid overseas response capability.

The article offers some insight into the role of this office. It will have both “operational commanding capabilities” and “policy capacity.” It is required to assess the local security situation before taking any action. It will take on a wider role than the various functional departments of the Chinese military and is involved in all overseas operations. According to the article, Dai Shaoan, deputy to China’s National People’s Congress, suggested that the relevant functional departments of the Chinese military directing various operations, such as overseas escort, rescue and relief, and antiterrorism operations, will formulate the applicable codes of operations. Additionally, the Overseas Operations Office should bear part of such functions.

The new Overseas Operations Office is likely part of a bigger reorganizational effort. This past January China reorganized the Central Military Commission (CMC), turning it into 15 functional departments, consisting of seven departments or offices, three commissions, and five subordinate offices. It is believed that the Overseas Operations Office will likely be a new institution established as part of the adjustment of the CMC. According to the second article, Xi Jinping is pushing for the restructured CMC to be “highly disciplined” and “able to take on heavy duties with iron beliefs so as the make contributions to the realization of the Chinese Dream and the Dream of a Strong Military.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: “PLA Sets Up Overseas Operations Office to Strengthen Overseas Rapid Reaction,” *China Military*, 25 March 2016, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/pla-daily-commentary/2016-03/25/content_6977517.htm>.

PLA Sets Up Overseas Operations Office to Strengthen Overseas Rapid Reaction,

The “Overseas Operations Office” is likely to be a new institution established along with this adjustment. The emergence of this Office meets needs of the trend.

In recent years, with the increase of overseas interests, the Chinese military faces increasing overseas tasks including naval escort, international aid and rescue, joint military exercises and evacuation. Chinese military’s overseas operations have become the norm.

The Overseas Operations Office focused on directing and coordinating overseas operations and thus the establishment of the Office is conducive to quick overseas actions.

Source: Zhaog Tao (Editor), “China’s New Central Military Commission Organ Established,” *China Military Online*, 11 January 2016, <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2016-01/11/content_6852723.htm>.

China’s New Central Military Commission Organ Established

President Xi Jinping has urged the restructured Central Military Commission (CMC) and its subordinate departments to be highly disciplined and able to take on heavy duties with iron beliefs, so as to make contributions to the realization of the Chinese Dream and the Dream of a Strong Military.

A Pakistani Perspective on China's "String of Pearls"

OE Watch Commentary: China began construction of a port in Djibouti in February 2016 for the stated purpose of support and logistics. Any word related to "military" operations was notably absent in Chinese statements. Nonetheless, Pakistan is aware of the military significance of China's port projects in East Africa, such as Djibouti, and in South Asia, such as the current Gwadar port project in Pakistan and prospective projects in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. The accompanying excerpted article in Pakistan's *The News* on 30 March provides a Pakistani perspective on China's port projects in Africa and Asia in the context of regional competition with India and global competition with the United States.

According to the article, China's promotion of its port projects as connecting international trade routes has inevitably led it to become a more significant defense partner for countries in Africa and Asia. The article also mentions China's growing economic presence in Afghanistan, which dilutes America's power in South Asia. It also notes that although Chinese foreign policy is mostly based on economics, the country has become involved in exporting arms to some Arab countries, which shows that economic relations can easily evolve into military partnerships.

From this Pakistani perspective, China's economic and military influence is a benefit. It prevents what the article alleges are American and Indian attempts to use Africa and create difficulties for Chinese companies. While the article may not reflect Pakistan's official position, it does represent an underlying aspect of its foreign policy establishment: namely, suspicion of America and India and trust of China. Despite this, Pakistani and American analysts both agree on one point: new Chinese port projects in littoral Africa or Asia should also be considered in terms of the potential military capabilities and partnerships that they provide for China, whether or not China announces any such military objectives or strategies there. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

"Since China has a heavy presence in the sea ports of Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the response from the Chinese government to any future threat to its economic and military objectives would be prompt and harsh."

Source: "China vs America: The New Cold War," *The News*, 30 March 2016.

China vs America: The New Cold War

In South Asia, it seems that China has outsmarted the US through its ongoing peaceful regional connectivity initiatives. The Chinese string of pearls strategy, stretching from the South China Sea to South Asia, has made China the main trade and defence partner of some of the littoral countries of the region. Moreover, the Chinese Silk Road, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and China's growing presence in Afghanistan have become real bugbears for the American's long-lasting military and economic dominance of South Asia.

Since China has a heavy presence in the sea ports of Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, the response from the Chinese government to any future threat to its economic and military objectives would be prompt and harsh. Through its astute diplomacy, China has grabbed the opportunity by both hands and created a win-win situation: it is not only importing substantial energy resources from the Middle East, but it is also exporting economic products and arms to some Arab countries.

Chinese naval ships, such as the one in the adjacent image, will be more common throughout littoral Africa Asia.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/china-djibouti-base/3092183.html>



Montenegrins Wary of NATO Membership

OE Watch Commentary: Montenegro was invited to join NATO in 2015, but its acceptance spurred protests from both Montenegrins and Russian officials. As the accompanying excerpts demonstrate, many do not want to formalize membership in 2017 and are pushing for a national plebiscite.

A referendum is only required by law at presidential request, a vote in Parliament, or request by 10 percent of all registered voters. However, the upcoming general elections in October 2016 will allow a platform for political opinions on NATO membership as well.

Russian President Putin's United Russia Party is sending a delegation to Montenegro in mid-April to strengthen relations. The article also notes that Montenegro's latest online referendum was sponsored by a pro-Russian organization. Montenegro is majority Orthodox Christian and Slavic in ethnicity and has historically held close ties with Russia, but it did participate in sanctions against Russia in 2014 due to the latter's actions in Ukraine and Crimea. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

“Opposition parties have also demanded a referendum before NATO entry is formalized next year - mirroring demands made by Russian officials.”

Source: Tomovic, Dusica. “Montenegrins Vote Online to Stay Out of NATO.” *Balkan Insight*. 13 April 2016. <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/montenegrins-vote-online-to-keep-military-neutrality-04-12-2016>>

“More than 10,000 people have taken part over two weeks in an online referendum on the military status of Montenegro, the pro-Russian organization behind the vote said.

... Opposition parties have also demanded a referendum before NATO entry is formalized next year - mirroring demands made by Russian officials.

Some 55,000 Montenegrins reportedly signed a petition by April 1, organized by the opposition Socialist People's Party, urging the government to hold a referendum on NATO.”

Source: Tomovic, Dusica. “Putin's Party to Foster Ties with Montenegro.” *Balkan Insight*. 11 April 2016. <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/putin-s-party-offers-closer-ties-to-montenegro-04-08-2016>>

“Announcing the visit, the Moscow-based Balkan Centre for International Cooperation said Russia was seriously interested in issues such as Christian civilization in the Balkans and Russia's role in preserving it, but also in a possible referendum on the country's NATO membership bid.

It said the intention is to develop new formats of Montenegro-Russian cooperation for the purpose of increasing Montenegrin representation in Russia's economics and politics.”



Montenegro

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMontenegro-map.gif>

An Incident on the Uzbek-Kyrgyz Border

OE Watch Commentary: Incidents on the borders in the Fergana Valley region over the past few years have gained a lot of attention in the media, especially in Kyrgyzstan, which has been involved in some way in the majority of the incidents. The accompanying excerpted article reports on a recent incident on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, and there are a couple of things to take away from it.

The author traveled to the area where Uzbekistan's border guards established a checkpoint on a road near the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border from March 18-26 and, in addition to providing some background on the dispute, offered some observations about what took place. He noted that this is not the first time that this area of the border has been contentious. Local residents remember an incident when Uzbek border guards took control of a radio tower on the Ungar-Too Mountain (east of the reservoir) on 20 September 2013. The border guards were inserted by helicopter and claimed the mountaintop facility was in Uzbek territory. There were no casualties reported, and, after a negotiation between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek governments that last around two weeks, Uzbek forces withdrew from the mountain.

While this recent incident might bring up memories of what happened in 2013, Uzbek border guards did not violate the border or take control of any territory this time. The article notes how they set up a checkpoint on a road for several days where they had not previously deployed, and this appears to be the extent of their actions. Kyrgyzstan responded to this by deploying additional forces to the area, and, as the article mentions, both sides pulled back on 26 March. If the author is correct, the recent incident took place because officials in Kyrgyzstan refused a visit by a delegation of Uzbeks to the dam near the border. The establishment of the checkpoint was not response to a border violation by either side, which had contributed to previous incidents between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Lastly, the article mentions that the incident prompted discussions of demarcating the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. The governments of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have demarcated part of their borders after a couple of years of negotiations, but it is unknown if this included the disputed areas which have been the sites of multiple incidents. Any negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan will be something to watch. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“...in the past, Uzbekistan has never put their forces on this road with a checkpoint...”

Source: Geine, Khloya. “Спецрепортаж: Как узбекские бронетранспортеры обнажили приграничные проблемы (Special report: How Uzbek armored personnel carriers uncovered border problems),” Kloop, 29 March 2016. <http://kloop.kg/blog/2016/03/29/spetsreportazh-kak-uzbekske-bronetransportery-obnazhili-prigranichnye-problemy/>

Special report: How Uzbek armored personnel carriers uncovered border problems

Uzbek soldiers and armored personnel carriers on the disputed section of the border with Kyrgyzstan have forced officials of both states to negotiate the problems of 25 years in the making – unknown post-Soviet territories...Correspondent Khloya Geine covered this story from March 23-25...

...we practically passed the Kyrgyz checkpoint without slowing down. Soldiers in blue-green uniforms glanced in the car and passed us through. After a few meters we suddenly found ourselves at the Uzbek checkpoint. There were no less than 10 soldiers here and they have more weapons and they look more impressive – they are wearing helmets and body armor with uniforms more suitable to the local landscape...in the past, Uzbekistan has never put their forces on this road with a checkpoint...

The issue of demarcating this disputed border area came up recently when Uzbekistan moved forces to the border and this happened right after Kyrgyzstan refused a visit by an Uzbek delegation to the Kasansay reservoir that provides water to an Uzbek village...Uzbekistan believes it belongs to them because construction was paid for by the Uzbek SSR, while Kyrgyzstan cites how it is located a few kilometers from the border...

...Uzbek specialists service the reservoir and the dam...The road from the Uzbek town of Kasansay to the reservoir runs through the border and into Kyrgyz territory...the Ungar-Too Mountain can be clearly seen on the road between Ala-Buk and Kerben, where Kyrgyz telecommunications equipment sits. Residents remember how Uzbek border guards landed here in 2013...on March 25, a week after Uzbekistan deployed its forces in the border area, the head of Border Guard Service of Kyrgyzstan Rayimberdy Duyshembiyev and the commander of the Border Guards of the National Security Committee of Uzbekistan Rustam Eminzhanov met for discussions... Uzbek and Kyrgyz forces left the disputed border area on the night of March 26...

A New Kind of CSTO Exercise?

OE Watch Commentary: The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) has held several joint military exercises in the past few years in Tajikistan, in addition to a large exercise that Russian and Tajik forces carried out in March 2016 at facilities across the country. The excerpted accompanying article reports on “Search-2016,” another exercise of CSTO member states in Tajikistan that started on 18 April and while it has similarities to past exercises, there are a couple of differences worth noting.

First, the article mentions that the exercise involves reconnaissance units and their role in a scenario of combating a terrorist group which had penetrated into the territory of a member state. This follows the same scenario of the majority of CSTO joint exercises that take place and while units like these have played a role in the past, this is the first time that they are the focus of an exercise.

Another notable difference in this exercise is how participants will train on conducting operations in unfamiliar terrain. Other reports on the exercise show that this does not apply to all CSTO members’ forces and it was noted by a member of the unit from Belarus that they needed more experience conducting operations in mountainous terrain. This is significant considering how leaders of member states have shown reluctance to get involved in conflicts that do not directly affect them, regardless of obligations under the CSTO’s mutual defense article. It is also noted in the article that the exercise included a special operation to seize and destroy critical objects. Past exercises have included operating in mountainous terrain and protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks, but the seizure and destruction of critical objects is something not seen before. The author of the article did not elaborate on what the seizure and destruction involved and it could have meant actions to deny the opposing force access to various objects.

Lastly, the total number of soldiers and equipment involved for a CSTO exercise is not the smallest ever utilized, but it is also not the Collective Operational Reaction Force typically seen in exercises like this. There have been hints in the past year that the CSTO, and Russian forces in Tajikistan, would try to maintain readiness for any situation in Central Asia with a smaller presence. The CSTO could be pushing for reconnaissance units to play a more significant role than the larger units in the reaction force and this is worth noting for future exercises. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The units will practice carrying out reconnaissance in mountainous terrain, collecting, processing and exchanging intelligence, as well as actions in the course of a special operation to seize and destroy critical objects in unfamiliar terrain.”

“Reconnaissance units from member states of the Collective Security Treaty Organization conduct sand table preparations for “Search-2016,” an exercise held in Tajikistan in April 2016.”
Source: <http://vsr.mil.by/2016/04/27/i-net-zadach-nevypolnimyx/>



Source: “Бордюжа назвал цели новых крупных учений в Таджикистане (Bordyuzha named the goals of the new major exercise in Tajikistan),” 18 April 2016.
<http://news.tj/ru/news/bordyuzha-nazval-tseli-novykh-krupnykh-uchenii-v-tadzhikistane>

Bordyuzha named the goals of the new major exercise in Tajikistan

“Search-2016,” the first joint exercise of intelligence forces of CSTO member states, opened today at the “Magob” training facility in Tajikistan...The CSTO said that the activities of intelligence units have a special role in the identification and detection of terrorist groups penetrating into CSTO member states...

The units taking part in the exercise are from various specialized units of the armed forces of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, and Tajikistan. The total number involved is 1500 soldiers and transport aircraft. The units will practice carrying out reconnaissance in mountainous terrain, collecting, processing and exchanging intelligence, as well as actions in the course of a special operation to seize and destroy critical objects in unfamiliar terrain.

Conscription and Contract Service in the Russian Federation

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation is currently engaged in its annual spring conscription campaign. The accompanying article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* outlines some of the details of the campaign, citing Colonel General Tonkoshkurov, Chief of the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff.

Among the more interesting details, the Russian Voluntary Society for Promotion of the Army, Air Force, and Navy (DOSAAF) program, in conjunction with vocational training programs, will cause Russia to induct 20,000 conscripts who already hold valid military occupational specialties (welders, mechanics, drivers, etc.). This pre-military training is especially valuable for Russia, as conscripts only serve one year.

The article also mentions the use of the Passport personnel system. The Russian Armed Forces has already begun implementing a Common Access Card like technology, email encryption, and medical records for identity; apparently the Passport personnel system will be used in conjunction with these cards to better track personnel issues.

Tonkoshkurov also mentions the relatively new “Science Company” program. Just as athletically gifted conscripts are placed into sports companies, now academically gifted conscripts are placed in science companies. Personnel in science companies are reportedly participating in 20 research projects, and within one six-month period published 40 articles and prepared eight patent applications. The science companies are also a gateway for conscripts to enter commissioned service: 41 conscripts from these companies have been commissioned as lieutenants.

The most interesting change in the draft this year is that conscripts are now being given the option to immediately sign enlistment contracts. Previously, conscripts were required to serve six months before they were allowed to sign enlistment contracts.

The accompanying article from *Izvestiya* discusses this development, and the economic motivations for personnel desiring contract service. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Viktor Khudoleyev, “Serve Worthily!” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 1 April 2016, <<http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/28331-sluzhite-dostojno>>, accessed 1 May 2016.

Serve Worthily!

The chief of the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff (GOMU) noted that around 20,000 new recruits will arrive in the troops who trained in military occupational specialties in Russian Voluntary Society for Promotion of the Army, Air Force, and Navy (DOSAAF) organizations and in secondary professional education establishments... Recruitment to sports companies continues. Today 386 persons are serving in these subunits. Colonel General Tonkoshkurov noted that during the past year servicemen of these sports companies won 105 awards, including 47 golds, for the country in international competitions...

[The use of the] Passport automated system began this year for the purpose of establishing unified record-keeping of Armed Forces personnel; monitoring the provision of various kinds of allowances and medical services to servicemen; and organizing the training process. In this connection, citizens called up for military service and being sent into the Armed Forces this spring will be issued personal electronic cards.

With respect to results of the 2015 fall draft, the chief of General Staff GOMU announced that 147,100 draftees were called up and sent into the troops during that period...In addition, during the 2015 spring and fall drafts the parents of draftees were given the opportunity to attend sessions of draft boards making decisions with respect to their sons. Around 20,000 parents took advantage of this right.

During the fall draft over 8,000 citizens took advantage of “hot lines” on questions of the call-up of citizens for military service, including over 400 who contacted the General Staff directly.

“While the majority of contacts previously concerned the granting of a deferment or exemption from the draft, lately draftees have begun to inquire about features of service in specific branches of the Armed Forces and combat arms, above all the VDV, Spetsnaz, and naval infantry as well as in scientific companies,” Colonel General Tonkoshkurov announced. “Currently 12 scientific companies in which 561 persons serve have been activated and manned.” After performing conscripted service, 41 servicemen of scientific companies have been appointed to military positions with conferral of the first officer rank of lieutenant...

There were 742 persons sent to alternative civilian service during the spring and fall draft campaigns of 2015. The number of citizens who received notices but who evaded the call-up for military service dropped by more than 20 percent in 2015 compared with 2014 and comprised 4,766 persons...The indicator of citizens’ fitness for military service in terms of health is improving. It was 77 percent in the fall of last year. Around 124,000 draftees were sent to medical establishments for a thorough exam.

(continued)

Continued: Conscription and Contract Service in the Russian Federation

Source: Yelena Loriya, and Dmitriy Litovkin, "Two Years for One. For the First Time, Conscripts Given Right to Turn Down Draft Service Immediately and Sign Two-Year Contract," *Izvestiya Online*, 26 February 2016, <<http://izvestia.ru/news/605056#ixzz41HhAj5bx>>, accessed 1 May 2016.

Two Years for One. For the First Time, Conscripts Given Right to Turn Down Draft Service Immediately and Sign Two-Year Contract

A spring conscription campaign which could radically change the composition of the Russian Army starts in one month. For the first time 2016 conscripts will have the right to turn down conscription and sign a professional two-year service contract within the framework of the military reform that has been in progress since 2008. Prior to this it was possible to sign a contract only after six months of compulsory service. "This standard was intended from the start for people with college education," Valentina Melnikova, chair of the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers and member of the Defense Ministry Public Council, told Izvestiya. "Graduates of the Moscow Aviation Institute, Moscow Highways Institute, Bauman State Polytechnical Institute, and other colleges. Furthermore, the plans were to conscript them for contracts not with military units but with parallel organizations linked to the military department. Those are organizations where they need people with higher education: cosmodromes, the military-industrial complex, etc."

As for the reasons for the growing interest in contract service, it is a case of "fortune through misfortune." According to Federal Labor and Employment Service data last year, more than one-third of country's unemployed (30.5 percent) are young people aged 14 to 29. The State Statistics Service data is more detailed: In 2015 the level of unemployment was 31.6 percent among 15- to 19-year-old city dwellers and 28.5 percent in the rural population (out of all economically active population). These numbers are 13.5 and 16.4 percent respectively in the 20-24 age group.

Economic crisis, drop in income, unemployment -- all these factors make contract service more attractive to yesterday's school graduate who is not planning to go into higher education.

"No one has studied the connection between the impoverishment that really is taking place and the desire to serve," Doctor of Economic Sciences Yelena Avraamova, head of the Laboratory for Problems of Economic Behavior and Social Mobility at the Russian Academy of Sciences...



The Chief of the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff, Colonel General Tonkoshkurov
Source: http://eng.mil.ru/images/upload/2015/001BAL_4341-550.jpg

Russia Fielding 'Sixth Generation' Tactical Radios

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has made a great effort to develop a “network-centric” command and control system (communications reform was one of the key aspects of the 2008 “New Look” reforms). Network-centric warfare can roughly be described as the wide-scale use of electronic reconnaissance and targeting systems (satellites, unmanned aerial vehicles, etc.) and use of mobile formations that can be quickly deployed throughout the entire theater of military operations to deliver decisive strikes on the enemy’s flanks and rear. At the highest levels this concept has led to the establishment of a national command center that will reportedly be connected to subordinate command centers at the operational strategic command (military district) and army group levels. At the tactical level the Russian Armed Forces is experimenting with several tactical systems for brigade level C2.

A key enabling technology for network-centric warfare is a stable and robust tactical radio system. The Russian Federation has made great efforts in transitioning away from Soviet-era analog-based equipment to digital equipment with substantial data transmission, encryption, and anti-jamming capabilities. The Russian Federation is currently fielding two families of radios; the R-168 Akveduk and the R-187 Azart. Although both are still being procured, the Azart is apparently the most sophisticated, as it is often referred too as a “sixth generation” radio in the Russian media. The compact, frequency hopping VHF-capable Azart made its first public appearance in 2014 on the “polite people” who occupied the Crimea in early 2014.

The accompanying articles from *Sputnik* and *Gazeta.ru* discuss radio innovations of the United Instrument Manufacturing Corporation (UIMC), the manufacturer of the Azart. Although these radio systems may not be of the Azart family (models are not specified), it is likely they share many features. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: “Russia to Start Mass Production of Advanced Radio Sets for Army in 2017,” *Sputnik Online*, 11 March 2016, <<http://sputniknews.com/military/20160311/1036128662/radio-sets-russian-army.html>>, accessed 18 April 2016.

The serial production of a new generation radio sets for the Russian army, ensuring the secure transfer of data over distances of up to 600 km (about 370 miles) without silent zones, will be launched next year, Russia’s United Instrument Manufacturing Corporation (UIMC) said Friday.

“UIMC has completed the development of a new generation of manpack radio sets for the army, security agencies and the Emergencies Ministry. The digital MOI radio set provides high-speed secure data transfer over distances of up to 600 kilometers ensuring the absence of ‘dead zones’ where other means of communication cannot work reliably... The start of its serial production is scheduled for 2017,” the company said in a statement...UIMC, a part of Russia’s state technologies corporation Rostec, added that the new radio sets feature the ability to choose optimal communication routes and the automatic testing and restoration of operational capacity...

Source: Yekaterina Zgirovskaya, “The Enemy Will Not Monitor the S-500: Advanced Air Defense System Will Have Unique Radio Communications System,” *Gazeta.ru Online*, 5 April 2016, <<http://www.gazeta.ru/army/2016/04/05/8160479.shtml>>, accessed 18 May 2016.

The advanced Russian S-500 air defense missile system will acquire unique covert radio stations, which will be developed in the next two years. This was reported to “Gazeta.ru” by designers of the United Instrument Building Corporation, which manufactures communications, command and control, and radio electronic warfare (REB) systems for the Armed Forces. Thanks to these systems enemies will not be able to monitor conversations of the S-500 crews or to interfere with them.

According to forecasts, the latest S-500 air defense missile...will acquire totally new radio communications systems, which have no equals in data quality and transmission range, as well as covertness. A unique feature of the S-500 long-range system, which has an attack radius of 600 km, can intercept not only aerodynamic targets (aircraft, helicopters, etc.), but ballistic and cruise missiles as well. “At the present time the corporation is conducting work on the next-, sixth-generation radio communications assets to equip various types of military equipment, including air defense missile systems, both for those already in the inventory, as well as those under development,” “Gazeta.ru” was informed by the United Instrument Building Corporation spokesman...

The spokesman explained that previous-generation radio stations have operated on previously assigned frequencies, which increased the probability of monitoring and interception of transmitted information. But in the advanced systems such situations will be impossible.

According to the spokesman, the communications device that the corporation sends to the troops today...already have high jamming resistance and it provides for “pseudo-random frequency changing and communications concealment” modes. The new device will possess fundamentally new capabilities and will substantially increase the quality, range, security and covertness of communications. The creation of the sixth-generation equipment is an issue for the coming two years,” the OPK spokesman explained.

As Mikhail Khodarenok, an expert in the field of anti-aircraft and anti-ballistic missile defense (PVO and PRO), explained to “Gazeta.ru,” the main requirements for PVO communications assets and systems are covertness and resistance to jamming...

Russia Forms 'National Guard'

OE Watch Commentary: The recent announcement that the Russian Federation has reorganized its security forces by forming a National Guard came as a great surprise to those following Russian security developments. National Guards are found in many other post-Soviet states, but there was no public discussion of establishing a similar institution in Russia.

Russia's Soviet legacy made stove-piped militarized intelligence and security agencies the norm. The Soviets were leery of investing all military power in a single organization or ministry, due to fears of a coup. Since the Russian civilian leadership has had few concerns about its ability to control these militarized security and intelligence services, the Russian Federation has generally been trending towards the consolidation of these organizations' powers to reduce bureaucracy and redundancies.

The establishment of a new ministerial-level body (bureaucracy) appears to be a move against this trend. The National Guard will reportedly include the Ministry of Internal Affairs-Internal Troops (MVD-VV), Special Rapid-Response Detachment (SOBR), the Special-Purpose Mobile Detachment (OMON), the MVD Prompt-Response and Aviation Forces' Special-Purpose Center, and aviation subunits. Estimates of the total personnel controlled have varied between 200,000-300,000. The accompanying excerpted article from *Komsomolskaya Pravda* gives an excellent synopsis of the baseline facts about this new structure.

One of the most interesting aspects of the National Guard is the possibility it could be used for peacekeeping purposes, as discussed in the accompanying article from *Kommersant*, but this prospect seems unlikely. Aside from all other descriptions of the National Guard having an inherently internal security functions, the Russian Federation already has a robust peacekeeping apparatus in the Ministry of Defense. Traditionally, peacekeeping duties were the sole purview of the Russian Airborne (VDV), which has one dedicated peacekeeping brigade (31st Air Assault Brigade at Ulyanovsk) and dedicated battalions in each of the four airborne divisions. In the last few years Russia has expanded the number of peacekeeping forces by designating dedicated peacekeeping battalions in each of its naval infantry brigades and transitioning the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade in Samara to the first dedicated motorized rifle peacekeeping brigade in the Russian Armed Forces. Currently there are plans for another motorized rifle peacekeeping brigade to be stood up in Tuva. It seems unlikely that the Russian Federation would use the National Guard for peacekeeping purposes, which does not have a logistic structure for extraterritorial deployments, when there are already existing MoD units available to perform this task, which do have suitable logistics. Nevertheless, if Russia desired to maintain a "lighter footprint" (police vs. military presence) in her near abroad, this could still be a possibility.

End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)

Source: Aleksandr Boyko, "Why Russia Needed a National Guard," *Komsomolskaya Pravda* Online, 6 April 2016, <<http://www.kp.ru/daily/26510/3382734/>>, accessed 15 April 2016.

Why Russia Needed a National Guard

- *Who will join the new service?*

The National Guard will be formed, based on the Russian Interior Ministry's Internal Troops. They will be its backbone...Around 200,000 people. [other reports state around 300,000 personnel]

- *What will the guards do and how will they be armed?*

Vasiliy Panchenkov, the head of the Internal Troops press service stated: "Stop riots, fight terrorism and gangs, free hostages...unauthorized rallies and other infringements of a non-violent nature will all still be cut short by employees of the OMON riot police and, if necessary, SOBR."

- *Is there an underlying economic motive here?*

Aleksandr Khinshteyn, the deputy head of the State Duma Security Committee, told Komsomolskaya Pravda that there were also economic reasons for combining several services in the National Guard. "Until recently, the Russian Interior Ministry's overall budget deficit comprised 127 billion rubles..." With the majority of the departments moving to the National Guard, there is the hope that this money will be found from cutting the superfluous bureaucratic superstructure of the services combined in the National Guard."

- *Will they be allowed to shoot to kill?*

[Yes]...This is the case. But all police employees have exactly this right under the law. And they have had it for a long time.

- *What will cooperation with the Interior Ministry and the Federal Security Service be like?*

Oleg Mikhaylov, the former head of the Russian Interior Ministry press service, explained whether the National Guard would duplicate the functions of Interior Ministry, FSB, and army.

"The army still serves for protection against an external enemy, while the National Guard will annihilate terrorists and other gangs inside the country. Moreover, the National Guard will not have its own investigative bodies, which the Interior Ministry and the FSB do have. Thus, the National Guard does not overlap with the other law-enforcement bodies in this sphere, but is more likely to become their security agency tool. A combat strike force."

- *What else will soldiers in this security agency body be allowed to do?*
- *The National Guard will obtain the right to cordon off territory, and to introduce a strict permit system there.*
- *To check citizens' documents, draw up charge sheets on administrative violations, and to detain citizens for three hours to ascertain their identity.*
- *To enter any premises to save lives, detain supposed criminals, and put a stop to unlawful acts.*
- *People will be able to serve as conscripts in the National Guard.*

(continued)

Continued: Russia Forms 'National Guard'

Source: Aleksandr Igorev: "A Place in the Formation Has Been Designated for the Russian Guard: The President Has Defined the Missions of the New Service," *Kommersant Online*, 12 April 2016. <<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2961750>>, accessed 15 April 2016.

Monitoring arms trafficking and private security activity will be assigned to the National Guard, which has received the abbreviated designation Rosgvardiya [Russian Guard] and the guardsmen themselves will be able to participate in operations abroad to maintain or restore "international peace and security" based upon the president's decision. The draft RF Presidential Edict on the Statute on the Russian Guard discusses this...

We must point out that, according to the draft law, based upon the RF President's decision, the Russian Guard can be assigned "to activities for the maintenance or restoration of international peace and security". This is first and foremost about possible measures within UN international police forces. This function previously fell within the jurisdiction of various MVD subunits.

The statute also stipulates the overall structure of the Federal National Guard Troops Service. Troops, a main staff, main directorates, directorates and other subunits, "which directly realize the directions of the Russian Guard's activities", and also administrative structures will be part of its composition. Furthermore, auxiliary subunits are stipulated.

The Director-National Guard Commander-in-Chief will head the service. General of the Army Viktor Zolotov was appointed to this post last Tuesday. Six deputies, including a first deputy and first deputy-chief of staff, have been stipulated for him. The statute states that precisely the director "within his competence" forms the Guard's military units, its organizations and subunits. It is assumed that the subdivisions, which have transferred to the new service from the MVD- extra-departmental security, the licensing-authorization structure (it monitors private security activity), and administrative organs of the Spetsnaz and OMON will obtain the status of main directorates and directorates.

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

More on Russia's New National Guard

OE Watch Commentary: While the question of fielding a National Guard has been discussed for years, President Putin's recent decision to create this force came as something of a surprise to many observers. Some analysts have suggested that this new power ministry will help with maintaining domestic stability as Russia approaches the election cycle (Duma elections this fall and presidential elections in 2018), particularly in light of growing economic difficulties. Others have posited that this move was designed to consolidate internal security forces under a single command (led by a trusted colleague) with direct control by the president. Still others have posited that this new organization will be better structured to handle the domestic challenges of organized crime and counterterrorism.

According to the brief excerpt from the Russian business daily, *Kommersant*, this new organization will be officially known as "Rosgvardiya" (Russian Guard). Among its broad range of tasks, this formation will also be responsible for regulating domestic weapons and Russia's huge private security market. While individual gun ownership remains relatively rare in Russia, there are literally thousands of private security companies (up to 3 million personnel), each maintaining its own arsenal of small arms. Establishing control over these private security firms will not only preclude these weapons falling into the wrong hands, but also will conceivably give the Kremlin leadership another tool in its hybrid arsenal.

According to the excerpt, alongside its many other functions, Rosgvardiya may also be responsible for conducting international peacekeeping operations. As the article points out, the new decree stipulates that the president may instruct Rosgvardiya to take part in "activities on maintaining or restoring international peace and security." Prior to this the Russian leadership had used select Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Affairs units for peacekeeping operations. Assigning this mission to the new National Guard suggests that its mandate could stretch beyond helping to maintain domestic security.

The Kremlin's peacekeeping track record in its "near abroad" has not always been impartial. Given the tenor of official rhetoric over the past couple of years regarding the necessity of protecting Kremlin interests within the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World), this new National Guard may find itself very busy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: "Росгвардии указано место в строю," [Rosgvardiya shown its place in the ranks] *Kommersant Online*, 11 April 2016. <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2961750>

The National Guard, which has received the official name "Rosgvardiya, will be assigned control over the use of weapons within private security companies; the guardsmen themselves, when ordered by the President will be able to participate in operations abroad to maintain or restore "international peace and security." This is stated in the draft presidential decree on the creation of the Rosgvardiya....

...The document says that Rosgvardiya will execute state policy on arms control and on private security services. It will enforce law and order during riots and in emergencies, combat terrorism and extremism, and ensure security of energy facilities....

...Moreover, where necessary, Rosgvardiya will be involved in territorial protection of the state, ensuring martial law and state of emergency, if they are introduced in Russia or in separate locations. The decree also stipulates that the president may instruct Rosgvardiya to take part in "activities on maintaining or restoring international peace and security". This is said to primarily relate to international UN missions. Previously, this function fell under the purview of various divisions of the Ministry of Interior (MVD)....



Viktor Zolotov, Commander Rosgvardiya.
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Russian Reactions to Putin's Announcement of Syria Withdrawal

OE Watch Commentary: On 14 March 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a partial withdrawal of Russian forces from Syria, stating that the Kremlin had achieved its main goals there. This announcement coincided with the commencement of the Syrian peace talks in Geneva. Putin also asked the Russian Foreign Ministry to increase Russia's participation in the peace talks.

Details about exactly what the Russian withdrawal will look like remain unclear. Indeed, the next day Putin said that Russia can return to Syria within hours. He also specified that Russia's Tartus naval facility and Khmeimim airbase in Syria will continue to operate without change.

Meanwhile, the accompanying excerpts from liberal-leaning *Echo Moskvy* from 15 May 2016, the day after Putin's announcement of the withdrawal, illustrate that a segment of Russian society distrusts him and mocks his regime.

Anton Orekh, an observer for *Echo Moskvy*, sarcastically writes, "We have already become so familiar with Syria, it is unclear how we're going to live without it. It is unclear how we had lived without it!" He explains that Syria had completely dominated Russian news broadcasts since September 2015, and, in his view, served as a distraction from Russia's domestic problems, "We were told more about Syria than about their own country. And who in general in Russia is interested in Russia, if there is Syria!"

"To Russia, rising from its knees, it was explained that the main purpose of this operation was to stop ISIS terrorists... and not allow them to come to us in Russia. And now the leaders report that during all this time 17 (!) field commanders have been killed," writes political analyst Andrei Pionkovsky with similar sarcasm. "Now our 'mission is accomplished,' and the soldiers are returning home with their heads held high. But what about the others, except for those 17? Who will meet them now meet on the distant frontiers? Or will they come to us?" *(continued)*

Source: Anton Orekh, "Как же мы будем жить без Сирии?" (How are We Going to Live without Syria?), *Echo Moskvy* (Moscow's Echo), 15 March 2016. <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/oreh/1730218-echo/>

... We have already become so familiar with Syria, it is unclear how we're going to live without it. It is unclear how we had lived without it! For many years [Syria] was a small spot on a map, and 99% of our people were unlikely to find this spot on this map. But a year ago everything changed. It turned out that Syria – is our sacred land. That it is precisely in Syria that the fate of our country is being decided, and perhaps of the entire world. For the last six months, news programs began, and often continued and ended with news from Syria.

...We were told more about Syria than about their own country. And who in general in Russia is interested in Russia, if there is Syria! Syria turned out even more important to us than Ukraine, in which just recently it was impossible to believe...

What will the TV talk about now? How to fill in endless hours of propagandistic broadcasting? It cannot be that we won, left victorious, and war somehow continues ... So in front of the propaganda a difficult question stands: what to do, or more precisely - what to say?

About Primakov

I knew him very well. Against the background of our general slacking off, carelessness, he was completely different - very businesslike, hard-working, efficient and conscientious. In this sense, he was absolutely not a Russian person. Although, of course, he was not Russian - Jewish on both sides ... But at the same time - a typical Soviet person! At 100%! Not I - no, I am completely anti-Soviet. And he—Soviet...

By the way, the KGB failed to recruit me... they gave up on me but got their revenge. For many years I was not allowed abroad - anywhere other than Poland and GDR [German Democratic Republic, East Germany], perhaps...

Source: Andrei Piontkovskiy, "Процесс пошел" (The Process Has Begun), *Echo Moskvy* (Moscow's Echo), 15 March 2016. http://echo.msk.ru/blog/piontkovsky_a/1729914-echo/

...To Russia, rising from its knees, it was explained that the main purpose of this operation was to stop ISIS terrorists/banned on Russia's territory / on distant borders and not allow them to come to us in Russia. And now the leaders report that during all this time 17 (!) field commanders have been killed. Now our "mission is accomplished," and the soldiers are returning home with their heads held high. But what about the others, except for those 17? Who will meet them now meet on the distant frontiers? Or will they come to us?

So ok, let's say that this was a formal declarative goal, but everyone knew and real one - to help Assad deal with the opposition... And now they throw sand into the eyes of the viewers, listing their humanitarian achievements ...Some very good reasons must have forced Putin and company to make such a humiliating somersault.

I do not know who and what serious arguments presented to these people, to bring them to such a state, after their propaganda tirelessly instilled into us how effectively we resist the hateful pindosy [gringos] and fight terrorists on the distant frontiers of the Russian World ... In any the case is a serious foreign policy and image defeat for the regime. One of those that lead to the fall of such dictatorships.

(continued)

Continued: Russian Reactions to Putin’s Announcement of Syria Withdrawal

Orekh concludes his commentary by asking what new topic the Russian propaganda machine will turn to now that Syria is out of the news. To Piontkovskiy, Putin’s announcement of partial withdrawal is a sign of the beginning of the end of his regime. The announcement was a “humiliating somersault,” and the decision to make it was a “humiliating” one and presents a public image defeat for Putin. Piontkovskiy is unsure what exactly prompted Putin and his circle to make the decision to withdraw, but feels that it is with such defeats dictatorships such as Putin’s crumble. Time will tell, but Orekh’s and Piontkovskiy’s comments point to less stability of the Putin regime than meets the eye. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Naryshkin: Spirituality and Tradition Bind Armenia with Russia

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpt from *NewsArmenia.am*, on 31 March 2016 Russia’s Duma Chairman Sergei Naryshkin said that Russia and Armenia serve as examples of commitment to traditional values and that the two countries share a deep history of commitment to the same spirituality. Indeed, he stressed that it is this that has become a fundamental component of modern relations between the two countries, according to the excerpt. He made these comments in his welcoming remarks at a conference in Armenia entitled, “Traditional Values: Spiritually-Moral Orientation of Modern Society.”

Naryshkin’s emphasis on traditional values and spirituality comes only a few months after Russian President Vladimir Putin approved the latest iteration of Russia’s National Security Strategy at the end of 2015. The concept emphasizes, among other things, spirituality and morality as part of Russia’s national security strategy—a notion that went largely unnoticed by the Western press, which typically emphasized the traditional threats the Russian document outlined, which included NATO and the West more broadly. The Security Strategy, in turn, came in the context of Kremlin-driven backlash against Western values in Russia, which the Kremlin and the Kremlin-sponsored media portray as morally corrupt and against which Russia, in this view, stands as the bulwark of protection, with emphasis on what it calls traditional values and a revival of a positive image of Stalin.

Russia’s reach in Armenia is vast and multifaceted. The Armenian government sees Russia as the ultimate guarantor of its security. Both countries are also predominantly Christian. It is consistent with the Kremlin approach in the current context, then, that Naryshkin made his comments. Yet such comments typically go unnoticed by the Western press. Naryshkin’s comment shows that the Kremlin’s talk of morality and spirituality is not confined to Russia’s borders. This trend certainly remains important to watch both in Russia and throughout the post-Soviet space, where Russia retains its closest alliances. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: “Россия и Армения дают пример приверженности традиционным ценностям – Нарышкин” (Russia and Armenia Give Example of Commitment to Traditional Values – Naryshkin), *NewsArmenia.am*, 31 March 2016 <http://newsarmenia.am/news/politics/rossiya-i-armeniya-dayut-primer-priverzhennosti-traditsionnym-tsennostyam-naryshkin/>

Russia and Armenia provide an example of commitment to traditional values, State Duma chairman Sergei Naryshkin said in his welcoming address to the participants of the conference “Traditional Values: Spiritually-Moral Orientation of Modern Society.”...

The Duma speaker underscored that the proximity of the spiritual ideals of the two nations, deep historical and friendly ties have become a fundamental component of modern relations between Armenia and Russia.

“I am sure that the results of the conference will contribute to the solution of many global issues, including the problems of dialogue between representatives of different countries and nationalities,” notes in the message.

The event is being held in the conference hall of the book depository “Tamar and Vache Manoukian” Holy Echmiadzin. The organizers of the conference, calling to unite the fraternal peoples of Russia and Armenia on the basis of long-term bonds of common spiritual and value orientations, became the Charitable Foundation of Support of Russian Holy Sites of Mount Athos, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church ...

Kudrin's NGO Proposes Democratization in the North Caucasus

OE Watch Commentary: On 1 April 2016 former Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin's Committee on Civil Initiatives (CGI) presented an expert report entitled, "The North Caucasus and the Current Model of Democratic Development"

While in government Kudrin was careful to slowly push for modest pro-Western fiscal reforms, but, according to expert assessments, he was reportedly fired in late 2011 when he publically opposed Russian President Vladimir Putin's policies, including what he believed was unsustainable military spending. Since then, Kudrin has participated in a number of anti-Putin protests and remains in the liberal anti-Putin camp. CGI has conducted a number of in-depth studies in recent years, including public opinion polling in Russia.

The accompanying excerpts provide a summary of the report's main findings. Two experts from the Gaidar Economic Policy Institute ultimately prepared the report, according to the article. Kudrin was close to the now-deceased Yegor Gaidar, who worked during the Boris Yeltsin presidency on reforming Russia into a Western free market economy.

The report rejects the prevalent view in Russia that the North Caucasus is doomed to remain on the "archaic" and "separate" path that leads away from mainstream development and modernization and recommends a number of policies that could bring this region closer to Russia. These include rejection of the previous model of favoring certain elites, which, the report's authors point out, only reinforces the clan-based system by favoring a clan that is closest to the Kremlin. Though they do not say it, this is precisely what happened in Chechnya when Putin installed the corrupt pro-Kremlin clan of Ramzan Kadyrov.

The report's other recommendations include working on elimination of radical ideology, integrating the region's Muslims into mainstream Russian life, and rejecting even a moderate form of Sharia law which, according to the authors, in the past allowed opportunities for radical elements to push for harsher versions of this law.

End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)

Source: "Комитет гражданских инициатив Кудрина объяснил, как привить демократию Северному Кавказу" (Kudrin's Committee of Civil Initiatives Explained how to Foster Democracy in the North Caucasus), *Newsru.com*, 1 April 2016. <http://www.newsru.com/russia/01apr2016/northerncaucasia.html>

Former Minister Alexei Kudrin's Committee on Civil Initiatives (CGI) presented an expert report "The North Caucasus and the current model of democratic development." In it a number of methods are formulated which, according to experts, will transform the North Caucasus of "traditionalism reserve," developing according to a "separate path," to the region developing by laws and social adopted by the rest of Russia's territory.

The Gaidar Economic Policy Institute staff members prepared the document...

The Speakers consider one of the main causes of many conflicts in the North Caucasus social changes associated with the breaking of the rural way of life, intense urbanization that has occurred in recent decades...

CGI policy recommendations in North Caucasus regions

First, is it necessary to create conditions for real change of the elites in the region. Starting in Dagestan criminal cases against the heads of the major clans undermines their role and influence in Republican politics, as CGI experts point out, does not lead to real change of power. This is not the destruction of the clan model, but redistribution of power resources in favor of clans that are closer to the current government and more integrated into it, the report said...

Second, the government should push out radical jihadist variety of Islamist ideology, and rely on a moderate version of non-traditional Islam, advocating modernization values and assuming integration of Muslims into the modern society

Third, it is necessary to transfer real conflicts in the region to conflicts in the political field, to interaction of different political forces, not interfere with the holding of free elections at all levels of government

Fourth, it is important to strengthen the regulatory role of the Russian legislation in the North CaucasusIn the context of inter-Islamic conflict, any, even limited legalization of Sharia justice may exacerbate the situation, especially if one of the parties, with the support of the state, attempt to monopolize this sphere....[T]here are precedents throughout the world, when in the conditions of limited legalization of Sharia radical forces began to struggle for its full implementation, including criminal punishment, and this led to armed conflicts and civil wars ...

Russian Joint Exercises in Indonesia

OE Watch Commentary: In addition to Russia’s recent activity in the Baltic Sea, the Russian Navy has also been active further east. A detachment of the Russian Pacific Fleet, consisting of the anti-submarine ship “Admiral Vinogradov,” ocean lifeguard ship “Photius Krylov,” and the tanker “Irkutsk,” under command of Captain 1st Rank Aleksandr Potapov, made an unofficial visit to the Indonesian port of Pandang on 12 April 2016.

This detachment of the Pacific Fleet, which has been in the Indian Ocean since 8 April, made this visit to Pandang to “[participate] in a multinational scale teaching of humanitarian and anti-terrorist exercises known as ‘Komodo-2016,’ which took place from 12-18 April.” This is the second iteration of these multilateral naval exercises in which Russia has participated, following “Komodo-2014.” “From 12-14 April at the headquarters of the joint exercises ‘Komodo 2016,’ the [35 participating nations] agreed upon procedures and rules of action at sea, and the nuances of episodes of joint maneuvers.”

The opening ceremony of the multinational naval exercises, held on 12 April, celebrated the participating nations with a joint declaration at the monument “Dove of Peace,” representing a mutual cooperation and readiness for peace, as is the slogan for “Komodo-2016.” In addition to classes on the shore for the crews of Russian ships, there was also an extensive cultural program prepared that the Russian sailors took part in.

“The detachment of ships of the Pacific Fleet left Vladivostok on 28 March, 2016, and during their military service in the Pacific they plan to visit five countries and take part in two multinational exercises in Asian-Pacific countries in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Burnside)**

Source: Gordeyev, A.Y. “Отряд кораблей Тихоокеанского флота зашёл в индонезийский порт Паданг,” [The detachment of Pacific Fleet ships went into Indonesian port Padang] *Trend*, 11 April 2016. http://function.mil.ru/news_page/world/more.htm?id=12083022@egNews

The detachment of Pacific Fleet ships went into Indonesian port Padang

This detachment of the Naval Pacific Fleet, which has been in the Indian Ocean since the 8th of April 2016 made this visit to Pandang to “[participate] in a multinational scale teaching of humanitarian and anti-terrorist exercises known as “Komodo-2016”, which took place from the 12th to the 18th of April.

From the 12th to the 14th of April at the headquarters of the joint exercises “Komodo 2016”, the [35 participating nations] agreed upon procedures and rules of action at sea, and the nuances of episodes of joint maneuvers.

The detachment of ships of the Pacific Fleet left Vladivostok March 28, 2016, and during their military service in the Pacific, they plan to visit five countries and take part in two multinational exercises in Asian-Pacific countries in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.



Location of Padang
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/43/Padang_location.png

Moscow Military Conference

OE Watch Commentary: For over the past decade the Kremlin leadership has sponsored a high-level political forum (the Valdai discussion club), wherein international visitors are invited to Russia, where they get to meet and discuss topical issues with key individuals within the government. According to the official website (<http://valdaiclub.com/>), the purpose of the annual conference is to “promote dialogue between Russian and international intellectual elite, and to make an independent, unbiased scientific analysis of political, economic and social events in Russia and the rest of the world.” Some observers have suggested, however, that this well funded conference is more of an attempt by the Kremlin to employ soft-power tactics to gain influence among Western journalists and scholars who study Russia.

It would appear that the Russian military has developed a similar strategy. For the fifth year in a row the Russian Ministry of Defense will be hosting the Moscow Conference on International Security, an annual forum whereby Russian security officials provide their perspective on global and regional security issues. Previous conferences have examined topics such as multinational military coalitions (e.g., NATO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization) and regional security. The first conference in 2012 was dedicated to European missile defense, where Russian officials used this forum to spell out their objections to this plan.

According to the conference website (<http://eng.mil.ru/en/mcis/index.htm>), fighting terrorism will be the primary focus of this year’s meeting. As the brief first excerpt points out, this year’s conference will host nearly 500 delegates from more than 83 countries. There will also be a number of high-level representatives from international organizations. Since the application of Western sanctions in response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, Kremlin officials have worked diligently to dispel any sense of international isolation. Although NATO officials were invited to attend, the second excerpt indicates that they have formally turned down the invitation. The article points out, however, that NATO may still send unofficial representatives in order to report accurately what was covered during the conference.

By hosting these high-level conferences, where foreign participants get to directly interact with key Russian officials, the Kremlin gives the impression that it values open and constructive dialogue toward improving global and regional security. While cultivating greater discourse and global transparency remain worthwhile endeavors, Russian actions often speak otherwise. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: “Russian Defense Ministry to Organize 5th Moscow Int’l Security Conference on Apr 27-28,” *Interfax*, 14 March 2016.

The problems with the fight against terrorism, military cooperation in building up global security, European security and the situation in the Asia-Pacific region will be highlighted by the participants in the 5th International Conference on International Security, the Russian Defense Ministry’s press service and information directorate told Interfax-AVN on Monday....

...“The defense ministers and the delegations from the defense agencies of 83 countries, Russian officials, as well as representatives of the expert community, and academic circles, are invited to a forum, which will be held on April 27-28,” the directorate said in a statement....

...The chiefs of the international organizations, namely the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (OSCE), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) will participate in it, it said. Over 500 guests are expected to attend

Source: “Борьба с терроризмом: Москва примет конференцию по международной безопасности” [The fight against terrorism: Moscow will hold a conference on international security]. *Rosinform.ru*, 6 April 2016. <http://www.rosinform.ru/antiterror/196983-v-moskve-snova-proydet-konferentsiya-po-mezhdunarodnoy-bezopasnosti/>

...Like last year, NATO officials refused to visit. However, there is information that some NATO countries may still send a delegate to the Moscow conference. It is clear that they will not do so without permission or orders of the general secretary or his deputies. Firsthand knowledge of what is said at the conference is very valuable....



Putin's German Judo Move?

OE Watch Commentary: In response to Russia's continued aggression against Ukraine and a more belligerent foreign policy, the West has applied economic sanctions along with other attempts to isolate the Kremlin leadership. There has also been a renewed military focus toward defending NATO's eastern flank. In reply, the Kremlin has adopted a multivector approach: countersanctions; continued denial of military involvement in SE Ukraine; import substitution; sustained focus on military modernization; and a skillful application of its growing collection of soft-power and information weapons.

The brief accompanying excerpt describes a recently published German book, ***Putins verdeckter Krieg: Wie Moskau den Westen destabilisiert*** [Putin's Covert War: How Moscow is Destabilizing the West], which details another instrument in the Kremlin's surreptitious and asymmetric arsenal. According to author Boris Reitschuster, "Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin (63) has set up a kind of underground force in Germany and other Western states." This force is allegedly built around "martial arts schools teaching a Russian martial art called *Systema*," where instructors are in reality members of elite military units. When needed, elements of these forces can be activated to carry out everything from "provoking unrest and uncertainty in the target area," to "distorting political and social processes in target countries." The article points out that last year, Western intelligence services identified some 300 men in Germany alone believed to be associated with the secret *Systema* structures. These members also have links with Cossack clubs and Russian biker gangs (Night Wolves).

Much has been written over the past couple of years regarding the Kremlin's use of unconventional and indirect methods to both defend its perceived legitimate sphere of interest and spread its influence abroad. Besides robust measures within the information sphere, it appears that the Kremlin leadership has infiltrated the realm of physical fitness and the martial arts training. Should relations between Russia and the West continue to deteriorate, there will likely be a corresponding increase in the Kremlin's asymmetric response from unexpected directions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

A government's nightmare come true: hostile fighters stay in the country as sleepers, saboteurs, and agent provocateurs waiting for combat orders. Is this only fiction for Germany? No, it is reality.

Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin (63) has set up a kind of underground force in Germany and other Western states, as research done by author and Putin biographer Boris Reitschuster (44) and other information Bild has obtained show.

For his new book entitled "Putin's Covert War"... Reitschuster analyzed, among others, the report of a Western European secret service.

According to it, Kremlin leader and former secret service chief Putin has direct access to a network of elite troops in the West. At its core are martial arts schools teaching a Russian martial art called Systema: training programs comprising one-on-one fighting and killing used in the past by Soviet and currently by Russian special commandos.

Most of those training at Systema schools are ordinary athletes, but the wirepullers in the background are believed to be the Russian military secret service GRU and Russian airborne troops (with their VDV special troops).

Author Reitschuster is certain: "This fighting force on enemy territory is a key element in Putin's covert war against the West."

Last year, Western intelligence services identified some 300 men in Germany alone believed to be associated with the secret Systema structures....

Meanwhile, Systema groups hold "regular maneuvers in the Swiss mountains, operating across borders, with lots of exercises also taking place in the Czech Republic," Reitschuster quotes from an intelligence service file. They have links with Cossack clubs and Russian biker gangs ("Night Wolves").

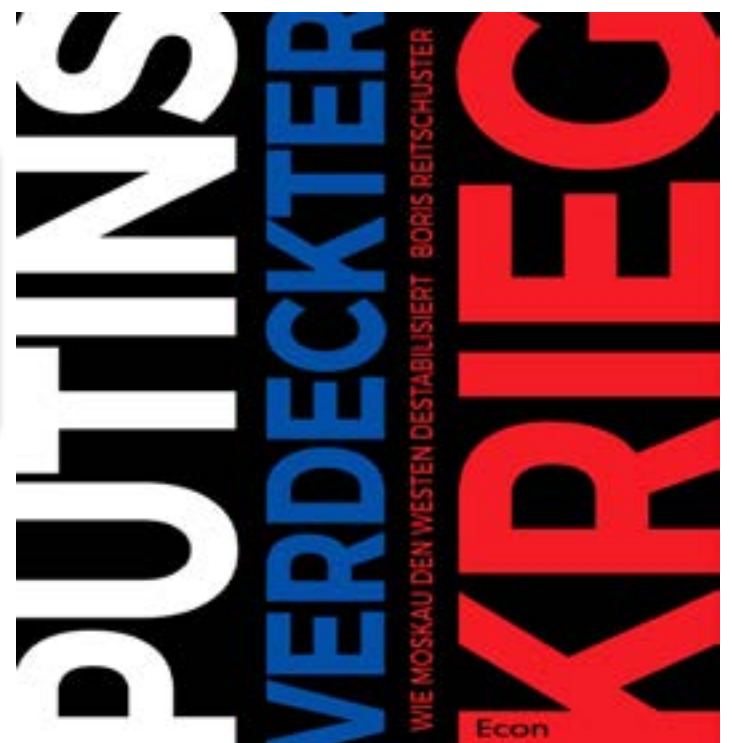
According to the intelligence analysis, these are the objectives of the "Systema Campaign":

- "Provoking unrest and uncertainty in the target area,"
- "Multiplying the number of troops by unknown commandos,"
- Recruiting "future elites,"
- "Distorting" political and social processes in target countries, and
- "Communicating non-democratic ideas."

According to Bild information, the groups also play an active part in the Reich Citizens' Movement, PEGIDA [Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West] and its offshoots, and in deliberate disinformation campaigns among Russo-Germans. ...

Source: "Neues Enthüllungsbuch | Russland steuert Geheim-Truppe in Deutschland!" [New Investigative Book: Russia Runs Secret Force in Germany!], *Bild*, 11 April 2016. <http://www.bild.de>

"Putin's verdeckter Krieg"
(Putin's Covert War)
Source: www.ullsteinbuchverlage.de



Spring 2016 Draft; Turning Away Conscripts?

OE Watch Commentary: Russia is in the midst of its latest military draft campaign, where between 1 April and 15 July 2016, more than 150,000 young Russian men will be conscripted for one year to serve in the country's various armed forces. If pro-government sources can be believed, Russian officials will have little problem reaching this target. According to the first brief excerpt from *Izvestiya*, military service has become so popular that defense officials are having to turn draftees away since "there is no room in the Army." The article goes on to explain that economics may play a significant role in this greater willingness to serve, since those who do not fulfill their military requirement are prohibited from taking up posts in the state service.

There is still some debate as to whether or not the overall draft pool is becoming healthier. On the one hand, the article points out that in 2014 more than 10% of draftees were discharged on health grounds after they had already donned a uniform. It quotes a representative of the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers who claims that "more than 50 percent of new recruits are not up to the requirements of their military posting on health grounds." Accessing these sick soldiers into the ranks is a huge expense for the military and "results in serious difficulties after they join their unit."

Others claim that the overall physical health of the country and draft pool continues to improve. It quotes a Duma deputy who states that "the prestige of service has risen to such an extent that strong and healthy young people from prosperous families have begun to be dispatched to the troops en masse." The article also quotes a doctor at a military hospital who claims that current draftees "are intelligent, well educated, and even the officers treat them differently." The excerpt points out that a higher percentage of the draftees have completed college (19% in 2014) and that a large number have already received preliminary military training at DOSAAF (Voluntary Society for the Promotion of the Army, Aviation, and Navy) institutions (25% in 2014).

A military will reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the country it purports to defend. Russia's military capabilities continue to grow stronger. Similarly, the Kremlin has spared no expense in inculcating patriotic sentiments within society. Its efforts appear to be paying off, as more young Russian men are willing to serve their country in uniform. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Roman Kretsul, "Призыв-2016: мест нет," [Draft 2016: No Room] *Izvestiya* Online, 30 March 2016. <http://izvestia.ru/news/607991>

The military are observing unusual trends in connection with the draft for military service: Whereas from the early 1990s the main headache for those involved in manning military units has been the shortage of new recruits because of the enormous number of evaders (there were hundreds of thousands of them), now the opposite situation is emerging: Many people would be happy to serve but they are not taking them -- there is "no room" in the Army. Izvestiya was told by Aleksandr Kanshin, deputy chairman of the public council at the Defense Ministry, that a week ago a muster of oblast and kray military commissars from the Western Military District was held in the Moscow region. These are the conclusions that the military drew as a result.

"Compulsory service has become more attractive for two reasons: On the one hand the Army's prestige has increased, and on the other service has become safer. Furthermore the law now prohibits those who have not served from taking up posts in the state service. As a result there are fewer evaders....

...Last spring the General Staff stated that during the draft campaign, in the course of which 154,000 people were placed under arms, about 600,000 young people passed through the draft commission. That is to say, three-fourths of citizens of draft age were not drafted....Let us observe that the draft plan for 2014, which was completely fulfilled, totaled 308,000...32,000 draftees were discharged on health grounds...

Valentina Melnikova, chairman of the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers and member of the Defense Ministry public council, points out that this is where the big problem lies: The military commissariats are still fulfilling the plan at all costs by drafting in young people en masse with various ailments, and this results in serious difficulties after they join their unit.

These young people are at serious risk to their health because their potential is not up to the conditions of service, while the commanding officers risk their careers because they are responsible for them. The state not only ends up without a soldier, it also spends a lot of money on treating him... According to Valentina Melnikova's estimates more than 50 percent of new recruits are not up to the requirements of their military posting on health grounds

Deputy Vladimir Bessonov expresses the opposite opinion: The prestige of service has risen to such an extent that strong and healthy young people from prosperous families have begun to be dispatched to the troops en masse. "We made amendments to legislation, thanks to which you cannot take up a post in the state service if you failed to serve in the Army without legitimate grounds," the parliamentarian explained. "

...Vladislav N., a doctor at one of Moscow's military hospitals, told Izvestiya that in recent years "draftees have begun to be notable for their intellectual level."

"They are intelligent, well educated, and even the officers treat them differently. If a soldier is polite and educated, nobody is going to swear at him for nothing....

...Indeed, on the results of the 2014 spring draft, when 154,000 people were dispatched to the troops, the Defense Ministry noted that 30,000 of them (19 percent) had higher education and about 40,000 (25 percent) were already trained in specific military specialties at DOSAAF [Voluntary Society for the Promotion of the Army, Aviation, and Navy] institutions.

Arctic Lanyard; Yankers on Ice

OE Watch Commentary: The gunners of the 61st Naval Infantry, 200th Coastal Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade are having high latitude adventure training near Murmansk. The units will be firing their 2S1 122mm self-propelled Gvozdika and 2S3 152mm self-propelled Akatsiya howitzers, as well as BM21 122mm MLRS during their 45 days of rugged training. Although these systems were introduced in the 1960s, they are still up to the mark in the far, far north.
End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, <http://www.mil.ru> , 29 February 2016 and 8 March 2016.

“More than 600 artillery troops from the Northern Fleet ground and coastal troops formations have started field exercises on combat training ranges in Murmanskaya Oblast. More than 80 pieces of armament and combat equipment deployed.”

Northern Fleet Artillery Transfer to Test Ranges; Units of Northern Fleet Coastal Troops Prepare for Live Firing Exercise in the Arctic

Simultaneously, subunits of a detached motorized rifle brigade, a detached naval infantry brigade, and a detached Arctic motorized rifle brigade are participating in a muster. For 45 days the servicemen will live and improve combat skills in the field conditions of the Far North.

In the course of practical exercises the artillerymen will practice setting up field camp, supply and technical support, setting up combat positions and camouflage, and marches over rough terrain, and they will participate in a number of tactical exercises as well.

The main goal of the muster is to improve the artillery subunits' combat skills and coordinated action, practicing eliminating a hypothetical enemy from both open and concealed firing positions. During the exercise, accompanying motorized rifle troops will conduct tactical actions in both defense and attack with support from artillery and tanks.

Special attention will be paid to organizing the concealment of defensive positions, carrying out reconnaissance, and determining target designations with the use of unmanned aerial vehicles.

The exercise will include T-72B3 tanks, Grad multiple rocket systems, and Akatsiya and Gvozdika self-propelled artillery guns.

The muster will conclude with a demonstration tactical exercise that includes live fire utilizing Gvozdika and Akatsiya self-propelled howitzers.

Field exercises are one of the main combat training activities of artillery subunits; they take place twice a year, in the winter and summer training periods.

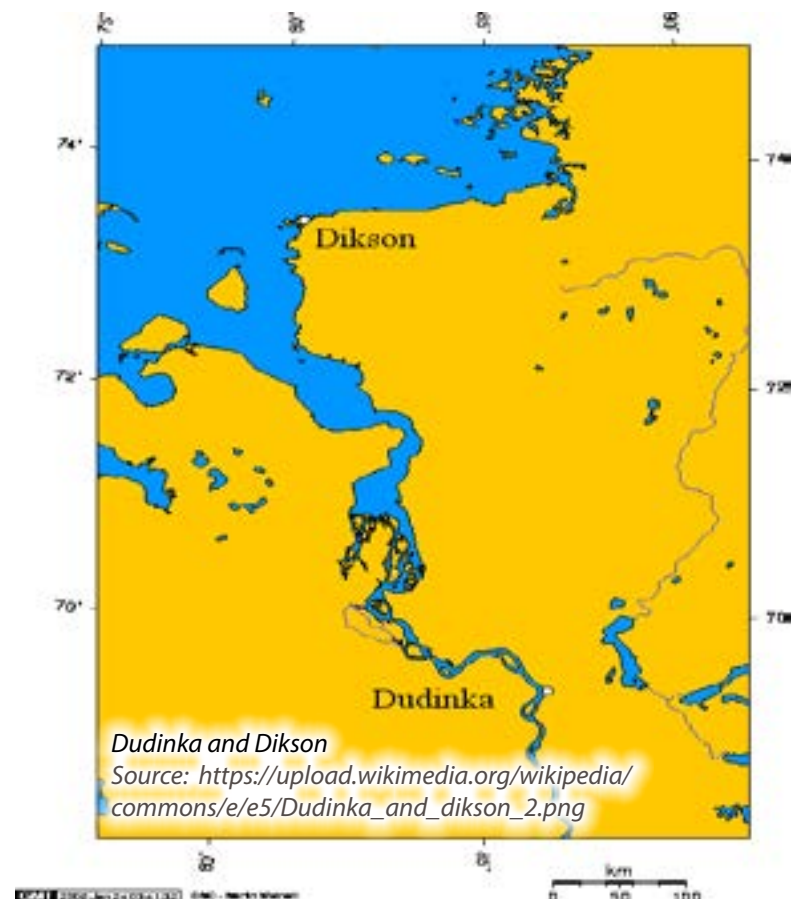
Lessons from the 2015 Arctic Riverine and Amphibious Landings

OE Watch Commentary: The 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade conducted amphibious landings from large amphibious ships at the Dudinka river port and on various Arctic islands during August-October of last year. Amphibious assault landings are complex, involving coordinating air and shipborne fires while moving vehicles and personnel to shore in a coordinated manner.

The riverine portion of the operation involved sailing from the Arctic Ocean up the powerful Yenesei River to conduct a landing at the river port of Dudinka, followed by a march to a training area for ground combat exercises. During the landing the river current was two knots [nautical miles] per hour, making it difficult to keep the amphibious warfare ships perpendicular to the beach and tugboats were required to push against the boats' sides to allow them to unload. Once the ships rejoined the fleet on the Arctic Ocean, they headed toward the New Siberian Islands, where live artillery fire supported an assault landing.

The ambitious Northern Fleet training seems to have paid immediate dividends in readiness and new TTPs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Aleksandr Bondar, *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, <http://www.redstar.ru>, 21 March 2016.



Ice Test; Naval Assault Landing in Northern Tracts Will Soon Become Everyday Episode of Combat Training

The riverine landing in the area of the port of Dudinka on the Yenisei River was conducted on an unfamiliar coast. In addition, the approach to this beachhead has a particular feature: the current at the mouth of the river reaches two knots. During the landing the ships were constantly kept from drifting by tugboats. As one of the large amphibious warfare ships approached the shore and ran its landing ramp aground, a tugboat stayed alongside, preventing the current from carrying the ship sideways. So now a new tactical method has appeared for making an riverine landing in difficult conditions.

Before making the landing in the area of the port of Dudinka, the crews of the large amphibious warfare ships had to complete another difficult task: navigation up the Yenisei River... In addition to the unfamiliar area of navigation for Northern Fleet sailors, there was wind and fog that cut visibility to less than 200 meters and the pilot ship had to sail ahead of the large amphibious warfare ships, but not following in their wake. There was a constant mutual orientation by the combat teams of the ships and an exchange of navigational data, so that the ships' maneuvers were carried out. In the end, instead of the planned two days, the passage from Dikson [where the Yenesei flows into the Arctic Ocean] to Dudinka took a little more than a day.

After completion of combat training in the area of Dudinka, the ships headed for the New Siberian Islands... Near Kotelnyy Island, both large amphibious warfare ships carried out four artillery firing missions each at various targets.

The amphibious landing on Kotelnyy Island was a serious test for the specialists of the large amphibious warfare ships. It involved the landing craft Nikolay Rubtsov. The boat "traveled" on board a mooring barge but at the island moved under its own power and, for the first time in the history of the modern Navy, performed an amphibious landing in the high latitudes.

The operation was calculated to the second. Artillery fire support by the amphibious warfare ships covered the disembarking naval assault troops during their battle to a battle to seize the beachhead. Despite the magnitude of the exercise, all passed without failures and delays.

Update on the 80th Arctic Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade

OE Watch Commentary: The 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade continues to develop its skills. It was founded in January of 2015 near Murmansk and underwent an intensive training regimen. This culminated with a long-distance multi-month cruise involving three amphibious landings, land road marches and live-fire exercises. The amphibious landings involved coordination and cross-training with airborne forces, Spetsnaz (special operations) forces, naval infantry, amphibious loading specialists, ship-to-shore command and control personnel and ship's crew.

The extended cruise provided an opportunity to perform at-sea vehicle maintenance and gain an appreciation for Arctic terrain, vehicle and equipment serviceability and communications in the Northern Regions. The logisticians certainly had a sharp learning curve. Brigade Commander Colonel Ilya Pavlovskiy has added the possibility of conducting air assault training in the future. You take baby steps before running, but the 80th seems to be jogging already. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Olesya Frantsishevich, Krasnaya Zvezda Online, <http://www.redstar.ru>, 18 March 2016



Source: <http://www.redstar.ru/images/files/2016/03-2016/027-18-03-2016.pdf>

Two Years in the Making

A little over a year has passed since Northern Fleet commander Admiral Vladimir Korolev passed the Battle Flag to the Northern Fleet separate Arctic motorized rifle brigade deployed in the border rural settlement of Alakurtti in Murmanskaya Oblast. During a recent snap inspection of combat readiness, the personnel of the formation confirmed their ability to resolve combat tasks for the protection of the Arctic coast. Today the servicemen of the brigade under the command of Colonel Ilya Pavlovskiy are undergoing scheduled military training.

...Both the Defense Ministry and the country's leadership are following the development of the brigade and professional training of personnel. Everyday life as a whole is running smoothly. There are some problems but they are being resolved.

The brigade is fully staffed with medical personnel. The local health unit, which also serves military families, has undergone major repair and is provided with equipment. Families are receiving official apartments. Unmarried contract servicemen live in a dormitory within the unit.

Currently, the Northern Fleet separate Arctic motorized rifle brigade is preparing for training exercises in various regions of the Arctic zone.

The harsh Arctic conditions are a serious test for the servicemen. They are learning to survive in the tundra, move through deep snow, and master a variety of special equipment...

In general, the training in the separate Arctic motorized rifle brigade is not very different from the training of any motorized rifle unit. But there are specifics. Here, for example, more attention is paid to ski training. Amphibious assault actions are practiced. Some of the time is spent on mastering special equipment. In the future, the training program of the personnel of the separate Arctic motorized rifle brigade may also include airborne assault training. Recently, the brigade also began to master the animal transportation used by the indigenous peoples of the North – reindeer and dog sleds. Tactical elements of raid actions were practiced during the sessions, which were conducted in 30-degree frost [-22°Fahrenheit].

“In 2015 the Northern Fleet Arctic motorized rifle brigade received articulated, tracked amphibious, all-terrain snow and marsh vehicles, army utility terrain vehicles, quadbikes, and snowmobiles. The delivery of new military equipment is expected in the coming year.”

New Formations on Russia's Western Borders

“Although this announcement did generate a certain frenzy in Russian and foreign mass media, as a matter of fact it did not become serious news. This was because back last summer the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff announced that by 1 December 2015 it planned to reconstitute the 1st Guards Tank Army and to reorganize and augment the 20th Guards Combined-Arms Army as part of the Western Military District. So it was for them that new divisions were required.”

Source: Sergey Ishchenko, “Divisions Will Rise up from the Ashes: Where and How the New Formations are to be Activated on Russia’s Western Borders in 2016,” *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 13 January 2016.

OE Watch Commentary: On 13 January 2016 it was reported that Russia would activate three new divisions on its western axis. Permanent stationing of new divisions requires ranges, equipment storage locations, and places for personnel to reside. The discussion noted that, in addition to the three divisions, which appear to be a tank division and two motorized-rifle divisions, Russia will deploy a tank army, comprising the 4th Kantemirovka Tank Division, the 6th Separate Tank Brigade, the 2nd Taman Motorized Rifle Division, and the 27th Sevastopol Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade.

It appeared that the former 10th Guards Volunteer Tank Division would be recreated and attached to the 20th Army; that a division will appear in Novochoerkassk based on the 33rd Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, which was a part of the Southern Military District’s 49th Army; and that perhaps the 144th Guards Red Banner Motorized Rifle Division will also be recreated, although it was not stated to which Army it may be assigned. The article was not specific on names, locations, or dates, and only “surmised” where and how the divisions would be created and deployed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

I have no doubt that we would get to the Dnieper even so should it be seriously necessary. Look at the stories from Syria to see how this is done. But if the target is not a Ukraine that has come unglued, then who or what?

For the answer to this question one has to take a bit broader look at our western Russian borders, from the Black Sea to the Baltic. What is happening there is devastatingly reminiscent of 1941. A month ago that very same Shoygu openly cited the following figures: “during this year alone” in NATO countries bordering on the Russian Federation “the contingent increased eightfold in aircraft and by 13 times in the number of servicemen.” “Up to 300 tanks and BMPs have been redeployed additionally” to Russian Federation borders, and Aegis Ashore missile defense complexes are being deployed. There are 310 platform aircraft in various degrees of readiness capable of carrying around 200 American nuclear aerial bombs.”

Three hundred tanks and infantry fighting vehicles represent a full-fledged division suite. Airlift the personnel from across the ocean in Boeing passenger aircraft, put them at the controls, and forward.

It is a matter of minutes of flight from the places where those same nuclear bombs are stored to our main industrial and administrative centers.



Developing Hypersonic Cruise Missiles

“The most single military-technical news this year was the announcement that Russian fighting ships and submarines will, in the near future, adopt ‘Tsirkon’ hypersonic cruise missiles, which are already being tested at a ground launch complex. Work on the latest 3k22 so-called interbranch missile system with 3M22 missiles, which was developed by the Reutov-based Machines Building Corporation Science and Production Association, has been in progress since at least 2011.”

OE Watch Commentary: On 30 March 2016 it was reported that the Tsirkon hypersonic cruise missile travels within the Earth’s atmosphere, while Russia’s other hypersonic aero-ballistic warhead, known as 4202, is a strategic system that can destroy targets from thousands of kilometers away. The 3M22 Tsirkon is an anti-ship missile. It destroys surface and ground targets within a range of 300-400 km. The designer of the Tsirkon, the Reutov-based Machine Building Corporation, also developed the kh-90 hypersonic missile, known as “Lopata” (Spade), an experimental hypersonic air vehicle.

Apparently a Tsirkon has already appeared on the launch pad at the 21st State Central Interbranch Test Range in Nenoksa. It will be armed with a radar seeker and an optical electronic complex that can search for and detect targets, and it can be used with the “Oniks” launchers installed on ships, submarines, and land-based facilities. The fifth-generation submarine “Khaski” (Husky) will be armed with the Tsirkon as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm and Dmitriy Kornev, “‘Tsirkon’: Mach 5 Away from the Target,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 30 March 2016.

At the same time, one must not forget that the “Tsirkon” has not simply to fly to a specific area, but also, on detecting the target, to overcome the enemy’s air defense and, within an electronic jamming environment, to point itself at the target object and destroy it. For this reason, the requirements in relation to the latest missile’s control and guidance system are also very rigorous.

The product’s inertial navigation system, which is combined with a radio altimeter and which controls flight through the cruising stage of the trajectory, must have exceptional accuracy and responsiveness, as the slightest error at that speed will result in a miss.

In the final zone of the trajectory the target is detected and identified by a radar homing head, the reliable functioning of which will be impeded by both enemy-generated decoy targets and electronic jamming. Given the speed of the rocket itself, its radar homing head has to be highly accurate and to operate in an environment where all of the product’s components and assemblies are subjected to maximum loading.

Despite all the problems associated with the physical characteristics of hypersound, “Tsirkon” is a target an order of magnitude more complex, which a likely enemy’s not only existing but also future air defense equipment, which is still being developed, will not be able to handle.



Alleged firing of Tsirkon missile.

Source: Sputnik News, <http://sputniknews.com/military/20160317/1036437650/zircon-hypersonic-cruise-missiles.html>

Russian Experts Comment on the Future Use of Robots in War

“Russia has a pretty favorable position in this respect: It has the science and technology experience, the personnel and talent, and innovatory courage and a creative focus on the future. Furthermore, the country’s leadership understands the importance of developing robotics and is doing everything possible to secure a leading place for Russia in this field. Robotics is being allocated a particular role in the matter of safeguarding national security and defense. Armed forces equipped with forward-leaning future types and models of robotic systems would enjoy indisputable intellectual and technological supremacy over an adversary that for various reasons would not be able to join the elite ‘club of robotic powers’ in time and would find itself on the margins of the robotics revolution that is developing. A technological lag in the field of robotics today could have catastrophic consequences in the future.”

OE Watch Commentary: On 4 March the Russian paper *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye* offered comments from several experts on the future of robotics in war. They all agreed that Russia’s future successes or failures depend on how professionally Russia acts in this sphere today.

Robotic use on traditional battlefields and in urban environments, to include enemy mechanical “toys” fitted with a suicide belt, is covered along with definitions of robotics and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles. However, due to the segmented nature of the presentations, the majority of the write-up is dedicated to direct lifts from the article citing the three people with the most interesting responses. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: Unattributed report, “Combat Robots in Future Wars: Experts’ Conclusions. Russian Experts Predict an Explosive Increase in the Utilization of Robotic Systems on the Battlefield,” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 4 March 2016.

Igor Mikhaylovich Popov, candidate of historical sciences and scientific director of the EPOKHA Independent Expert Analysis Center:

In the long term the winner will be whoever finds his place today in the world technological race that is underway in the field of robotics. There is a need for universally recognized terminology in the field of robotics in order to separate out the basic concepts of remote-controlled systems, automatic, semi-autonomous, and autonomous systems, and systems involving artificial intelligence. It would clearly be rational to refer to a system with artificial intelligence possessing a high or total level of autonomy (independence) from a human as a robot. There is a general rule that the cost of a weapon should not exceed the value of the target. The commander of a future robotized brigade would be unlikely to dare to throw his androids into a head-on attack on fortified enemy positions. But what the commanders of tactical-level subunits already need today is aerial and ground-based remote-controlled or automated reconnaissance, observation, and tracking systems and engineering equipment for various purposes. A significant level of development in the field of robotics cannot be achieved without qualitative leaps and real achievements in other -- closely related and less closely related -- sectors of science and technology. I am talking about cybernetics, global-standard automated control systems, new materials, nanotechnologies, bionics, studies of the brain, and so on and

so forth. So it seems to us that the driver in developing robotics in Russian conditions has to be defense industry complex enterprises and organizations, which have all the resources and competencies for this, but in the immediate future the demand for robotic systems for civilian, specialist, and dual-purpose uses will be greater than that for purely military and particularly combat uses. And this is an objective reality of our time.

Colonel-General Aleksandr Nikolayevich Postnikov, deputy chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces General Staff (2012-2014):

Nevertheless it currently looks premature to talk about this as the robotization of the Ground Troops. Today the Armed Forces need autonomous military equipment and weaponry corresponding to the new situational conditions, the new battlefield. Or rather the new combat arena, which also incorporates cyberspace along with the well-known theaters. For example, an urgent requirement of combat robots is for their tactical and technical characteristics to correspond to the increased dynamism of present-day combat operations. This struggle for dominance in terms of speed of movement on the battlefield (in a sense a “motor war”) was characteristic throughout the last century. Today it has only intensified. It is also important for the Armed Forces to have the kind of robots whose operation would require minimal human intervention. Otherwise the enemy would rapidly hit the people in the support structures and easily halt any “mechanical” army. While insisting on the need for the Armed Forces to have autonomous robots I understand that what is most likely in the short term is the widespread introduction in the troops of various semi-autonomous technical devices and automated means of transport performing primarily support tasks. Systems of this kind are also needed. As the specialist software improves, their participation in warfare will expand significantly. According to some predictions, the widespread introduction of really autonomous robots among the Ground Troops of various armies of the world can be expected in the 2020s-2030s, when autonomous humanoid robots will become sufficiently sophisticated and relatively inexpensive for large-scale use in the course of combat operations. Nevertheless there are many problems along this road. They are linked not

Continued: Russian Experts Comment on the Future Use of Robots in War

only to the technical features of the development of weaponry and military equipment incorporating artificial intelligence but also to the social and legal aspects. For example, if a robot was to blame for the killing of civilians or a robot was to start killing its own soldiers because of defective software who would be responsible -- the manufacturer, programmer, commander, or somebody else?

Musa Magomedovich Khamzatov, candidate of military sciences and assistant to the Russian Federation Armed Forces Ground Troops commander in chief for the coordination of scientific and technical development (2010-2011):

For this to happen it is necessary right now to actively carry out work to theoretically describe and create algorithms governing the functioning of a combat robot not only as a separate combat unit but also as an element in a complex system of combined-arms combat. And taking account without fail of the features of our national school of warfare. The problem is that the world is changing too rapidly and the experts themselves often do not have enough time to perceive what is and is not important, what is a major and what is a minor circumstance or a capricious interpretation of individual events. The latter is not such a rarity. As a rule it happens because of a lack of a clear understanding of the nature of future warfare and all the possible cause and effect connections between its participants. It is a complex problem, but the value of solving it is no less than the importance of developing a "super-combat robot." There is a need for a broad range of specialist software for the effective functioning of robots in the course of every phase of the preparation and conducting of combat operations in which they are involved. In the most general terms, the following can be categorized as the main such phases: acquisition of a combat mission, collection of information, planning, establishment of initial position, continuous assessment of the tactical situation, fighting, interaction, withdrawal from battle, recuperation, and relocation. In addition another task that certainly needs to be resolved is that of organizing effective semantic interaction between people and combat robots and also between combat robots of different types (from different manufacturers). This requires conscious cooperation between manufacturers, particularly so that all machines can "speak the same language." If combat robots are unable to actively exchange information on the battlefield because their "languages" or technical parameters for transmitting information do not coincide there can be no question of any kind of joint utilization. Correspondingly the identification of common standards for programming, processing, and exchanging information is also one of the main tasks in developing full-fledged combat robots.



The Platforma-M variant of the Multifunctional Utility/Combat support/Patrol. Serially produced by the Russian Army.
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/60/Platforma-M_550.jpg

The Changing Face of Chinese Peacekeepers in South Sudan

Introduction

In May 2015 a riot squad of China's first ever peacekeeping infantry battalion rushed to stop a riot in one of three refugee camps located near the Chinese peacekeepers' barracks in the vicinity of Juba, the capital of South Sudan. The riot caused 2 deaths and over 100 injuries, but Chinese troops were able to cordon off the turbulent crowds and prevent any further violence.¹

2015 marked the 25th anniversary of China's participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions and a significant turning point, when the country committed its first infantry battalion to participate in a mission. China's recent willingness to commit these more capable and heavily armed troops goes against its longstanding principle of noninterference, raising questions among international observers.

Since 1990 China has participated at some level in over 30 peacekeeping operations around the world. In December 2015 there was a total of 125,097 UN personnel serving in 16 active UN peacekeeping missions, with 3,045 Chinese peacekeepers participating in 10 of the 16 missions.² Approximately 85 percent of all Chinese peacekeepers are located in Africa - Democratic Republic of Congo (232), Liberia (667), Western Sahara (10), Cote d'Ivoire (6), Mali (402), Western Sudan's Darfur (235) and, most notably, South Sudan (1068). Of even more interest is China's recent decision last year to commit an infantry battalion to the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), marking the first time China has ever deployed an infantry battalion to any peacekeeping mission. This article focuses on China's interest in Sudan and South Sudan, its growing peacekeeping role in the countries, strategies, and possible motives.

Sudan and South Sudan: Countries in Constant Strife

Over the past century Sudan has fought various civil wars. For example, South Sudan's struggle for independence caused two civil wars over the past six decades. The second civil war began in 1983, in part after Sudanese President Jaafar Numeiri abolished South Sudan's autonomy and sharia law was imposed by the north on the south.

There were a number of attempts by the UN, neighboring countries, and other concerned parties to try to bring peace to the nation. During the civil war, which pitted the government against South Sudan's Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), more than two million people died, four million were displaced, and about 600,000 fled the country.

After nearly 22 years of strife, the second civil war finally came to an end in January 2005, when the Sudanese government and the SPLM signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which would last until 2011. It called for a border between the South and North to be demarcated and temporarily allowed institutions to govern the south and put into place an international monitoring mechanism. Three months after the CPA was signed, on 24 March, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to support the implementation of the agreement, facilitate and coordinate humanitarian assistance and the return of refugees and displaced persons, and protect and promote human rights in Sudan.³

Over the next few months China and other countries began gradually sending in their peacekeeping troops. By June 2006 China was contributing 473 peacekeepers, who provided noncombat services such as engineering, medical, and other support roles.

Meanwhile, while the CPA helped to resolve the conflict between the North and South, it ignored grievances of other regions, such as the Darfur crisis. As a result, it was criticized for its narrow vision.⁴

As the numbers of international peacekeeping troops assigned to UNMIS grew to support the CPA, the African Union pushed to come up with a solution to resolve the Darfur crisis. On 5 May 2006 the Sudanese government and the Sudan Liberation Movement, a rebel group in Darfur (not to be confused with the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement), signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA). In July 2006 the UN Secretary General suggested in a report to the Security Council that a UN peacekeeping force, consisting of as many as 18,600 troops, might be needed in Darfur to ensure all sides abided by the peace agreement. One month later the Security Council decided to expand the UNMIS mandate to include deployment to Darfur.

In August 2006 the UN voted on the deployment of up to 17,300 UN peacekeepers to Darfur. Twelve of the UN Security Council's 15 members approved the measure. However, China, Russia, and Qatar abstained from the vote. Wan Guangya, China's UN Ambassador, explained that while his country supported the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force "as soon as feasible," his country abstained because it objected to the timing of the vote. He added that it was "unnecessary to put the draft to the vote in a hurry." Wang said he worried that the UN resolution "may trigger further misunderstanding and confrontation."⁵

China's reason for abstaining seems to be more deeply rooted in geopolitics. Its interest in Sudan has long been tied to energy. In a 2005 article entitled "On Strategic Resources and National Security," Chen Bo wrote that a country cannot have complete national security without a stable supply of strategic resources. Beijing has been a leading developer of oil reserves in Sudan for more than a decade. In 2004 China was importing 60 percent of the country's oil output while refusing to address issues of genocide and other atrocities occurring in the country, in particular in Darfur. At that time the international community accused China of turning a blind eye to the violence. Additionally, the National Islamic Front, which had gained control over the country, was very unpopular among the Sudanese population. Ahmad

(continued)

Continued: The Changing Face of Chinese Peacekeepers in South Sudan

Sikainga, a Sudanese scholar and expert in African history, points out that the regime's growing isolation prompted it to turn to China, which had become "its major trading partner and main supplier of arms."⁶

The relationship was given further impetus by China's dominant role in the production and consumption of Sudanese oil. China found itself caught between a rock and a hard place. Beijing did not want to ruffle the feathers of a country on which it was dependent for energy. It therefore had to tread cautiously in its decisions. Approving quick deployment of peacekeepers might have damaged its relations with the Sudanese government, or perhaps China had other reasons. On the other hand, China was interested in promoting peace, which is necessary to operate successfully within the country. Therefore, outright opposition to the measure would not have been prudent either.

The resolution to deploy UNMIS to Darfur passed. However, the Sudanese government opposed it and the measure went no further, since the UN will only initiate a peacekeeping plan if all sides agree to it. As an alternative, in the months that followed, the UN pursued a different approach to try to stabilize Darfur, and on 31 July 2007 it established the UN African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), which was tasked with protecting civilians, contributing to security for humanitarian assistance, monitoring the implementation of agreements, assisting the political process, promoting human rights and the rule of law, and monitoring the borders with Chad and the Central African Republic.⁷

With Khartoum now backing the new resolution, albeit reluctantly, China began to send peacekeepers to the region to participate in UNAMID. Since January 2008 China has steadily contributed a peacekeeping force of 150-350 personnel, who have been participating in noncombat roles. There was also talk, in April 2015, of China dispatching a helicopter detachment to UNAMID.⁸ However, no further reports have surfaced since on whether or not the helicopters were actually deployed.

While China's contribution to UNAMID has held steady over the years, after South Sudan gained independence in 2011, China's role was destined to grow in UNMISS, which replaced UNMIS.

In mid-December 2013 armed conflict broke out in South Sudan between forces loyal to South Sudan's President Salva Kiir and former Vice President Riek Machar, who had been removed from office five months earlier and went on to head up the SPLM opposition.⁹ As a result of the conflict, South Sudan suffered thousands of casualties, and tens of thousands of people were made homeless. The increasingly deteriorating situation in South Sudan prompted China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to warn Chinese citizens not to go to South Sudan in the near future. Nonessential personnel were also urged to evacuate South Sudan as soon as possible.¹⁰ In February 2014, 300 Chinese nationals were among other foreign oil workers to be evacuated from South Sudan after fighting between government forces and rebels broke out. The fighting and unrest severely impacted the production of oil in the country and put Chinese investments in danger.

In late 2014 the UN Security Council adopted a resolution to expand the scale of UNMISS. Chinese media attributed the need to bolster its peacekeeping mission, personnel, and equipment in South Sudan to increased criminal activity and a deteriorating security situation. According to one article, "The squadron responsible for guarding the base was only equipped with light weapons such as automatic rifles and [were] unable to deal with large-scale riots or armed attacks."¹¹ The additional peacekeeping troops that China would go on to dispatch in 2015 would ultimately assist in maintaining South Sudan's security and stability and help to protect civilians and support humanitarian relief efforts.

China's First Infantry Battalion Peacekeeping Force: A New Era

Up until 2015 China had sent small specialized units, including engineering, transportation, medical, and security teams, to different UN peacekeeping missions around the world. On 19 July 2014 the UN, reportedly for the first time ever, "formally invited China to send peacekeeping battalion infantry troops under UNMISS mandate."¹²

China sent the peacekeepers in increments. In late February 2015, 144 members of the infantry battalion flew to South Sudan, where they joined forces with 36 other Chinese peacekeepers. Together they worked to prepare for the mission by familiarizing themselves with the local situation, constructing barracks, receiving equipment, and undertaking any other task assigned by the UN.¹³ The last group of peacekeepers arrived in April, bringing the total to 700 attached to the battalion, which comprised three infantry companies and one supply company.¹⁴ The infantry battalion included 121 officers and 579 enlisted personnel, of whom 43 had previously participated in peacekeeping missions.¹⁵

According to Chinese press reports, the infantry battalion in South Sudan is different from China's other peacekeeping forces in several ways. First, it is better equipped with defensive combat capability. Having 700 participants, it is regarded as a security force and they are not limited to guard duty: it has active defense capability, being described as a "true combat force."¹⁶ The battalion is reportedly equipped with drones, infantry fighting vehicles, armored personnel carriers, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars, machine guns, superior body armor weighing more than 40 kilograms, helmets, and 185 other vehicles.¹⁷

Second, this battalion is the largest peacekeeping unit that the PLA has deployed. Up until the battalion was sent to South Sudan,

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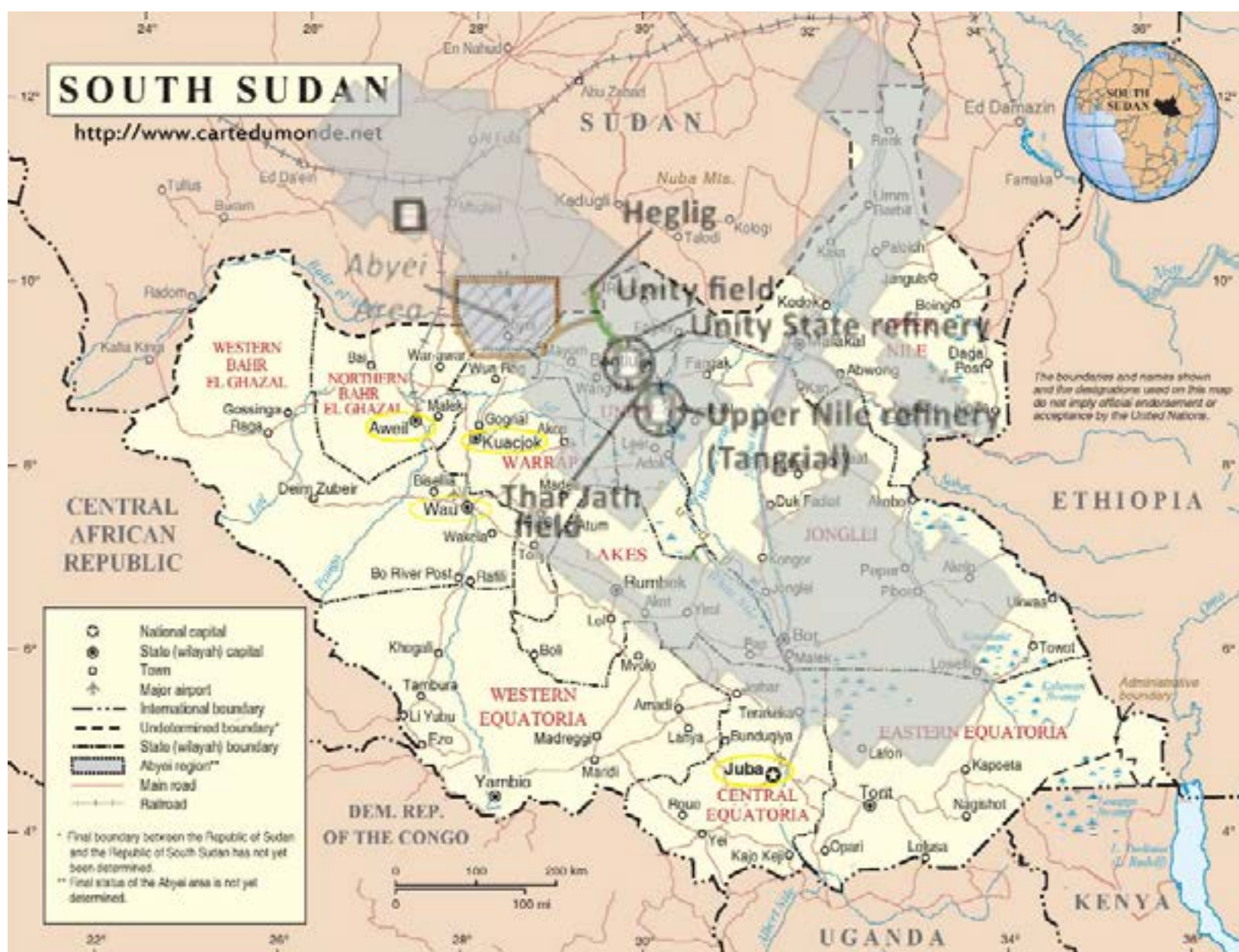
Continued: The Changing Face of Chinese Peacekeepers in South Sudan

China had sent peacekeeping forces that were equivalent in size to that of a company. As one article put it, “These Chinese peacekeeping forces are not dominant in the mission areas judging by their scale, formation, personnel, equipment, and task nature.”¹⁸ The article went on to explain that the battalion sent to South Sudan, “judging by the number of persons alone, has exceeded the standard establishment of a traditional battalion in China and is close to a reinforced battalion in time of war.”¹⁹

Third, the infantry battalion is capable of carrying out more diversified tasks, including protection, escort, reinforcement, patrol, and guard duties. It also, according to requirements set forth by the UN, is able to perform urgent tasks or to establish temporary operation bases outside Juba. According to the United Nations, in December 2015 Chinese peacekeepers, along with other peacekeeping groups, were operating in four locations of South Sudan. Chinese engineer companies were located each in the cities of Wau, Aweil, and Kuacjok,²⁰ which are situated in the northwestern part of South Sudan. None of these cities are located inside any of the oil field boundaries. In addition to the engineer company in Wau, there is also a medical company there (see map 1).

These locations are within 100-200 miles of certain oil fields instead of inside the oil production zones in the new country. Meanwhile, China’s peacekeeping infantry battalion is headquartered in Juba.²¹

Prior to the arrival of China’s infantry battalion, UNMISS had divided the urban area of Juba into two parts: south and north, with Nepal originally in charge of the former and Ghana in charge of the latter.²² China would eventually go on to assume responsibility of both sectors.



According to UN Maps, Chinese construction peacekeeping forces are operating in Aweil, Wau, and Kuacjok; medical peacekeepers are in Wau, and the Infantry Battalion is headquartered in Juba.

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Continued: The Changing Face of Chinese Peacekeepers in South Sudan

What is not clear is how far outside of Juba China's infantry battalion might be operating or the new missions of the Nepalese and Ghana peacekeepers. According to one Chinese source, the infantry battalion would be "engaged primarily in the protection of civilians living in or near the Mission's UN House property," and they would "carry out patrols in and around the capital of Juba and assist in the escorting of humanitarian relief supplies and the guarding of UN assets." However, the same source also stated that the Chinese battalion is "expected to extend the reach of the Mission and its effectiveness in carrying out its mandate."²³ What that means exactly is not clear, but it would not be inconceivable for China to continue to expand its military capabilities throughout South Sudan.

Black Gold: Motivation and Chinese Strategy

China's role and increasing capabilities in UNMISS have prompted some international concern and skepticism. To try to offset the concern, China has been quick to point out that it does not intend to become involved in any conflicts among armed factions. The country is also quick to point out that it will not intervene in other countries' internal affairs through armed intervention.²⁴ Chinese and UN sources also point out that China's rise as a world power gives it more responsibility, interest, and capability in helping to maintain world peace.²⁵ However, China's goals go deeper than maintaining world peace.

Some have argued that China's participation in UNMISS is centered on oil, a claim that China does not seem ready to support. Yet, it is the one argument that makes the most sense. China has contributed billions of dollars in energy and infrastructure in both Sudan and South Sudan. Out of five major oil consortiums in Sudan and South Sudan, state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation is the majority stakeholder in three of them. China is by far the leading export destination for crude oil from both Sudans. In 2013, according to the Energy Information Administration, 86 percent of the oil from these countries was exported to China. However, oil supplies have been put in jeopardy over the past few years since South Sudan claimed independence. Ongoing tensions, conflicts, and disputes over fee transits have caused oil exports to fall between 2011 and 2013: in 2011 both countries exported 337,000 barrels per day (bbl/d) globally. The following year exports fell to 60,000 bbl/d. In 2013 the number rose to 133,000 bbl/d, which was still considerably lower than the amount of oil exported in 2011.²⁶

Currently, both Sudan's and South Sudan's oil sectors are closely linked. With South Sudan being landlocked, it depends on pipelines traversing Sudan to the Bashayer Port along the Red Sea to export its oil. Sudan charges transport fees from South Sudan to allow the oil to traverse its territory. Oil, therefore, plays an important role in both countries' economies, although to a lesser extent in Sudan. In South Sudan oil accounted for 98 percent of the government revenue following the country's independence.²⁷ Meanwhile, South Sudan has signed memorandums of understanding with Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti to build pipelines through those countries. However, plans to move forward have stalled due to the conflict in South Sudan.

While oil plays a significant role in the economies of both Sudans, it is equally important to China, which must find the right balance between diplomacy and security in its international relationships to ensure supplies of critical resources do not dry up. While China has long strived for a more diplomatic approach to resolving issues, the country, with its growing status, is feeling public pressure at home to better protect its citizens and assets abroad. The above-mentioned February 2014 conflict may have been the impetus for China agreeing to commit its first infantry battalion to a UN mission. The fighting and unrest severely impacted the production of oil in the country, endangering Chinese investments.

China needs energy to continue its growth and modernization over the years to come, including a stable supply of strategic resources for its national and military security, economic growth, and political stability. Bo Chen argues that petroleum is the most important strategic resource because it is "a key factor for creating social wealth, for making scientific and technological progress, and for supporting and winning victories in war."²⁸ It is "the basic driving force for industrialization and industrialized society."²⁹ Due to oil resources being unevenly distributed (sometimes in contested areas), securing supplies has become a critical national security issue to China.³⁰

Conclusions

China's role in UN peacekeeping missions has grown considerably over the years, especially during the past decade in South Sudan. China has gone from being a nation that voiced its opposition to international peacekeeping efforts to one that has committed a fully equipped infantry battalion, whose troop strength and capabilities equal that of a reinforced battalion in time of war. This change of heart has many observers questioning China's possible intentions and motives.

Peacekeeping missions are one of the PLA's global operations that help to extend the country's influence and roles in the international arena.³¹ China's involvement in African peacekeeping missions could reflect a number of factors, i.e., that it is becoming a more responsible power, that its presence is growing on the world stage, etc. Finally, the locations in which China is most heavily involved clearly indicate its commitment to protect its investments, which are often in the form of natural resources. According to China's 2015 *Defense White Paper*, "With the growth of China's national interests, its national security is more vulnerable to international and regional turmoil, terrorism, piracy, serious natural disasters and epidemics, and the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel, and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue."

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Continued: The Changing Face of Chinese Peacekeepers in South Sudan

Chinese government officials and media sources report that China's Armed Forces will continue to participate in UN peacekeeping missions, strictly observe the mandates of the UN Security Council, maintain China's commitment to the peaceful settlement of conflicts, promote development and reconstruction, and safeguard regional peace and security. However, China does not do anything for mere goodwill. According to the White Paper, "China's armed forces will strengthen international security cooperation in areas crucially related to China's overseas interests, to ensure the security of such interests." Peacekeepers clearly may be doing just that.

Endnotes

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15. "China Sends First Infantry Battalion for UN Peacekeeping," *Xinhua*, 22 December 2014.
16. "A Look into Chinese Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 10 April 2015.
17. "Overview of China's Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion," *Xinhuanet*, 9 April 2015, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-04/09/c_127673315.htm>
18. "A Look into Chinese Peacekeeping Infantry Battalion," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 10 April 2015.
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20. Other countries participating include the following: in Wau (Sector West of UNMISS): an infantry battalion from Kenya, a signals/communication company from India, and military police from Cambodia; in Aweil and Kuacjok: each have an infantry company from Kenya and a signals/communication company from India.
21. Juba is home to the "Sector South" for overall Headquarters for UNMISS. Also operating out of Juba are infantry battalions from Nepal, Ethiopia, and Rwanda; construction/engineering companies from Bangladesh and Japan; a medical company from Cambodia; a support company from Rwanda; a signals/communications company from India; and police from Cambodia.
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26. "Sudan and South Sudan," Energy Information Administration, 3 September 2014.
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28. Chen Bo, "On Strategic Resources and National Security," *China Military Science*, No. 1 2005, pp. 7-15.
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30. Ibid. For more information on Chinese strategic activities in Africa, see Timothy L. Thomas, "Geothinking Like the Chinese: A Potential Explanation of China's Geostrategy," Foreign Military Studies Office, September 2011.
31. Other operations include counterpiracy patrols, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, exercises and sea lane security.