

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH



Volume 6
Issue #2
February 2016

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Special Essay:

Is the Western Sahara Dispute Nearing an End?



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Focus on Russia's National Security Strategy



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ON THE COVER: Small mountain near Tifariti in Western Sahara with map of Western Sahara painted in white on the mountain. Taken in August 2009.
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MapWesternSaharaTifariti.jpg>

OEWATCH

Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

Volume 6 | Issue 2

February | 2016

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Towards CIS Collective Security and a Joint Air Defense System

OE Watch Commentary: On 23 December Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan agreed to establish a Joint Air Defense System in the Caucasus. Russia is also working on a joint air defense system with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and has an agreement with Kazakhstan to establish one as well. Russian and Belarusian systems have already been unified. The accompanying passages by Turkish analysts express that these initiatives indicate Russian plans to establish a joint air defense system for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition, they claim that Russia's presence in Syria and the Mediterranean, along with its bases in the Black Sea, is encircling Turkey from both the north and the south, limiting its access to the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The first accompanying passage notes that the December 2015 Moscow summit of the CIS called upon Turkey to apologize to Russia for downing a Russian plane on 24 November, which Turkey alleges violated its air space. It claims that this indicates that some of the Central Asian states, with which Turkey had gone to great lengths to establish close ties, are now preparing to distance themselves from Turkey. It also notes that the Russian-Armenian defense agreement, along with the subsequent developments, will impede Turkey's access to the Caucasus. The passage also points out that Russia has been firing cruise missiles from its navy based in the Caspian and could block Turkish passage through that sea, severely restricting Turkey's access to Central Asia via that route as well.

The second passage also notes the agreement between Russia and Armenia and quotes a former Russian military official as saying that it was made in response to Turkey's actions. The official points out Turkey's membership in NATO and the US's use of air bases in Turkey, and says it was necessary to strengthen Russia's and Armenia's air borders. In addition, he indicates that Moscow's and Yerevan's initiative to form a joint air defense system is a step towards establishing a joint CIS air defense system.

Thus, Russia is continuing to increase its military presence in countries surrounding Turkey. With its bases in the Black Sea and now its increased presence in the Mediterranean, it appears that Russia has encircled Turkey from both the north and the south, creating concern in Turkey that tensions will continue to escalate. However, seen in a broader context, these moves are likely not only directed at Turkey, but also indicative of Russia's regional and global ambitions.

End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)

“... Today air power is an important factor in the military arena. Turkey is a member of NATO and Turkey's air bases are used by the US Air Force. [We needed] a system that would strengthen our air borders and for this it was necessary to join forces.”

Source: Zülfikar Dogan, “First the Middle East, now Central Asia Slipping from Turkey,” *Al Monitor.com*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/01/turkey-losing-its-standing-in-central-asia-after-middle-east.html>

“The sanctions imposed after the November 24 downing of a Russian plane are spreading to Russian spheres of influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, as Central Asian countries that had established close ties with Ankara.... appear to be preparing to distance themselves from Turkey. At the December 2015 Moscow summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)- which includes the Turkic states of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in addition to Russia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Belarus and Armenia- calls were made for Turkey to apologize to Russia.

...

It has become clear that the Russian-Armenian air defense agreement, normalization of Russian-Georgian relations and resumption of fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia will impede Turkey's access to the Caucasus. There are also fears that Russia, which has been firing cruise missiles from its navy based in the Caspian, could block passage through that sea, severely restricting Turkey's access to Central Asia via that route.”

Source: “Rusya ve Ermenistan Türkiye'ye karşı hava savunma sistemlerini birleştirdi” (Russia and Armenia have joined their air defense systems against Turkey), *Milliyet.com.tr*, 23 December 2015, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/rusya-ve-ermenistan-turkiye-ye/dunya/detay/2168400/default.htm>

“On 23 December, the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and the Armenian Defense Minister Seyran Ohanyan signed an agreement that foresees the establishment of a Joint Air Defense System in the Caucasus. [The former Deputy Commander of the Russian Army] Luzan said in his statements to Ria Novosti, “I think this decision has to do with what happened with Turkey. Today air power is an important factor in the military arena. Turkey is a member of NATO and Turkey's air bases are used by the US Air Force. [We needed] a system that would strengthen our air borders and for this it was necessary to join forces.”

...

Luzan also indicated that Moscow and Yerevan's initiative to form a joint air defense system was a step towards establishing a joint CIS air defense system. Russia is also working on a joint air defense system with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan right now. It also signed an agreement with Kazakhstan in 2013 to establish one. Similarly, Russia has also announced an initiative with Belarus to establish one as well.”

Saudi Arabian-Iranian Tensions and Turkey

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as Turkey's position with regards to these tensions, with most commentators calling on Turkey to refrain from taking a side on the issue. In addition, they claim that the issue is not just about executed Shia cleric El Nimr or Saudi security, but more about Saudi Arabia's increasing concern over losing influence as a result of the Iranian nuclear deal and the deal's effects on the regional and international system.

The first passage, by respected foreign policy expert Soli Özel, notes that "Turkey got stuck between its new close ally Saudi Arabia and [Iran]—its Eastern neighbor with whom it has not gone to war for centuries, from whom it buys oil, and whose wide market will soon open up to the world." He also argues that the executions were not just about security or El Nimr, they were about Saudi Arabia's increasing discomfort with the nuclear deal and Iran's potential reintegration into the international community. He quotes a Saudi academic who claims that the Saudis feel like "an abandoned adopted child" in the face of the Iran nuclear deal. Özel claims that the US is pursuing a delicate balance between trying to balance Iran's influence in the region, while at the same time establishing a foundation on which it can cooperate with Iran in the long-term.

The second passage notes that there has recently been an impression that Turkey was taking the side of Saudi Arabia in the recent conflict. It claims that this has been due to Turkey's position against Iran in Iraq; the Syrian civil war; Turkey's strengthening of its political, economic and military relations with Saudi Arabia; and its decision to establish a base in Qatar. However, the passage notes that Western foreign policy experts claim that the escalating tensions are forcing Turkey to make a choice, but that doing so carries a risk for Turkey.

The passage also quotes a German policy expert who claims that Turkey should follow a balanced and impartial policy, and warns that it would be dangerous for Turkey to position itself within an alliance formed by Sunni Muslim countries against ISIS. The expert also notes that Turkey is already in NATO and its participation in another military alliance may raise questions. He suggests that Turkey should turn its face towards Europe and rejuvenate its relations with the European Union. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

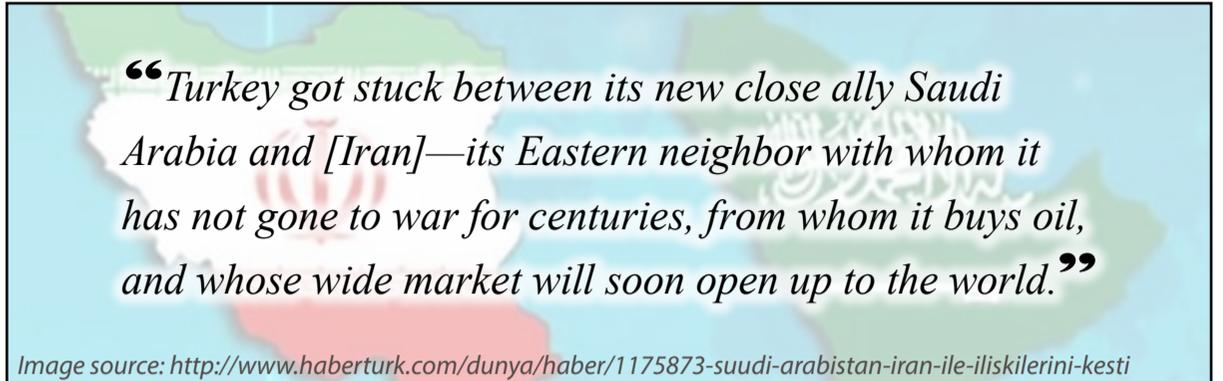


Image source: <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/1175873-suudi-arabistan-iran-ile-iliskilerini-kesti>

Source: Soli Özel, "Suudlar ve İranlılar" (The Saudis and Iranians), *Haberturk.com*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/soli-ozel/1176894-suudlar-ile-iranlilar>

"The executions and subsequent developments took place after President Erdogan's visit to Saudi Arabia. During that visit, Foreign Minister Cavusoglu said that Turkey would participate in every level of the Saudi-led Islamic military alliance that excluded Shia Islam countries; and that the two countries would fight together against injustices. Turkey got stuck between its new close ally Saudi Arabia and [Iran]—its Eastern neighbor with whom it has not gone to war for centuries, from whom it buys oil, and whose wide market will soon open up to the world.

...

Riyadh is extremely uncomfortable with the US's rapprochement with Iran. According to a Saudi academic, 'They feel like an abandoned adopted child.' And the US's reaction to the events' escalation shows that their concerns are not unfounded.

...

The US Secretary of State called both the Saudi and Iranian Foreign Ministers. A former CIA Director praised the Iranians for their actions following the raid on the [Saudi] embassy in Tehran. The US is trying to break Iran's influence in Iraq and establish the mechanisms to balance Tehran via Turkey, Israel and the Kurds; while at the same time establishing a foundation on which it can cooperate with Iran in the long-term. This is a search for a new balance that will take a long time and will take quite a bit of adjustment."

Source: "Suudi Arabistan-Iran gerilimi Türkiye'ye zora soktu" (The tension between Saudi Arabia and Turkey put Turkey in a difficult position), *Deutsche Welle in Turkish*, 5 January 2016, <http://www.dw.com/tr/suudi-arabistan-iran-gerilimi-turkiyeyi-zora-soktu/a-18958850>

"Turkey's position against Iran due to the recent developments in Iraq; the Syrian civil war; Turkey's strengthening of its political, economic and military relations with Saudi Arabia; and its decision to establish a base in Qatar, had led to the impression that Turkey was taking a side in the tensions. Western foreign policy experts said that the escalating tensions are forcing Turkey to make a choice, but that doing so carries a risk for Turkey.

'The correct path for Turkey is Europe'

Felix Schmidt, a German expert who said that it is critical for Turkey to follow a balanced and impartial policy, and warned that it would be 'dangerous' for Turkey to be positioned within an alliance formed by Sunni Muslim countries against ISIS.

...

Schmidt, who reminded that Turkey is already in a strong engagement against terror within NATO, noted that it may raise questions for Turkey to participate in a second military alliance, saying, 'What will Turkish troops do in Saudi Arabia? Will they get involved in domestic anti-terror [operations]? There is no logic to this.

...

The correct part is for Turkey to turn its face towards Europe, and rejuvenate its relations with the European Union. If Turkey works with its NATO allies, then Turkey's foreign policy can become more strategic and goal-driven. Any other alternatives would be dangerous for Turkey."

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan Interested in Buying Turkish Tank

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss the ALTAY, Turkey's first domestically designed and produced new generation main battle tank. This tank has received much interest from export markets, including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries.

The first passage quotes a Turkish defense industry official as saying that Pakistan, the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia are showing interest in the tank. The second passage also notes that Saudi Arabia is interested in the ALTAY, as well as Turkey's national unmanned aerial vehicle (ANKA). The passage notes that Saudi Arabia has been making a record amount of investments in the military field due to its domestic situation and to the situation in Yemen.

The ALTAY will be equipped with a 120mm L/55 smoothbore gun. The front of the tank will have special modular reactive composite armor protection. The tank will be designed to resist chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) attacks. Both the gunner and the commander will be provided with stabilized day/thermal sights, which are expected to be incorporated with a laser range-finder having hunter-killer capability. The tank will have a maximum speed of 70 km/h and maneuverability at depths of 4.1 m in water.

In January 2016 officials from the Undersecretariat for the Defense Industry declared that five prototypes of the tank had been produced and succeeded in tests in different areas across Turkey. Turkish company Otokar is expected to start mass producing the ALTAY either at the end of 2016 or the beginning of 2017.

This is part of a broader trend in the Turkish defense industry, which points to efforts by Turkey to become more self-sufficient in defense. It is also part of a trend in which Turkey is trying to become an exporter of military technology. As the 16th largest economy in the world and a regional power with the second largest army in NATO, Turkey has initiated various national military and defense projects in recent years. In addition to the ALTAY, these include the ANKA, the national combat aircraft project, the national combat ship, and national helicopters. There is also an effort underway to produce indigenous missile and rocket systems, battleships, and much more. With such initiatives, Turkey hopes to become one of the top ten countries in the world in the military industry. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Pakistan and the Gulf countries...are showing a large interest in the tank.”



The ALTAY, Turkey's first domestically designed and produced main battle tank.
Source: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-first-domestic-tank-sees-big-regional-demand.aspx?PageID=238&NID=93567&NewsCatID=345>

Source: Turkey's First Domestic Tank Sees Big Regional Demand," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 7 January 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-first-domestic-tank-sees-big-regional-demand.aspx?PageID=238&NID=93567&NewsCatID=345>

“Altay, Turkey's first domestic tank in the making, has received much interest from the country's allies, said Undersecretariat for Defense Industries (SSM) head İsmail Demir said Jan. 7 during a presentation at parliament.

“Including Pakistan and the Gulf countries, we can say that countries that we have good relations with are showing a large interest in the tank. Representatives of some countries are being invited to the ongoing firing tests,” he said, adding that the tests were extremely satisfying. “Lately, we have seen that Saudi Arabia's interest was big,” he said.”

Source: “Suudi Arabistan Türkiye’den zırhlı araç alacak” (Saudi Arabia will buy armoured vehicles from Turkey), *Sabah.com.tr*, 3 January 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/01/03/suudi-arabistan-turkiyeden-zirhli-arac-alacak>

“Saudi Arabia has been investing in the military field in record numbers recently, both due to domestic terror attacks and due to the situation in Yemen....Saudi Arabia is interested in the indigenous tank ALTAY, and the national UAV ANKA.”

Foreign Military Aid Strengthens Jordan's Defense Against Al Qaeda, ISIL

OE Watch Commentary: The ongoing crisis in Syria has fueled an expansion of Jordan's defense capabilities, with particular focus on enhancing airspace and border defense systems to achieve a measure of deterrence. Jordan's acquisition of helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft and the deployment of foreign military assets to Jordan characterize this focus. (For more information, see "Jordan's Border Policy Moves from Defense to Deterrence," OEW, August 2015.)

Writing for *Al-Ghad*, Taghreed Risheq details the "exceptional" US aid to Jordan during fiscal years 2015 and 2016. She quotes Jordanian Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications Mohammad Momani, who expressed Jordan's appreciation for this US support. He indicated that Jordan considers US aid a demonstration of "strategic interdependence" between Jordan and the United States, highlighting the importance that Jordanian officials place on maintaining positive relations with the United States.

Additionally, Germany's deployment of assets in the region lends support to Jordan's effort to deter Al Qaeda and ISIL at its borders. The report by Sami Muhasena for Abu Dhabi-based *Erem News* notes, for instance, that Germany is expected to deploy UAVs and reconnaissance aircraft to Amman, Jordan, as well as to Turkey's Incirlik Military Base, for use in the campaign against ISIL in Syria (subsequent Jordanian reporting notes that thus far the German aircraft have deployed only to Incirlik). Muhasena notes the deployment of German reconnaissance assets to the region comes in the wake of reports that Jordan aims to use its increased importance to the international coalition to develop more robust capabilities, including adding UAVs to its defense inventory. While the excerpted article indicates that the threats to Jordan include infiltration attempts by armed groups, this shift in security thinking is also perhaps a response to shelling along Jordan's border with Syria. (For more information, see "'Buffer Zone' Along Jordan's Border Linked To Syrian Shelling," OEW, September 2015.)

The quoted statements by retired Major General Fayeze Douiri indicate that Jordan is preparing for a conflict in Syria that could continue for years. While the German deployment may serve Jordan's needs in the short term, we should expect to see further Jordanian interest in UAVs and other reconnaissance systems, particularly if the conflict along its borders continues. **End OE Watch Commentary (Beeny).**

"US aid to Jordan is "a demonstration of the extent of strategic interdependence between Jordan and the United States."

Source: Taghreed Risheq. "Amreeka tuqadm musa'adaat askariya istithna'aiya lil Urdun bainaha 8 ta'iraat" (America offers exceptional military aid to Jordan, including 8 aircraft). *Al-Ghad*, 09 November 2015. <http://www.alghad.com/articles/902556>.

In response to a question about the importance of increasing US military aid to Jordan at this time, given the war against terrorism, the international coalition, and finally the number of fronts along its borders with Iraq and Syria, the Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications, Mohammad Momani, stressed the Kingdom's appreciation for this US support.

Momani said yesterday in a statement to Al Ghad that, "Jordan appreciates US support in light of the dangerous security conditions facing the region, and the spread of instability and terrorism," and considers the aid "a demonstration of the extent of strategic interdependence between Jordan and the United States."

Source: Sami Muhasena. "Hal yuhawal al-Urdun illa markez lil-darib Daesh bil ta'iraat bidun tiyar?" (Will Jordan become the center for striking ISIL with UAVs?), *Erem News*, 29 November 2015. <http://www.eremnews.com/news/world/389402>.

Observers anticipate Jordan's strategic location and its presence in the area of the Syrian and Iraqi crisis will contribute to the country becoming a new base for UAVs.

This comes in the wake of Germany's announcement of its intention to provide Jordan with reconnaissance UAVs for protecting its borders from the threat of ISIL and armed terrorist groups.

The German decision to supply the Jordanian army with this type of aircraft comes following Jordan's efforts to obtain an aerial defense capability for protecting its borders from the threat of infiltration by terrorist groups.

General Volker Wierer, the German Chief of Staff, revealed that his country held talks with Turkey and Jordan on basing for German "Tornado" reconnaissance planes, which will contribute to operations against ISIL in Syria. Wierer explained that he expects to send four or six reconnaissance planes, and that meetings were under way with officials in Turkey and Jordan, to base the aircraft in Incirlik military base in Turkey and in the Jordanian capital of Amman.

Mohammed Abu Rumman, an expert on Islamist groups, said Jordan is seeking to take advantage of the Syrian crisis to strengthen its defensive regime and the capabilities of its army with weapons and techniques it is not usually permitted to access under normal conditions due to the Israeli veto.

Major General Fayeze Douiri (retired) confirmed that Jordan requested the UAVs in order to achieve a better position than that achieved with its F-16 aircraft, due to [the UAV's] ability to surveil a wide horizon during operations. He stated that during the current year, approximately 1,000 American troops arrived in Jordan as part of a mission American officials say aims to assist Jordan in containing the repercussions of the Syrian war, which could continue for years.

Source: "Ta'iraat Tornado Almaniya tatajihi ila Turkiya" [German Tornado planes head to Turkey]. *JO24.net*. 10 December 2015. <http://www.jo24.net/article-144518.html>.

The first German Tornado reconnaissance aircraft and refueling aircraft headed to Turkey on Thursday to participate in supporting the alliance against ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

According to the publication, Deutsche Welle, it was decided that the planes would begin their mission to support military operations against ISIL in Syria and Iraq from Turkish territory beginning next January.

Iran: Were Iranian Drones Useful in Battle for Ramadi?

OE Watch Commentary: On 28 December 2015 an Iraqi military spokesman announced that Iraqi Security Forces had taken the Ramadi government complex back from the Islamic State (variously known as ISIS, ISIL, Daesh). While the Iranian press had reported months before about the Iranian Basij paramilitary force's use of drones over Ramadi in the fight against ISIS, the absence of any discussion of the Iranian drone presence is important, if only in juxtaposition of this omission to earlier reporting.

Iraqi officials insisted that it was the government's security forces—not Iranian agents or the Popular Mobilization Forces, a collection of predominantly Shi'ite volunteers who took up arms and formed militias to fight the Islamic State—who did the bulk of the fighting. While the initial claims of victory may have been premature—ISIS continued to control 30 percent of the city—the battle was nevertheless a major victory for the Iraqi Army.

Because Al-Anbar, the governorate for which Ramadi is the capital, is an overwhelmingly Sunni province, many residents of Ramadi and its environs, as well as policymakers in Washington, worried that the presence of Shi'ite militiamen could exacerbate problems should they conflate newly-liberated residents with ISIS sympathizers. Authorities in Baghdad were conscious of such concerns and the necessity to dampen sectarian tension rather than inflate it, which is why they placed the Iraqi Security Forces front and center.

The Iranian government, for its part, has wavered with regard to the degree to which it seeks to claim credit for its aid and assistance to ISIS. In October 2015, for example, just hours before a senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) general was killed in battle in the Syrian city of Aleppo, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denied to the Iranian news portal *Tabnak.ir* that Iranian forces were actively fighting, and instead suggested that they had limited their mission to a train and assist capacity.

Likewise, in the aftermath of the Iraqi Security Forces' recapture of Ramadi, the Islamic *Republic News Agency* ridiculed the notion that the United States had played any role assisting the Iraqi Security Forces with airpower. Multiple Iranian websites published a photo purporting to depict Qassem Soleimani, Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, talking to Iraqi commanders in Anbar against the backdrop of the fight, although there is no indication to suggest that the photograph occurred when and where Iranian officials suggest (Soleimani was rumored to be seriously wounded, if not killed in Aleppo in November, and there have been no time-confirmed photographs of him since).

While the excerpted article was first published more than six months before the re-capture of Ramadi, it is important for several reasons. Firstly, it confirms both the depth that the IRGC's paramilitary Basij has become involved in Iraq and Iran's willingness to utilize its drone technology outside of Iran and the waters immediately surrounding it. Second, if the Ashura Brigades really were flying UAVs over al-Anbar months before the final Iraqi Security Force assault, then it raises questions over the operational efficacy of the Iranian UAV program, as it did not appear to have provided an advantage upon which the Iranian-backed forces could seize. Third, the lack of subsequent mention also indicates that the Basij had left Al-Anbar, perhaps at the urging of the Iraqi government, which understood that the Iranian presence might undercut the ability to turn Sunni tribes against ISIS. This, in turn, would suggest that Baghdad is not as subordinate to Tehran as some analysts and journalists suggest. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The Ashura Brigades flew UAVs in the skies over al-Anbar.”



Monitoring the fight against the Islamic State from the Ashura Brigade Situation Room.
Source: *Daesh.ir* (http://www.daesh.ir/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/daesh.ir-4287058750190650_7664854363963117698_n.jpg)

Source: “Pehpad-e Guruhanha-ye ‘Ashura’ Bar Faraz al-Anbar beh Pervaz Dar Amad,” (UAVs from the ‘Ashura’ Brigades Flying Over Al-Anbar), *Young Journalist Club*, 19 May 2015. <http://goo.gl/pVKdMR>

UAVs from the ‘Ashura’ Brigades Flying Over Al-Anbar

According to the International Correspondents Press Club, citing a report from Al-Alam News, Kazem al-Jabbari, the Imam Brigade commander, on Tuesday said in a statement that “The forces of the Basij flew advanced drones in al-Anbar to identify the terrorist groups of the Islamic State.” Jabbari said, “the Ashura Brigades flew UAVs in the skies over al-Anbar before the attack of the defenders of the Islamic State in order to liberate the province, and they were used to detect the facilities and positions of the terrorist group.”

Iran: Open New Fronts against America

OE Watch Commentary: Throughout post-revolutionary Iranian history hardline Iranian

factions have used the United States as a foil against which to rally Iranians. During the initial seizure of the US embassy in Tehran in 1979, hostage-takers leaked documents showing which political adversaries met with Americans in order to marginalize them. Likewise, it was an Iranian hardline faction associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) which first exposed the secret negotiations which formed the basis of the Arms-for-Hostages scheme during the Reagan administration in order to embarrass those willing to work with the United States.

In November 2009, on the 30th anniversary of the original hostage taking, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei warned the United States that Washington should not hope to create a wedge between hardline factions and relative reformists. The “Death to America” rhetoric remains commonplace as a refrain during Iran’s weekly prayer sermons.

Despite the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the IRGC remains outspoken against the United States. In the accompanying excerpted speech, Deputy Commander of the IRGC Hossein Salami argues that responsibility for all wars in the Middle East over the previous 37 years, that is, since the Islamic Revolution, lays with the United States and its policies. His analogy to the conflict between Washington and Tehran being akin to a chess or soccer match is illustrative as a reminder that the IRGC believes itself engaged in asymmetric warfare, as it constantly tries to shift tactics to confound the US military and intelligence. Salami’s speech is an important reminder that US security vis-à-vis any threat from Iran cannot be achieved simply by defending against the tactics of the last attack. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“*War is like a chess match; each tactic can only be successful once.*”



Gen. Hossein Salami, deputy commander of the Revolutionary Guard (r) standing next to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei

Source: *Asna-Alborz.ir*, <http://www.asna-alborz.ir/images/docs/000004/n00004965-b.jpg>

Source: “Amerika Moharak-e Jangha-ye 37 Akhir Ast” (America is the Driver of Wars for the Past 37 Years), *Fars News*, 26 December 2015. <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13941004000376>

America is the Driver of Wars

According to a report from the defense correspondent of the Fars News Agency, Gen. Hossein Salami, deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, in a speech this morning to the First Congress for the Protection, Authority, and Security of the IRGC, on the occasion of the anniversary of the December 26 decree by Imam Khomeini with regard to the security of flight and the protection of IRGC air force, stated: “We live today in a world of hard and difficult facts, and we must understand and see this....”

The Deputy Commander of the IRGC stated that authority itself doesn’t create security, and said, “The IRGC Protection Service [Ansar al-Mahdi Brigade] battles every intelligence service in the world and this is complex work for the Protection Service. It must protect on these points in all spaces since the enemy always uses new tools and applications, and in the area of terror they are masters of power....” Gen. Salami added, “War is like a soccer or chess match, because each tactic can only be successful once since the enemy learns how to deal with it; therefore, staying within the established rules and doctrine is the first scourge and failure. It must constantly change because the face of the threat is constantly changing.... General Salami stressed that other enemies should not be able to enter into the heart of the world of Islam, and said, “Several fronts should be opened against the Global arrogance so that its energy is distributed throughout the region.” He added, “We are able to stand against any strategy they try, and our stand is both obvious powerful.”

Iran: Cybercrime Rises

OE Watch Commentary: While US officials are necessarily concerned about

the cyber threat the Islamic Republic of Iran poses to it and to critical infrastructure in the United States, as the internet has expanded into and perhaps even permeated Iran, Iranian officials have grown steadily more aware of the cyber threat inside Iran. While the “Passive Defense Organization” of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) might both engage in cyber warfare and seek to protect Iran’s military and security infrastructure from hacking and sabotage, the Iranian Cyber Police seek to counter other crimes conducted via the internet. It is in this context that Cyber Police Chief Kamal

Hadianfar’s report on cybercrime in the first eight months of the Iranian year (that is, 21 March-21 November 2015) is so interesting. While moral crimes—code for pornography—were a significant portion of the caseload and reflect the ability of Iranian authorities to monitor online activity, by far the vast majority of crimes involved finance. This suggests problems for outside investors and Iranians, as the lifting of sanctions injects money into the Iranian banking system, much of which remains less sophisticated and secure than its European and Gulf Arab counterparts. Even if the banking sector is not involved, the report suggests that a generation of young Iranian conmen are taking advantage of those less sophisticated in the ways of phishing or internet fraud.

Also interesting is Hadianfar’s listing of those regions experiencing the greatest occurrences of cybercrime. Tehran—as Iran’s largest city and financial hub—makes sense as the region of greatest occurrence. The same holds true for Razavi Khorasan, whose capital Mashhad is Iran’s second largest city, Fars and Isfahan, whose capital cities Shiraz and Isfahan are also major cities. The Iranian province of Western Azerbaijan, however, is not heavily populated, but is home to a large percentage of Iran’s Kurdish minority. Its inclusion suggests that Iran’s Cyber Police might be heavily involved in surveillance of Iran’s restive minorities. Conversely, the idea that Kish Island is not a major cyber concern is counterintuitive, given that it remains a major trading hub for both Iranians and, as a visa-free zone, non-Iranians. Indeed, foreigners and Iranians may mix in Kish more than in any other Iranian city beyond Tehran. That most of its hotels and malls are run by the IRGC’s economic wing perhaps suggests a hands-off policy on the part of the Cyber Police more than Kish being an area unaffected by cybercrime. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“Eleven percent of the [cybercrime] cases were moral crimes.”



Gen. Kamal Hadianfar, chief of the Iranian Cyber Police
Source: *Cyberpolice.ir*, <http://www.cyberpolice.ir/sites/default/files/SARDAR06.jpg>

Source: “Rashd 13 Darsady Jara’im Tey 8 Mah” (13 Percent Increase in Crimes in First 8 Months), *Cyberpolice.ir*, 4 December 2015. <http://www.cyberpolice.ir/news/50971>

13 Percent Increase in Crimes

The chief of the Cyber Police reported a 13 percent increase in crime, uncovered 90 percent of those cases, and also reported an increase of 92 percent of defamation cases so far in 2015. The Cyber Police chief said that in 2015, we had a 13 percent increase in crime, and in the last eight months, 11 percent of the cases were moral crimes, while most of the crime in this country that was investigated were unauthorized withdrawals amounting to 52 percent of the cases.

Cyber Police Information Center: Gen. Kamal Hadianfar initially spoke at a press conference about police activity and said, “These police rely on internal capabilities and technical expertise which they have developed, cyber security and the protection of scientific knowledge, and their objective is to seek to protect Islamic and human [values] and control and protect legitimate freedoms.” He added that another goal is to protect the peace of mind of the citizens who work in various fields in order to defend against illegal cyber activities. The police chief cited 1,700 days of operation and said these police operate in 130 towns and districts with populations greater than 200,000, and in 11 provincial capitals there are active digital test centers, and that 82 percent of the cyber police have Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Ph.D’s. The head of the cyber police said that the following areas had the most cyber crime: Greater Tehran with 29.5 percent had the most crime, and after that, Fars Province, Razavi Khorasan, Western Azerbaijan, and Isfahan, while Ilam, Southern Khorasan, North Khorasan, East Tehran, and portions of Kish Island had the least cyber crime.

The Slums of the Arab World

OE Watch Commentary: Last November the Arabic-language daily *al-Araby al-Jadid* ran a six-part series on informal settlements/slums in various cities of the Arab world: Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Cairo, Tunis, and Casablanca. Cairo is the only megacity among the six, with the estimated population of its informal settlements approximately equal to the entire population of Baghdad, the Arab world's next largest city. According to the first accompanying excerpt, eight million people living in informal settlements occupy nearly half of the surface area of greater Cairo.

Baghdad's informal settlements pose a threat to state authority. Many of the new settlements on the city's outskirts are fully controlled by armed militias. Iraq's central government lacks reliable data on the residents of these settlements. As the second accompanying excerpt notes, this intelligence gap and the settlements' difficult geographies make them a challenging environment in which to conduct raids. The article singles out the Asaib Ahl al-Haq militia for its effectiveness in establishing and controlling neighborhoods, estimating that the group has around 50,000 armed men in Baghdad alone, many of them living in informal settlements.

Baghdad is a unique case, given the precipitous collapse of central government authority in 2003. Yet even small erosions of state authority can have significant consequences when it comes to policing informal settlements. As noted in the third excerpt, Tunisia has experienced a boom in illegal construction since 2011. In some areas the task of monitoring compliance with zoning laws has become dangerous enough for Tunisian authorities to consider sending armed teams to help enforce regulations.

Residents of the Arab world's informal settlements are for the most part economically and emotionally vulnerable, as well as deeply devout. This makes them a soft target for extremist recruiters, as the fourth accompanying article notes has been the case in Morocco. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Cairo working-class area (Old Cairo)

Source: Mohammed Shamma (Flickr: Panorama of old Cairo) [CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASlums_of_Egypt_Cairo.jpg

Source: العشوائيات العربية [4-6]. فقراء مصر يواجهون تحالف الدولة ورجال الأعمال Nadia Shahata. "Egypt's Poor Face an Alliance between the State and Businessmen," *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 12 November 2015. <http://goo.gl/Q2Wnfy>

Of the 15 million living in the city, 8 million live in informal settlements that occupy 45% of greater Cairo's surface area. According to the World Bank's latest study discussing informal settlements in Egypt, around 25% of the country's residents live in informal settlements, or around 20 million citizens... According to another study issued by the "Demographic Center" in Cairo and written by Dr. Nadi Halim, informal settlements growth is as high as 34% per year in the 'Qism al-Salam' settlement in Cairo...

Source: العشوائيات العربية [1-6]. تجمعات بغداد خزان بشري للأحزاب السياسية Amir al-Abadi. "Baghdad Communities Are Popular Strongholds for Political Parties," *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 9 November 2015. <http://goo.gl/cDnu8y>

According to Ali Nima al-Saadi, a colonel in the Iraqi Ministry of Interior's intelligence branch, informal settlements are a security nightmare that cannot be controlled. Building an accurate picture of them is impossible given the lack of data on their residents. There are no government security buildings inside them, making them the perfect haven for gangs of all types, particularly kidnappers. COL al-Saadi noted that their pursuit of a gang in the Ur settlement failed due to the proximity of buildings, the narrow lanes connecting them, and the tight, winding roads that predominate there. In addition, a large number of neighborhood residents provide cover and assistance to the gangs... There are over 50,000 Asaib Ahl al-Haq fighters in east Baghdad. Altogether the group has more than a quarter million fighters throughout Baghdad, a number that is significantly larger than its nearest competitor, the Sadrist Movement's Mahdi Army...

Source: العشوائيات العربية [5-6]. أخطار بيئية وصحية تهدد التونسيين Basma Barakat. "Environmental and Health Hazards Threaten Tunisians," *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 15 November 2015. <http://goo.gl/IOhD6v>

Since the 14 January 2011 revolution, Tunis has experienced an unprecedented increase in construction and a revolt against municipal regulations and those enforcing them.... The Tunisian government has set out to improve the working conditions of the municipal monitoring teams and incorporating them into a joint security force that includes national army and security forces, so they can carry out their duties and implement demolition orders....

Source: العشوائيات العربية [6-6]. "أزمة الفقر" تنتشر التطرف في المغرب Hassan al-Ashraf. "'Poverty Belt,' Spreads Extremism in Morocco," *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 16 November 2015. <http://goo.gl/iBKKF6>

Abu Hafz added that despite the fact that extremism is not exclusive to marginalized areas, one should not overlook the elements of poverty and indigence, as well as the element of isolation in the poverty belts surrounding cities and their outskirts. These should be considered as key elements of the spread of extremism... The Islamic activist added that another element is the widespread religiosity in this social group, which makes them susceptible to being drawn in by extremist groups. Another element is the material incentives through which these organizations recruit young men...

Attrition in Yemen

OE Watch Commentary: Saudi Arabia has characterized its intervention in Yemen as a move to push back Iranian expansionism, which it qualifies as an existential threat. The first accompanying excerpted article, written by a prominent Saudi columnist in the daily *al-Hayat* and titled, “You Are Either with Us or against Us,” reflects Saudi frustrations with the tepid global response to the Yemen campaign and Saudi concerns more broadly.

According to the second accompanying excerpted article, from the news website *Arabi 21*, it is time for Saudi Arabia to rethink its entire Yemen campaign. The limits of its aerial war are showing and its local coalition is infiltrated. By getting stuck in Yemen, Saudi Arabia has become embroiled in a slow war of attrition with Iran, according to the third accompanying excerpted article, from the daily *al-Quds al-Arabi*. The article explains Iran’s intention to break up the coalition of states fighting alongside Saudi Arabia and argues that many Yemeni groups fighting on the Saudi side are, in fact, sympathetic to Iran. The Iranian foreign minister, according to the article, told his Saudi counterpart that Iran could see this war drag on for another ten years without spending a penny. The same cannot be said for Saudi Arabia.

Estimates are that the Saudi-led coalition spends around 200 million dollars daily on its Yemen campaign. Ten months in, the war is thought to have cost roughly 60 billion dollars (not counting recent multibillion dollar contracts). According to the dissident Saudi insider tweeting under the handle @mujtahidd, Saudi Arabia has lost around 2000 men (plus 5000 injured), 450 tanks and armored vehicles, 4 Apache helicopters, and an F-15 fighter jet.

Iran still has cards to play in Yemen. An important one, mentioned in the fourth accompanying excerpt (citing @mujtahidd), consists of encouraging cross-border incursions into Jizan (Jazan), Saudi Arabia’s southwesternmost province. In late December former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh, a one-time Saudi ally now fighting alongside the Huthis, hinted at increased cross-border attacks by claiming that the real battle was yet to begin. He asked to negotiate directly with Riyadh rather than going through Saudi Arabia’s Yemeni allies, but was rebuffed. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“... Iran has not put all its egg in a single basket...”

Source:

إما أن نكونوا معنا وإما ضدنا
Jamal Khashoggi. “You Are Either With Us or against Us,” *al-Hayat*. 9 January 2016. <http://goo.gl/FwuYzJ> (translation via: <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2016/01/12/You-are-either-with-us-or-against-us.html>)

There is no power worth dying for in politics, but Iranians are ready to die and kill in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Had they received the green light, Yemen would have been their fourth battlefield, though the Huthis represent them there in the most hideous way. Why then are Iranians killing our people and getting killed in our world? Because they have an expansionist project, and the time has come to convince our allies of this... We are not standing in the face of Iran because we are fundamentalists, but due to its aggressive expansionism.



Former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh in front of his house in Sana'a after it was bombed by Saudi aircraft in May 2015.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Afash.Yemen/photos/pb.531106360274009.-2207520000.1452881715./960262037358437/?type=3&theater>

Source:

محللون: فشل استنزاف الحوثيين يتطلب تغيير معادلة الصراع
Ashraf al-Falahi. “Analysts: Failure to Attrition Huthis Brings Change in the Balance of Conflict,” 13 November 2015. *Arabi 21*. <http://goo.gl/VsjdJ1>

According to Safwan al-Faishi, the editor-in-chief of the website “al-Khabr,” the balance of forces in Yemen requires coalition forces to reconsider their military operations, as well as their tactics and the groups to which they provide money and ammunition. In an exclusive interview with Arabi 21, he argued that the coalition had been infiltrated by the Huthis and Ali Abddulah Saleh... “No military expert would call what is going on in Yemen a war of attrition against the Huthis given the number of casualties among them,” he added. “A war of attrition requires the adversary to reconsider the way it fights, and this has not occurred in the slightest with the Huthis.” He added that the “attrition which the coalition speaks of is not taking place” given that the Huthis are sending daily reinforcements to the various battlefronts without being targeted by airstrikes.

(continued)

Continued: Attrition in Yemen

Source: حرب استنزاف إيرانية في اليمن ترهق السعودية
 Najah Mohammed Ali. "Saudi Arabia Overstretched by Iran's War of Attrition in Yemen," *al-Quds al-Arabi*. 19 December 2015. <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=453434>

... Iran intends to take advantage of the Yemen War prolonging by breaking up the coalition waging the war in Yemen, according to a report following the Turkish downing of a Russian plane written by Iranian BRIG GEN Yadollah Javani... Iranian sources claim that Foreign Minister Javad Zarif told his Saudi counterpart Adel al-Jubeir... if the war in Yemen lasted ten more years, that would not cost the Iranian treasury a single Riyal, while the opposite is true of Saudi Arabia, which is directly injecting money, soldiers and energy into the war.... when Saudi Arabia announced the end of the "Decisive Storm" campaign and the launch of the "Restoring Hope" campaign it was believed that... the war would stop and the coalition countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, would help rebuild Yemen... What many don't realize is that Iran has not put all its egg in a single basket... Iran maintains a network of relations with other powerbrokers in Yemen... Many of those receiving funds from Saudi Arabia are allied with Iran, whether secretly or openly...



Royal Saudi Air Force F-15 Eagle fighter aircraft (Operation Desert Shield).
 Source: <https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:DF-ST-92-07383-C.jpg>

Source: مجتهد: الرياض تخشى انتقام "القاعدة" واجتياح جيزان
 "Mujtahidd: Riyadh Fears al-Qaeda Revenge and an Invasion of Jizan," *al-Safir*. 6 January 2016. <http://assafir.com/Article/1/465435>



As the Saudi tweeter [@mujtahidd] pointed out, "The second card which Iranians can play is Yemen. Their strategy has been to empower the Huthis within Yemen, without attacking Saudi cities. The Huthis have merely carried out limited incursions in their border maneuvers to strengthen their bargaining position, without seeking to advance toward Jizan or Najran. The situation seems to have changed now, and the United States informed Saudi Arabia that Iran might pressure the Huthis to carry out broad attacks specifically targeting Jizan and not Najran. Without trying to frighten anyone, it is useful to recognize that military preparations in terms of morale, technicals and coordination do not include stopping a Huthi invasion of Jizan"... "between the city of Jizan and the border the Huthis have cover from aircraft thanks to the presence of villages, farms, shrubs and trenches, none of which are found in the Najran front."

Jizan Province.
 Source: "Jizan in Saudi Arabia" by TUBS - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jizan_in_Saudi_Arabia.svg#/media/File:Jizan_in_Saudi_Arabia.svg

Egyptian-Saudi Relations and the Islamic Coalition

OE Watch Commentary: The Egyptian expression “fish, milk and tamarind” refers to an unappealing mishmash of disparate things. It is how a former Egyptian diplomat characterized the Islamic Coalition announced by Saudi Arabia in mid-December 2015, of which Egypt is a member. The former diplomat, as cited in the first accompanying excerpted article, explained that “real coalitions do not suddenly materialize... there is nothing clear regarding the coalition, who will fight whom, and what the tools for coordination between the countries are.”

Bilateral relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, arguably the Arab world’s two most powerful nations, continue to be murky and ambiguous. The second accompanying excerpted article, by a columnist in the Saudi daily *al-Hayat*, blames this on the failure of Egypt’s political and intellectual leaders to accept their country’s decline. “It is clear,” the author claims, “that for Egypt to regain its leadership role change must first of all come to Egypt.”

The third accompanying excerpted article is an opinion piece from Egypt’s semi-official *al-Ahram*. It was written in response to Egyptian membership in the new Islamic Coalition, a subject of great debate in that country. Its author warns Egypt against joining any sectarian coalition whose main target is Iran. Cooperation with coalition-members Turkey and Qatar should be contingent on their suspending support for the Muslim Brotherhood. More generally, the author decries the “chaos of coalitions” and rhetorically asks which of the four coalitions currently fighting in the region best helps advance Egyptian interests: the new Saudi-led Islamic Coalition, the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen, the US-led anti-ISIL coalition, or the Russian-led coalition fighting in Syria? The answer, if one is to believe most Egyptian pundits and opinion-makers, is number four.

Money has played a key role in Saudi-Egyptian relations since the summer of 2013. Both countries face economic contraction in 2016. Saudi Arabian financial assistance helped Egypt avoid a painful devaluation toward the end of 2015. A sharp decline in tourism and the broader slowdown in global trade paint a gloomy picture for Egypt’s economy in the year ahead. The Saudi economy, meanwhile, has been drawing from its vast currency reserves to plug the deficit caused by low oil prices and the costly war in Yemen. With fewer resources to go around in 2016, the tangled relationship that has developed between Saudi princes and Egyptian generals may come under strain from an unlikely source: their own domestic media. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...Egypt wants financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf but it does not want to pay any price ...”

Source: شكوك مصرية بالتحالف الإسلامي: يضم الخصوم.. ودولاً فاشلة
Mustafa Bassiouni. “Skepticism in Egypt over the Islamic Coalition as It Includes Foes and Failed States,” 17 December 2015. <http://assafir.com/Article/5/462364>

Former Egyptian deputy foreign minister, Ambassador Masoum al-Marzouq, told al-Safir, “What was announced can in no way be considered a military or political coalition, since real coalitions do not suddenly materialize. It seems clear that US Secretary of State John Kerry called for the creation of a Sunni military force to fight ISIL. Saudi Arabia announced the formation of these forces and Egypt supported it. The statement announcing the coalition’s formation seemed like it was translated from another language.” Al-Marzouq added, “How can the same military coalition include Turkey and Egypt, while Egypt accuses Turkey and Qatar of supporting terrorism? How can it include failed states like Somalia and Libya? How can the headquarters of the coalition be in Saudi Arabia? Based on the size, weaponry and capabilities of the militaries involved it should be in Turkey or Egypt, not Saudi Arabia. There is nothing clear regarding the coalition, who will fight whom, and what the tools for coordination between the countries are. There is no clear agreement on the founding of this coalition. We might say that this coalition is “fish, milk and tamarind.”

Source: السعودية ومصر: مصالح مشتركة وسياسات رمادية
Khalid al-Dakhil. “Saudi Arabia and Egypt: Shared Interests and Murky Politics,” *al-Hayat*. 29 November 2015. <http://goo.gl/Vg8o8b>

There is a consensus of sorts that Egypt-Saudi relations are murky in a way that serves neither party... Why the murkiness? Is Saudi or Egypt the reason? Egypt is the reason... Almost all recent Egyptian writings on the subject also attribute the opaqueness of relations to Egyptian policies, but they do so not from a perspective of properly understanding the Saudi positions and their rightfulness, but rather to chastise Egyptian leaders for accepting them and in doing so weakening or curtailing Egypt’s role... The intellectual elite wishes Egypt to reclaim its leadership role in the region that it held in the first half of last century... It is clear that for Egypt to regain its leadership role change must first of all come to Egypt... Egypt realizes that following the decline of Iraq and Syria the only way to save the region is by cooperating with Saudi Arabia.... Egypt wants financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf but it does not want to pay any price for this...

Source: مصر وفوضى تشكيل الأحلاف
Muhammad al-Said Idris. “Egypt and the Chaos of Forming Coalitions,” *al-Ahram*. 29 December 2015. <http://www.ahram.org.eg/NewsQ/462459.aspx>

All eyes are turned toward Egypt. In the eyes of the regional and world powers active in the Middle East, Egypt is the “most powerful and decisive force in violent conflicts”.... the important question is “what will Egypt do?” or more precisely what should it do Egypt should not be part of any coalition whose primary goal is fighting Iran or a coalition based on sectarian or doctrinal foundations. The Sunni-Shi’a war is an Israeli creation, part of Israel’s plan to divide Arabs... Egypt can also not be part of a coalition with Turkey and Qatar while those countries support the Muslim Brotherhood and are fighting against the Syrian state... This chaos of coalitions and ideas has nothing to do with the challenges that Egypt is concerned about at the moment... Which one of the coalitions will help Egypt confront the challenges it faces and help secure its vital interests?

Gambia: Is Africa's Second Islamic Republic Becoming More Islamic and Less Republic?

OE Watch Commentary: In December 2015 Gambia's President Yahya Jammeh declared his country would be an Islamic Republic, adding there would be no dress code. One month later and, as the first accompanying excerpt relates, female government workers were told they were no longer permitted to have their hair showing during work, causing concern, especially among the approximately five to ten percent of the population that is not Muslim, that Jammeh was paving the way to implementing full-fledged sharia. Barely ten days later, as the second accompanying excerpt relates, the dress code was rescinded.

The reason behind Jammeh's push for Gambia to have a stronger Islamic identity is unknown, though theories abound. His 2013 decision to pull Gambia out of the British Commonwealth and his recent decree making the country an Islamic Republic - the second in Africa after Mauritania - are often viewed as reflecting his intention to distance Gambia from its colonial past. The Islamic Republic declaration has also been described as a move to distract Gambians from the recent economic turmoil the country has been undergoing. With memories of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa still fresh in many Europeans' minds, they are choosing not to spend their vacation on Gambia's beautiful beaches, depriving that country of badly needed revenue.

There are still other theories as to why Jammeh is moving his country, a significant portion of whose population is fairly liberal and dresses in Western styles, towards a more Islamic bent. Some say it is his way of showing his strength, and still others say he is trying to curry favor with Arab countries as the West backs away from him. However, the truth is it is difficult to completely understand his motives. His behavior is often described as erratic, and his methods, including torture, ensure few people actually living in the country, as the first excerpt relates, are willing to vigorously challenge his decisions, so he is not compelled to publicly justify his actions. Though the dress code has been rescinded, the concern now is that Jammeh, who has ruled Gambia since seizing power in a 1994 coup, is not done implementing policies in the name of religion that will further reduce freedom. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

"...according to Mama Linguere Sarr, a Gambian human rights activist and journalist based in Sweden, no matter the people's thoughts on the issue – in public they will support the move so as not to face retribution as many have in the past."



President Yahya Jammeh, whose recent actions have some people worried he is implementing a more restrictive form of Islam in Gambia than many practice.
Source: <http://www.mambaonline.com/2015/05/13/gambian-president-says-hell-slit-gays-throats/>

Source: "Gambia: Female Government Workers Ordered to Cover Hair," *Africa Times*, 6 Jan 2016, <http://africatimes.com/2016/01/06/gambia-female-government-workers-ordered-to-cover-hair/>

The memo was released on Monday January 4 detailing that "all female staff within the Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies are no longer allowed to expose their hair during official working hours.

"Gambia's destiny is in the hands of the Almighty Allah. As from today, Gambia is an Islamic state. We will be an Islamic state that will respect the rights of the citizens," Jammeh stated.

At the time of the decision the president stated that no dress code would be enforced and that all citizens no matter their faith would be able to freely practice their religion....

In the past the country has had a good relationship with the west, however over time it has deteriorated in part due to human rights concerns in the state..

Many Gambians living abroad expressed their disagreement over the decision and the political party, The United Democratic Party (UDP), said the pronouncement was "ill-advised".

Jeffery Smith of RFK Human Rights said the move is simply a demonstration of strength by the president "related to his declaration of the Gambia as an Islamic Republic, to show that the country somehow supports him and his decisions, regardless of how erratic and bizarre they might seem to be," reported Vice

Source: "Gambia Lifts Directive on Hair Cover at Work," *StarAfrica.com*, 14 Jan 2016, <http://en.starafrika.com/news/gambia-lifts-directive-on-hair-cover-at-work.html>

The Gambia government has confirmed it is withdrawing a directive passed recently which ordered female civil servants to cover their hair at work. A statement from the Office of the President on Wednesday evening pointed out that the government was abandoning the edict with immediate effect.

"The directive had nothing to do with religion the latest statement said.

The statement hinted that the directive ordering female members of the government workforce to cover their hair had not gone down well with women in the country and President Yahya Jammeh in tune with their sentiment was rescinding the order.

AU Debates Intervention in Burundi

OE Watch Commentary: Burundi is on the brink of - or, more pessimistically, in the midst of - a genocide, stemming from civil society unrest in the aftermath of incumbent President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to allow himself to run for (and emerge victorious from) a third term in July 2015. Since then, violence has spread throughout the country, with rioters attacking the government, and the government attempting to maintain order. Between 400 and 500 have been killed. The violence has deteriorated to such a point that the African Union (AU) has contemplated intervention and, resultantly, in late December the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the AU decided to send in human rights observers, as well as a 5000-person military force to monitor the status of civilians. However, while some observers, such as the author of the attached excerpted article, are enthusiastic about the AU's newfound commitment to human rights, the AU continues to face practical constraints on its ability to intervene.

At the core of the AU's dilemma is what is arguably the most important clause of its Constitutive Act, Article 4(h), which gives "the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity." The deteriorating situation in Burundi, it would seem, would fall into this category. However, the Burundian government has said the presence of AU troops would be seen as a provocation, and they are not welcome. Thus, despite the PSC's decision to send peacekeepers, the AU has not been able to get acquiescence (in the form of a memorandum of understanding, thus supporting state's individual sovereignty) from the Burundian government; thus, it is hamstrung.

Most observers like the author, Ngugi, understand that two options are on the table for the AU. On one hand, the AU could remain stalled in action, as it has been for the past several weeks, and reiterate the fears of the author that AU has "has not completely given up its moral ghost" of being averse to military interventions in member states. Where observers hope that the AU could prove itself to be truly revolutionary would be if it decided to send a military intervention force into Burundi, even against the wishes of President Pierre Nkurunziza, continuing its "laudable actions" to protect civilians in the face of violence.

To be sure, such a bold move would have long-lasting consequences, both positive and negative. On the negative side a unilateral AU intervention could put AU troops in danger of being attacked by both sides of the conflict: those in support of Nkurunziza and those protesting him. Moreover, the political backlash could be severe: not only would such an action infuriate Nkurunziza, but it could indeed cause profound censure of the African Union from some of the continent's more conservative regimes - such as Yaya Jammeh's Gambia; Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe; Isais Afiwerki's Eritrea, among others - who would be infuriated by the granting of such wide-ranging supranational powers to the AU. Yet to date, the AU remains hamstrung, and observers will wait to see which way the AU decides to react. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

"We have to laud the AU's robust stand on Burundi, including a declared intention to send in troops to protect civilians."



The African Union, under the leadership of Commission Chairperson Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, is coming up against roadblocks in its attempt to deploy an AU peacekeeping force to quell violence in Burundi.
Source: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201601131302.html>

Source: Ngugi, Tee. 2016. "Burundi Gives African Union a Chance to Prove It's No Longer a Club of Dictators." *The East African (Nairobi, Kenya)*. 16 January. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201601181209.html>.

In Burundi, the Africa Union (AU) has a clear and non-controversial opportunity to shed its image as "the trade union of dictators"...

Though coming a little late in the day, the AU's concern about the deteriorating situation in that country is a hopeful sign that the continental body has not completely given up its moral ghost. We can be forgiven for viewing anything the AU, or its predecessor the OAU, does with a healthy dose of cynicism....

Still, all that notwithstanding, we have to laud the AU's robust stand on Burundi, including a declared intention to send in troops to protect civilians. There is also an AU-supported peace effort led by Uganda. Of course, as intimated earlier, these laudable actions should have followed incremental penalties such as sanctions against Pierre Nkurunziza and his associates, freezing of government assets outside of Burundi and lobbying for the ICC to focus its lens on the country.

We have to bear in mind that the slide towards murder and mayhem in Burundi has followed a pattern we have seen before. First, a regime becomes self-serving without a people-focused socio-political or economic agenda. Then it perpetuates itself in power through stamping out independent voices, before it finally descends or disintegrates into murderous mayhem....

AU organs concerned with peace and governance must devise and begin to robustly implement a clear policy whereby regimes exhibiting the patterns detailed above attract penalties that increase in severity, leading to troop deployment....

The AU and the international community must not let Burundi slide back to the killing field it has been for most of its history.

What is al-Murabitoun?

“A military solution alone will not be enough. However, in the short term, the government must continue to strengthen the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA), with a particular emphasis on intelligence.”

OE Watch Commentary: An Islamist group known as al-Murabitoun is gaining prominence in West Africa, for all of the wrong reasons. In November 2015 the group claimed responsibility for a takeover of the Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Mali, in which 21 people were killed. Later, on 16 January 2016, the group also claimed responsibility for a similar style of attack on The Splendid Hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in which 28 were killed. While the group has claimed some associations with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), it is a distant outfit, whose origins, goals and tactics merit further scrutiny and investigation. The accompanying excerpt details one opinion from a researcher in Senegal as to how the region should collectively deal with Islamic extremism from groups like al-Murabitoun.

Al-Murabitoun, which is rightfully beginning to attract more attention since the January 2016 Burkina Faso takeover, is known to be the result of a merger of two older Sahelian Islamist groups. The first is the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), one of the Islamist insurgent groups that was battling for control of the northern stretches of Mali after the January 2013 collapse of the country. The second, known as the “Masked Men’s Brigade” in English, is headed by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the former commander of AQIM. Al-Murabitoun is one of the many groups and splinter groups of Islamists battling for control in the Sahel and Sahara, which also include, Ansar Dine, Ansaru, Boko Haram, AQIM, and some smaller groups with degrees of individual or group loyalty to the Islamic State. For its part, al-Murabitoun is believed to be unaffiliated with the Islamic State, though stories on this front are continuously shifting.

While the exact composition of al-Murabitoun remains somewhat unclear, its goals and tactics are easier to parse out. The motivations behind the group remain broadly similar to those of its constituent offshoots: officially, it is eager to instill sharia in the areas of its control, a part of which demands delegitimizing (or unseating) the governments of states. Unofficially, drives for economic, political, and social power underlie individual leaders’ goals. Tactically, the group’s attacks have been concentrated in two Sahelian West African countries - Burkina Faso and Mali - both of which have undergone recent tumultuous political histories, and whose police and military units are in transitory phases. Another commonality of the attacks is that in both instances the group has taken over hotels in capital cities that are frequented by Westerners, which some have argued are as symbolically important as Western embassies.

The continued proliferation and enduring salience of such Islamist groups in Western Africa coincide with a moment where local Islamist identities are attempting to either fit in - or reject - larger Islamist narratives from around the world. In West Africa specifically, the rise of al-Murabitoun comes at a moment when The Gambia has just declared itself an Islamic Republic, joining Mauritania as one of two states on the African continent with that distinction. More broadly, a larger swath of West African countries are currently dealing with how to reconcile the relationship between civil liberties and Islam, with many - including Senegal, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Niger - banning full veils for Muslim women for fears of their abilities to conceal suicide bombs. Indeed, the emergence and seeming power of al-Murabitoun reveals not only the shifting alliance of Islamist groups in the Sahara and the Sahel, but also, more importantly, their capacity for destruction in some of the least consolidated states in the world. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**



The Islamist group al-Murabitoun has claimed responsibility for two high-level attacks on Western hotels in Mali and Burkina Faso in the past three months. Source: <http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-mourabitoun>

Source: Maïga, Ibrahim. 2015. “Lutte contre le terrorisme au Mali : Nécessité d’un virage stratégique” [Fight Against Terrorism in Mali: The Need for a Shift in Strategy.] Institute for Security Studies (Dakar, Senegal). 4 December. www.issafrika.org/iss-today/strategic-shift-needed-to-combat-violent-extremism-in-mali.

On 20 November, the Malian capital of Bamako once more became the scene of a terrorist attack. The assault targeted the Radisson Blu Hotel. Once considered one of the safest establishments in the city, the hotel attracts a mostly foreign clientele. It claimed 22 lives. Militant jihadist organisations al-Mourabitoun and the Macina Liberation Front (MLF) claimed responsibility for the incident....

Most of the fighters in these two groups come from the ranks of MUJWA and AQIM, which is proof of the cooperation that exists between various terrorist groups....

Two factors should inform responses to these new threats. First, it is clear that a military solution alone will not be enough. However, in the short term, the government must continue to strengthen the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA), with a particular emphasis on intelligence. Strong actions are needed, but they should be part of a coherent institutional framework. Moreover, the gradual redeployment of FAMA in the north must be accompanied by investment in access to basic social services. This will help to restore trust between the administration and citizens. Furthermore, no lasting victory will be possible unless the government’s response forms part of a long-term strategy. This response should be multifaceted and involve greater mobilisation of the authorities to the danger posed by violent extremism.

Besides awareness-raising, in which religious authorities should play an important role, policies against organised crime which benefits terrorist groups could also prove effective. One has to keep in mind that the terrorist threat has not always been the top priority for Malian authorities. Initially seen as a secondary threat in comparison to the risk of separatism, terrorist groups have now become the most serious challenge to stability in Mali.

Security Impacts of Declining Oil Prices in Nigeria

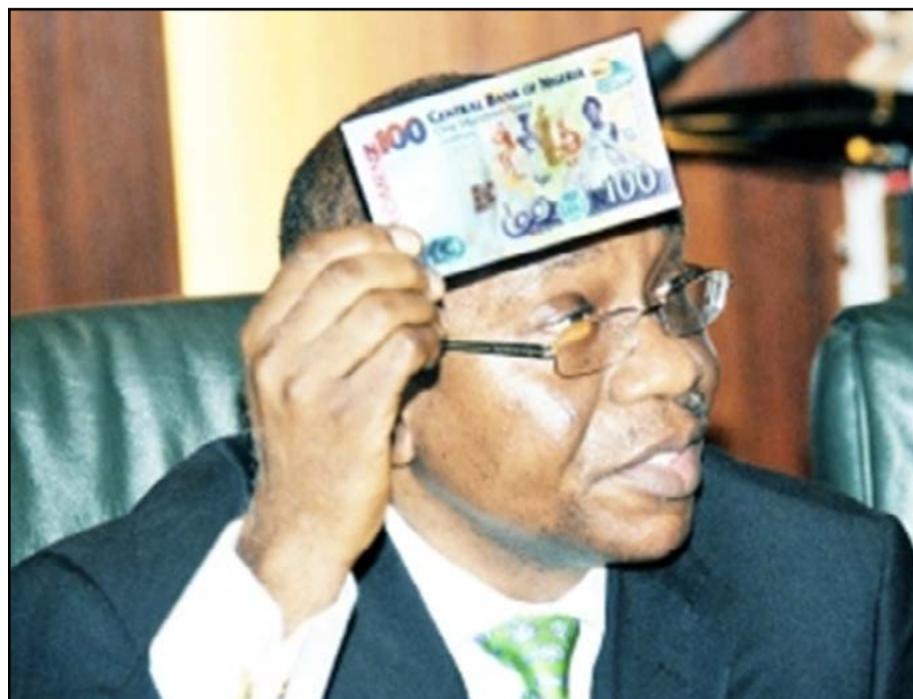
OE Watch Commentary: The global price of oil has recently fallen below \$30 a barrel, down from a mid-2014 high of \$100 a barrel. While the low price of oil has been a boon to consumers around the world, for many countries whose primary sources of revenue come from oil, the current glut is disastrous. This is especially true for Nigeria, which has long been Africa's primary oil-producing nation. While only about 15% of Nigeria's overall GDP comes from oil, an estimated 70% of the government's revenue comes from it. Importantly, while the decline in global oil prices is already having negative effects on Nigerian state coffers, it has the potential to exacerbate insecurity in the country as well, as is detailed in the accompanying excerpted article.

Most broadly, the global decline in oil prices will exacerbate tensions between the state and citizens and can lead to social protest. With the Nigerian government cash-strapped and no upturn in oil prices on the horizon, it has had to take a series of measures that are unpopular with citizens. Beginning in late 2014, Nigeria has devalued the naira multiple times, from a high of 160 naira per dollar in September 2014 to its current exchange rate of around 200 naira per dollar in January 2016. In response, many large international banks have sold off Nigerian assets, taking even more capital from the country. Moreover, Nigeria is currently considering reducing a fuel subsidy (thus making gas more expensive for citizens), as well upping its VAT (thus increasing taxes on citizens' everyday purchases). Together, these moves make the purchase of everyday commodities more expensive for average Nigerians, and backlash could be a result.

More specifically, and as the article details, the decline in global oil prices appears to be leading to an upsurge of insecurity in the Niger Delta. Anti-statist groups, especially the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), have long been operating in the southeastern Niger Delta, attacking government oil extraction facilities and national and private security forces, claiming that the government and international oil companies are profiting from people's land without adequate compensation. Yet, with the decline in global oil prices, insecurity in the region - which had become somewhat calmer over the years - appears to be on the uptick again. Thus, as Governor of Delta State Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa has articulated: "It is an incontrovertible fact that maritime security and national prosperity are inextricably linked" and that because of the decline in global oil prices, "[p]iracy in the Gulf of Guinea has continued to prosper; rampant crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism are still flourishing and Nigeria loses between 40,000 and 100,000 barrels (of crude oil) a day due to theft."

Finally, a decrease in government revenues might have implications for the fight against Boko Haram. While the issue of funding - not only for materiel, but also logistics, salaries, etc. - has historically been a stumbling block, a decrease in government revenues will not improve the situation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

"It is an incontrovertible fact that maritime security and national prosperity are inextricably linked."



The recent decline in global oil prices is likely to have numerous security implications for the governments of oil exporting countries, like Nigeria.
Source: <http://leadership.ng/news/470993/no-plan-for-naira-devaluation-emefiele-insists>

Source: Okowa, Ifeanyi. 2015. "Dwindling Oil Revenue: Okowa Challenges Navy on Maritime Security." *This Day (Lagos)*, December 1. <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/dwindling-oil-revenue-okowa-challenges-navy-on-maritime-security/226795/>.

As Nigeria faces financial crisis as a result of dwindling revenue from oil resources, the Delta State Governor, Dr. Ifeanyi Okowa, has challenged the Nigerian Navy to ensure effective maritime security.

...Okowa decried the high rate of piracy, crude oil theft, illegal bunkering, pipeline vandalism and other criminal activities in the nation's maritime domain. "It is an incontrovertible fact that maritime security and national prosperity are inextricably linked together; therefore, at this critical juncture in the nation's history, I expect the Nigerian Navy to treat the issue of maritime security as a national emergency because today, the country is hanging precariously on a financial cliff owing to dwindling receipts to the Federation Account occasioned by the falling oil prices," the governor said

He added: "Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has continued to prosper; rampant crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism are still flourishing and Nigeria loses between 40,000 and 100,000 barrels (of crude oil) a day due to theft while illegal fishing (poaching) and pollution that threatens the local food supply is also thriving in addition to the fact that drug and human trafficking are enjoying a boom in the West African coastlines."

While commending the Nigerian Navy and other security agencies for battling crime and criminal activities in the maritime sector, the governor disclosed that Delta State, "as an oil producing state, is caught in the cross hairs of these unfortunate development in the maritime sector as the state has continued to lose huge revenues to oil thieves and pipeline vandals, with severe adverse consequences on our already depleted finances."

AQIM Sahara Branch's "Localization" Strategy

OE Watch Commentary: Al-Qaeda leaders explain their organization in terms of "circles". The first circle is Al-Qaeda Central; the second circle includes affiliates, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); and the third circle includes allied individuals and cells operating covertly behind enemy lines. In a 10 January Arabic-language interview with Mauritania's *Al-Akhbar* Jemal Okacha (alias Yahya Abu al-Hammam), the leader of AQIM's Saharan Branch, discussed Ansar Dine (Supporters of Religion) and the Macina Liberation Front (FLM). Ansar Dine and the FLM both have operated in local areas outside of AQIM's regular area of operations in Mali by interacting with tribal leaders and civic groups and often concealing the truth about their higher-level connections to AQIM. Okacha's interview and description of Ansar Dine and FLM confirms their role is in the "third circle."

According to the *Al-Akhbar* interview of Okacha and accompanying analysis, Ansar Dine's local mandate is for all of Mali (including the south, where AQIM has historically had little influence) and the FLM's mandate is for the Fulani ethnic group, who inhabit the central and southern regions of Mali (Macina was a pre-colonial Fulani-led Caliphate in present-day southern Mali). Consistent with AQIM's "localization" strategy, the attack on the Radisson Blu Hotel in the capital of Bamako in southern Mali in November 2015 was claimed by AQIM's Saharan Branch and separately by Ansar Dine and the FLM. This attack was outside of AQIM's traditional area of operations and was made possible by cells of the FLM and Ansar Dine that operated clandestinely on behalf of AQIM.

Recent videos from AQIM's Saharan Branch have shown militants lecturing northern Malian tribesmen. Other videos have adopted the choreography, music, and semantics of ISIL videos. Nonetheless, as Okacha confirmed, AQIM rejects ISIL's declared Caliphate, and is only emulating ISIL's successful online recruitment techniques to compete with ISIL. Ansar Dine and FLM will also not fall into ISIL's orbit and will follow AQIM. They will assist AQIM to expand its influence and operations in southern Mali and enhance Al-Qaeda's brand more generally in West Africa.

The open communications and strategic relationships between AQIM and smaller and lesser known jihadist groups and cells in Africa like Ansar Dine and FLM may lead to the exportation AQIM's model to areas that previously did not see jihadist violence. For example, a hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso's capital, was attacked by AQIM on 15 January 2016, with more than 20 people killed. This was the first ever jihadist attack in Ouagadougou and required AQIM to coordinate with local Burkinabe supporters, whose identities are still under investigation at the time of this writing.

As a result of these developments, national and international militaries in Africa would benefit from studying the AQIM Saharan Branch's strategy and anticipating its next moves throughout West Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

"But as for our brothers in Ansar Dine, they see jihad as local... This difference we mention is a simple one and does not prevent us from coordinating and cooperating with them."



After being expelled from northern Mali in 2013, Ansar Dine (featured above) and allied Al-Qaeda groups are now returning to the region in 2016.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/sahel-terrorism-draws-international-attention/1874559.html>

Source: "Abu Al-Hammam in the First Interview After the French Intervention in Mali," *Al-Akhbar*, 8 January 2016.

AQIM Sahara Branch's "Localization" Strategy

And after three years of this Crusader intervention in northern Mali, we go back and remember what the French government said during the intervention. The French promised several things: eliminating terrorism in northern Mali; returning a unified and stable government in Mali and restoring peace and stability to the Sahel region; returning the French hostages to their countries through force and not negotiations; and economic development.

Before the French invasion, the mujahideen were only in the north, but today, after this intervention, the mujahideen are now all over Mali, from the Mauritanian border in the west to the borders of Burkina in the east, and from Algeria in the north to the capital, Bamako, in the south. It is a war of attrition in the long term. Indeed, we can say today that France is stuck in the quagmire of Mali.

We coordinate and cooperate with [Ansar Dine and Macina Liberation Front] in all matters related to the war inside Mali. As for our position on [the Islamic State's] declared Caliphate, we do not acknowledge the legitimacy of this Caliphate nor the legitimacy of pledging allegiance to it, and we do not see it on the prophetic method.

Echoes of Nigeria's Crackdown on Boko Haram in Current Crackdown on Shias

OE Watch Commentary: In July 2009, in the northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri, there was a confrontation between the Nigerian security forces and an extremist, but not yet militant, Boko Haram. The security forces killed up to 1000 Boko Haram members at that time, including the then Boko Haram leader, and lost about 20 of their own. Within one year a new leader, Abubakar Shekau, emerged and declared a jihad against Nigeria and the United States. He has since led Boko Haram, which has become the most violent militant group in Africa, if not also the world.

Despite the events of July 2009, the Nigerian security forces again entered into a similar clash with the Iran-supported Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) in December 2015. The IMN reportedly set up a checkpoint for the Chief of Army Staff in Kaduna State. After an initial dispute, the army returned later, clashed with the IMN and reportedly killed up to 1000 members and destroyed the IMN headquarters. The IMN leader was reportedly killed or taken secretly to a hospital in Lagos; he has not been seen since the clash.

An article in Nigeria's *Pulse* from 8 January details the IMN's response to the events of December 2015. According to the article, the IMN believes the crackdown was premeditated. However, the IMN does not promise revenge against the security forces like Boko Haram did after 2009. Rather, it continues to label itself a peaceful movement. Meanwhile, according to the article, the Army states that it followed the necessary rules of engagement.

This event in December 2015 shows that the Nigerian Army sets a red-line when it comes to groups like Boko Haram or the IMN forming a de-facto state-within-a-state. Yet, crackdowns that cause significant casualties risk radicalizing survivors to greater violence or agitation. In the context of decaying pre-existing Sunni-Shia tensions elsewhere in the world, the recent violence in Nigeria could also spiral downwards, whether or not the government and remaining IMN members intend such a result. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Islamic Movement of Nigeria believes that even the Nigerian Army was aware that the Movement and its members were unarmed and defenceless when [the Army] launched their brutal attack of indiscriminate killings of men, women and children, which judging by the nature of the attack, was actually pre-planned.”

Source: “‘We Don’t Need Soldiers’ Apology,’ Group Says,” *Pulse*, 8 January 2016.

Echoes of Nigeria's Crackdown on Boko Haram in Current Crackdown on Shias

[The IMN] have a list of about 700 of our members that are currently missing some of which are in detention with the Army. The army is desperate to cover up its indefensible crime against humanity, of indiscriminate killing of defenceless and unarmed civilians in Zaria.

IMN believes that even the Nigerian Army was aware that the Movement and its members were unarmed and defenceless when they launched their brutal attack of indiscriminate killings of men, women and children, judging by the nature of the attack, which was actually pre-planned.

[Major General] Oyebade] had said that the army had followed the necessary rules of engagement in Zaria. He said that the army would not apologize over the incident.



Nigerian troops (featured here) destroyed the compound of Nigeria's Shia movement and either killed or critically injured its leader.
Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/nigerian-shiites-say-soldiers-have-killed-hundreds/3102014.html>

Colombian Plebiscite (Part 2)

OE Watch Commentary: In the January 2016 OE Watch, this commentator erroneously stated that this January the Colombian electorate would vote in a plebiscite on the implementation of a FARC-government negotiated agreement. As of this writing, the date for such a plebiscite has not been fixed. If it happens, it will be after an agreement has final signatures affixed and the complete text of what has been accorded has been presented to the public. Most likely that would mean a plebiscite would occur in May or June. The plebiscite would be an up or down vote, with the passage threshold being 13% of the electorate (4,396,625 votes in favor).

There remain some hurdles, including additional legal review, but, more significantly, FARC dissatisfaction with the method may trip up the plebiscite. The FARC claims to prefer a constitutional assembly as the referendum method of choice, and it has been getting much of what it wants. A constitutional assembly would look more closely at the details of the agreement and would open up a number of issues dealing directly with the basic Colombian law. According to some, including ex-President Álvaro Uribe, the constitutional assembly would be the more democratic way for the Colombian electorate to examine and opine on the many details of the negotiation. They also fear, however, that the FARC would to its benefit successfully organize the representation to (and the procedures of) a constituent assembly.

In any case, although President Santos has promised some method of popular review and approval, his government argues that no referendum method is legally needed for the accords to be approved and implemented. The supposed purpose of the negotiations is to bring a lasting and democratic peace to the country. Many Colombian commentators opine that if the majority of Colombians do not agree with what has been given to the FARC, internal peace will not have been achieved by the peace process. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

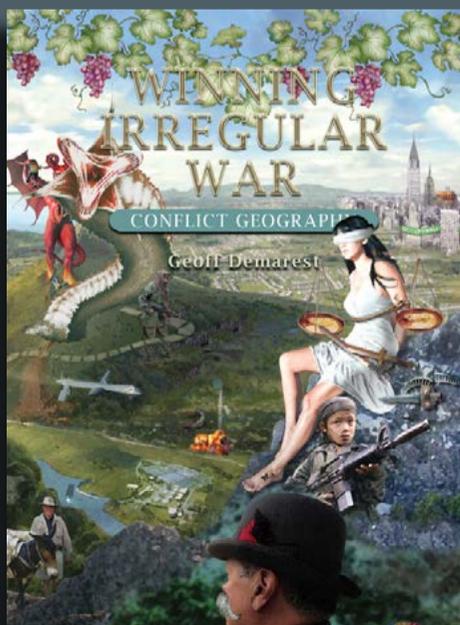
“...peace is a fundamental right, and that precisely therefore, it is protected from decisions of the majority...”

Source: Editors, “Así funcionará el plebiscito para avalar acuerdos de paz” (This is how the plebiscite to approve the peace accords will work), *Bluradio.com*, 14 December 2015, <http://www.bluradio.com/118214/asi-funcionara-el-plebiscito-para-avalar-acuerdos-de-paz>.

“...It is important to clarify that at least thirty days beforehand, an open, massive information campaign is to be launched that will allow all Colombians to know the whole content of the Final Accords...No fixed date is dictated by the bill, but in any case the convocation is to be after the signing of the Final Accord and no more than four months after the President informs Congress of the intention to convoke [the plebiscite]....For the majority vote to be valid, it will have to have, as a minimum, 4, 396, 625 Yes votes.”

Source: Alfonso Monsalve Solórzano, “¿Plebiscito o constituyente?” (Plebiscite or Constitutional Assembly?), *Periódico Debate*, 15 November, 2015, <http://www.periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/10105-¿plebiscito-o-constituyente>

“But, more likely this [a constituent assembly in which each person in the electorate has one equal vote] and that the demands of the FACR will be admitted through the back door. And if that won't work and no popular referendum mechanism serves that organization, then what remains is the position of the attorney general, who simply asserts that the President is not obligated to seek any kind class of popular acceptance for the agreement because peace is a fundamental right, and that precisely therefore, it is protected from decisions of the majority. What he did not say is that a peace won behind the Colombians' backs will only generate more violence, which is, exactly, what the wish was to avoid, one supposes, with the negotiations...”



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

Guatemalan Military Officers Losing 1980-82 War

OE Watch Commentary: In January 2016 the Guatemalan prosecutor-general made a mass arrest of retired military officers, accusing them of having perpetrated grave human rights violations during the height of the war there in the early 1980s. This is a milestone in a long history of successful and unsuccessful human rights prosecutorial ventures. Some will label the prosecutions as an attempt toward justice long-overdue, while others see them as cynical, ideologically/politically motivated lawfare. The officers had effected a successful military campaign against the communist Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). Then, after a process of negotiations and disarmament, the Guatemalan far left also found itself relatively unsuccessful at the election booths.

Today, any juridical offensive is welcomed by the left as potential comeuppance for the military. In a related case, ex-president Efraín Ríos Montt was to appear in court this month as well, but one prominent member of his defense team was just murdered. As another of this month's OE entries (Crosscurrents in Colombia's Irregular War) notes, the prosecution of human rights cases in the region is often peopled by foreign lawyers sponsored by NGOs that can have close ties to radical leftist movements — so the conspiratorial lawfare theory is at least worth watching.

End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)

“...the investigation is based on 558 skeletons of children, adults and seniors found between 2012 and 2015 in an old military camp in Alta Verapaz...”

Source: Editors, “Caen exmilitares guatemaltecos por desapariciones” (Guatemalan Ex-militaries fall because of disappearances), *La Prensa*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.laprensa.hn/mundo/917395-410/caen-exmilitares-guatemaltecos-por-desapariciones>

“Prosecutor Thelma Aldana said in a press conference that 14 of the military officers are accused of participation in at least 88 massacres of indigenous people during the internal armed conflict, most of them in the northern department of Alta Verapaz. Among the detained individuals is Benedicto Lucas, ex-Army Chief of Staff of the army during the presidency of his brother Romeo Lucas (1978-82), whose term is considered one of the darkest during the 36-year conflict. Part of the investigation is based on 558 skeletons of children, adults and seniors found between 2012 and 2015 in an old military camp in Alta Verapaz, of which 97 have been identified through DNA testing...the arrests happen shortly before a special genocide trial begins the 11th of January against ex-dictator Efraín Ríos Montt.”

Source: Ricardo Angoso, “Entrevista a Oscar Plantero, Guatemala: la Izquierda se está vengando de los militares” (Interview with Oscar Plantero [ex assistant director of Guatemalan national intelligence], Guatemala: the left is taking vengeance on military officers), *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 25 November 2015, <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/guatemala-la-izquierda-se-esta-vengando-de-los-militares.html>

“On being named Subdirector General of Civil Intelligence (DIGICI), Oscar Platero suffered a difficult campaign of political and media attacks, by way of various media, from his country's most radical political left. Platero, military officer, writer and political analyst, has for years reported on the existence of a kind of conspiracy against his country that stigmatizes the Guatemalan Army and denounces it for its participation in the struggle against communist subversion. That threat, presented by the URNG guerrilla, was defeated beyond doubt during the internal conflict that the country lived through from the seventies through 1996, when the Guatemalan peace accords were signed. Now the left, beaten on the field of battle, returns to fight through the political route.”



Ixil people carrying their loved ones' remains after an exhumation in the Ixil Triangle in February 2012.

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

Crosscurrents in Colombia's Irregular War

OE Watch Commentary: Noting that in a long war of “all forms of struggle” the various forms affect and infect each other, we offer this illustrative mix of drug dealing, criminal conspiratorial behaviors, NGOs, lawfare, negotiations and amnesty. These small reports are what becomes visible to us from an organized armed struggle that is widespread and chronic in the hemisphere.

Some connecting of dots is necessary, which incurs some speculation, but the pattern is repeated often enough that the revealed picture of interwoven criminality has become depressingly unremarkable to many regional observers. In Mexico the horrendous 2014 massacre of school children in Iguala (apparently perpetrated by a drug gang with the help of police) is still being investigated, including by international human rights groups. Now the shadow of illegitimacy is drawing over the investigators. As it turns out, a lead investigator is from Colombia, where, according to the accompanying article, she apparently framed Army Colonel Luis Plazas for a 1980s crime he did not commit, and which may have not happened at all. Now she wants to investigate the Mexican military, the suggestion by some commentators being that her motivation is ideological.

Meanwhile, back in Colombia the legal system can cut both ways. Prosecutors are lining up a mass of civilian cases supported by information coming from demobilized and captured guerrillas. Apparently, there are a lot of people guilty of a lot of crimes they committed in cahoots with FARC or ELN guerrillas. The large number of potential crimes and criminals, all associated with guerrilla predatory behavior, brings a discordant tone to the negotiations the FARC has been conducting with the government. So does the capture of the Mexican drug lord “El Chapo,” who is linked to the FARC and to the Venezuelan regime. The radical left seems to have evolved “all forms of struggle” into “all forms of predation and corruption.” Here, one dispiriting paradoxical result might be that hundreds of Colombian civilians will be convicted of accessorial and conspiratorial criminal behavior while the authors and principal beneficiaries of the underlying crimes are amnestied under the official peace negotiation. To Mexico, Colombia will have gifted its expertise not only in the illicit commodities industry, but also in subversive jurisprudence as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the leader of a group of experts from the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH) used false testimonies...”

Source: Iván Briceño, “La Fiscalía investigará a 1.500 civiles por colaborar con las guerrillas Farc y Eln” (The Attorney General will investigate 1,500 civilians for collaborating with the FARC and ELN guerrillas), *Radio Santafé*, 8 January 2016, <http://www.radiosantafe.com/2016/01/08/fiscalia-investigara-a-1-500-civiles-por-colaborar-con-la-guerrilla/>

“...Perdomo [Colombian prosecutor], explained that the matter involves processes in which third parties paid the guerrillas to attempt or assassinate political opponents, or to eject some persons from their lands and confiscate them, or, the inverse, when the guerrillas used cut-outs to commit various crimes. ‘We are investigating those private citizens who provided information for use in kidnappings...’”

Source: Efe, “Andrés Pastrana cree que detención del ‘Chapo’ Guzmán afectará el proceso de paz” (Andrés Pastrana [former President of Colombia] believes that the capture of ‘Chapo’ Guzmán will affect the peace process), *El Mundo* and *Radio Caracol*, 8 January 2016, <http://www.elmundo.com/portal/resultados/detalles/?idx=269021&anterior=1¶mdsdia=8¶mdsmes=01¶mdsanio=2016&cantidad=25&pag=1#.VpDmuhUrKuk>

“Ex-President [of Colombia] Andrés Pastrana confirmed today that the arrest of the Mexican narco-trafficker Joaquín ‘El Chapo’ Guzmán, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, will have implications in the peace process that the government has been developing with the FARC for over three years. ‘It is a very important capture because it is known that El Chapo Guzmán is one of the most important associates of the FARC and this capture is likely to have very great implications for the Colombian peace process, especially for the struggle against drug trafficking’...”

Source: Daniela Wachauf, “Encarceló a militar colombiano con pruebas falsas experta de la CIDH” (A Colombian Military Officer was jailed on false expert testimony of the Interamerican Civil Rights Commission), *La Razón*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.razon.com.mx/spip.php?article291778>

“In 2007, being the Colombian attorney general, Ángela Buitrago used fabricated testimony to convict a colonel of forced disappearance. The colonel was absolved this past December 16; now the woman discredits the investigation by the PGR [Mexican attorney general’s office] of the 43 school children [massacre in Iguala and Cocula, Mexico in September 2014]... Ángela Buitrago, the leader of a group of experts from the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (CIDH) that is investigating the Iguala case and insists on questioning officers of the 27th Infantry Battalion, used false testimonies to impose a 30-year prison sentence on a Colombian military officer for supposed forced disappearance, an accusation that collapsed this past December 16 when the Supreme Court of Justice of that country annulled the sentence and ordered the immediate release of the accused, who had been kept prisoner for eight years.”

Venezuelan Legislative Elections Part 2

OE Watch Commentary: Newly elected members of the Venezuelan National Assembly (AN, *Asamblea Nacional*) were sworn in on 5 January 2016. While the event induced some tension and verbal dust-ups between the now minority caucus of government loyalists and the new opposition majority, the inauguration of legislators went without a serious hitch.

The new majority coalition elected Henry Ramos Allup as speaker of the assembly. Seventy-two-year-old Ramos is a long-experienced member of the political class that had governed in Venezuela before the rise of Hugo Chávez. His election probably indicates a desire to put in place someone with the guile and resolve to successfully confront and diminish the administration's power.

For its part, the administration has not taken the loss gracefully, even while it could not immediately aggregate the force to physically deny the results. The now-minority loyalists resorted to seemingly petty expression of their disenchantment with the change. For instance, all of the motorcycles assigned to the national assembly for security and administrative matters suddenly disappeared, as did all the silverware in the press lounge. For his part, using a law imposed by Hugo Chávez himself, Ramos ordered the disposal of dozens of huge poster images of Hugo Chávez that had adorned the legislative chambers. All in all, the legislature is passing through a confusingly competitive moment, with the administration's caucus blocking quorum, the electoral tribunal finding the assembly in contempt, etc. It seems at the time of this writing, however, that foreign countries are beginning to line up to specifically recognize the Venezuelan National Assembly, and might try to do international diplomatic business directly with it. Ramos seems intent on leading a change in the country's ideological azimuth. A first step in that direction was to assert the supermajority of 112 seats by swearing in three deputies whose elections had been (dubiously) challenged by the administration-controlled supreme electoral tribunal. The larger play for the legislature seems to be the restoration of press freedoms, something that will immediately gain international as well as internal support for the assembly. It is hard to believe that the assembly will not attempt to eject President Maduro from power this year, and it is equally hard to imagine Maduro's Cuba-backed socialists relinquishing power peacefully. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“The Assembly has to see guaranteed its legitimate independence...”

Source: CAR01, “¡DÍA HISTÓRICO! Henry Ramos Allup, Enrique Márquez y Simón Calzadilla asumen la nueva directiva de la AN” (An Historic Day! Henry Ramos Allup, Enrique Márquez and Simón Calzadilla assume the new leadership of the NA), *DolarToday*, 5 January 2016, <https://dolartoday.com/dia-historico-henry-ramos-allup-enrique-marquez-y-simon-calzadilla-asumen-la-nueva-directiva-de-la/>

“By vote of the representatives to the National Assembly, Henry Ramos Allup was designated parliamentary president for the period 2016-2017 with 109 votes. Also designated was Enrique Márquez as first vice-president with 109 votes. For second vice-president Simón Calzadilla was designated with 109 votes.”

Source: Editors, “Rajoy apoya a la nueva AN de Venezuela frente a los ataques antidemocráticos de Nicolás Maduro.” (Rajoy supports Venezuela's new National Assembly in the face of the anti-democratic attacks of Nicolas Maduro), *DolarToday*, 11 January 2016, <https://dolartoday.com/rajoy-apoya-la-nueva-de-venezuela-frente-ataques-antidemocraticos-de-nicolas-maduro/>

“The Assembly has to see guaranteed its legitimate independence in the exercise of the prerogatives and functions that are recognized for it by the Constitution of Venezuela, without these being blocked by way of obstacles and subterfuges that work against the separation of powers,’ Rojoy asserted...”

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

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

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

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

Costa Rica No Longer Considered the “Switzerland” of Central America Due to Drug Trafficking Violence

OE Watch Commentary: Costa Rica has long been referred to as the Switzerland of Central America because of its historic stability and its neutrality stance in a region rife with conflict (think drug trafficking, civil wars, and dictatorships). Its murder rate is also much lower than that of its neighbors; it was recently cited by BBC as 11 per 100,000 inhabitants. In comparison, in recent years neighboring countries such as Honduras and El Salvador have both been ranked as the most violent in the world and maintain consistent murder rates ranging from 58 to 91 per 100,000 inhabitants, as cited by BBC. Furthermore, Costa Rica boasts one of the healthiest economies in Central America, with an average per capita income of \$10,683 (more than 3 times that of El Salvador).

Despite Costa Rica maintaining much lower levels of violence and a more stable economy, the accompanying articles indicate changes in that are a direct result of increased drug trafficking in the country. During an interview with BBC, Public Safety Minister Gustavo Mata stated that drug trafficking is now the country’s main security problem. Violence associated with this is centered in and around the capital city of San Jose and is characterized by local gangs fighting for control of both the internal market and coastal shipments that are stored in coastal locations before heading north to the US market. This violence is further compounded by a deteriorating social situation and all-time unemployment highs, which has created a new employment pool to support drug trafficking within the country. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**



Source: Natural Earth v2.0

Source: “La creciente violencia del narco activa las alarmas en Costa Rica” (Growing drug violence in Costa Rica stokes alarm among authorities). *El Pais*. Accessed from http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/10/27/america/1445974107_121938.html

For decades, Costa Rica managed to escape the drug violence that plagued its Central American neighbors. But now, El Pais is reporting that drug-related crimes have risen to new records across various regions, but especially in the capital city of San Jose and its surrounding neighborhoods. Currently the country is averaging one revenge killing every two days – sometimes in broad daylight – and according to statistics, the annual murder rate could exceed 11 per every 100,000 inhabitants by the end of the year. This information has prompted the Costa Rican government to take action to prevent these gangs from gaining control of additional territories as officials want to prevent a situation similar to the one that has affected Honduras and El Salvador.

Source: “Por qué Costa Rica está dejando de ser la “Suiza de Centroamérica” (Why Costa Rica Is No Longer Considered the “Switzerland” of Central America). *BBC*. Accessed from http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/10/151027_costa_rica_violencia_narcotrafico_homicidios_suiza_centroamerica_paraíso_seguridad_lv

Surrounded by violent neighbors, Costa Rica appears as an oasis of calm and has been called the “Switzerland of Central America” for decades. Yet, despite not harboring such high murder rates as next door Honduras and El Salvador at 58 and 91 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, Costa Rica is also making the UN murder watch list at 11 murders per 100,000, anything over 10 is considered to be a risk. This is because Costa Rica is now one of Central America’s premier smuggling routes, and as reported by Public Safety minister Gustavo Mata, “drug trafficking is now the country’s main security problem.”

Source: “Desempleo de Costa Rica alcanza a más del 10% de la población” (Unemployment Affects More than 10% of the Costa Rican Population). *La Nacion*. Accessed from http://www.nacion.com/economia/consumidor/Desempleo-Costa-Rica-primer-trimestre_0_1488451223.html

Unemployment in Costa Rica reached 10.1 percent in the first quarter of this year, a slight increase over the same period last year, the National Statistics and Census Institute (INEC) reported Tuesday. Furthermore, the Costa Rican government is citing unemployment as one of its principal economic concerns. President Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera indicated that strengthening the economy is of the utmost importance as “the fight against organized crime is based on social investment and the generation of opportunities.”

Amphibious Planes as a Preferred Trafficking Method in Argentina

OE Watch Commentary: Argentinian web daily *La Nacion* reported that international drug-trafficking organizations in Argentina are now using amphibious aircraft and fluvial drug routes to deliver shipments of marijuana and cocaine to awaiting fast boats along the Parana River. This is significant because it represents a change to historical fluvial trafficking along this waterway, as past trafficking has focused on large shipments concealed in cargo containers. Another method used by river traffickers in the past was to simply float drugs concealed in impermeable black plastic bags down the river.

Apart from representing changes to historical fluvial trafficking, this new method is also signifies fundamental changes in basic trafficking patterns, which have focused on land, aerial, and coastal routes. At present, Argentinian security officials have not confirmed the use of amphibious aircraft along fluvial routes, but this modus operandi is likely, as the Parana River has been used by traffickers for decades. The Parana Delta in particular is known for high levels of impunity, where traffickers are known to silence locals with violence or death threats. This area is also unique geographically, as it forms a maze of rivers and over 1000 tiny islands which provide logistical and storage support to traffickers. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “Los aqua-narcos: ahora utilizan avionetas anfibias para traficar” (Amphibious Planes as a Preferred Trafficking Method in Argentina). *La Nacion*. Accessed from <http://www.lanacion.com.py/2015/11/16/los-aqua-narcos-ahora-utilizan-avionetas-anfibias-para-traficar/>

Claudio Izaguirre of the Argentinian Anti-Drug Association reported to La Nacion that drug traffickers are abandoning clandestine airstrips and terrestrial routes in exchange for amphibious aircraft that are able to land directly in the Parana River. He further stated this his organization detects up to 20 amphibious flights a week; many of which depart from Pilar, Paraguay. Night flights are the most popular, but day flights have been noted.

According to this source, the amphibious shipments belong to Bolivian and Paraguayan traffickers who are well aware of the radar systems that actively scan Argentinian airspace for incoming narco flights. For this reason, pilots are told to fly at low altitudes to avoid detection. Izaguirre also indicated that pilots coordinate delivery locations with GPS coordinates.

When questioned as to why traffickers are now using amphibious routes, Izaguirre indicated that the shift is likely related to effective destruction of clandestine airstrips, the implementation of aerial radar systems, and successful Argentinian police operations along the northern border where drug shipments commonly enter into the country.



Mexican Cartels Operate Diverse Enterprises

OE Watch Commentary: Mexican criminal organizations are usually associated with narcotics smuggling with good reason, but the cartels are more than just drug smugglers. They are alliances of gangs that operate diverse enterprises that include kidnapping, human smuggling and trafficking, weapons smuggling, and money laundering.

As the Mexican government has systematically decapitated cartels by pursuing senior leaders, such as El Chapo, there have been second- and third-order effects on how the gangs operate. One of these effects is the diversification of revenue. Fuel theft through illegal tapping into pipelines has been a common tactic. It has occasionally resulted in tragic accidents (first excerpted article) and has had a significant enough economic impact to force the Mexican government to adopt stricter legislation (second excerpted article). Another tactic has been to infiltrate the mining industry, either through direct operation of mines or theft of mining material – sometimes resulting in violence (third excerpted article). Gangs have also continued traditional criminal rackets, such as extortion, which have had devastating effects on local economies (fourth excerpted article).

While the international community focuses on drug trafficking, the real problem from the Mexican perspective is rampant criminality. This puts the Mexican government in a precarious position – cooperating with international law enforcement efforts actually increases instability at home, at least in the short term. To make matters worse, this could feed a vicious cycle, because instability provides a more permissive environment in which illicit actors could operate. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

Source: Rene Alberto Lopez Staff author(s), “Explota ducto de Pemex en Tabasco; 30 heridos” [Pemex pipeline explodes in Tabasco; 30 injured], *La Jornada*, 22 December 2015, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2015/12/22/explota-ducto-de-pemex-en-tabasco-30-heridos-507.html>

The explosion of a Mexican Petroleum (Pemex) pipeline due caused by an illegal siphoning operation resulted in 30 injured by burns ... the accident occurred in the village C-23 del Plan Chontalpa Plan in the municipality of Cardenas ...

Source: Alejandra Lopez, “Publican ley contra robo de hidrocarburo” [Law against Hydrocarbon Theft Published], *Reforma*, 12 January 2016, <http://www.reforma.com/aplicaciones/articulo/default.aspx?Id=738953&po=4>

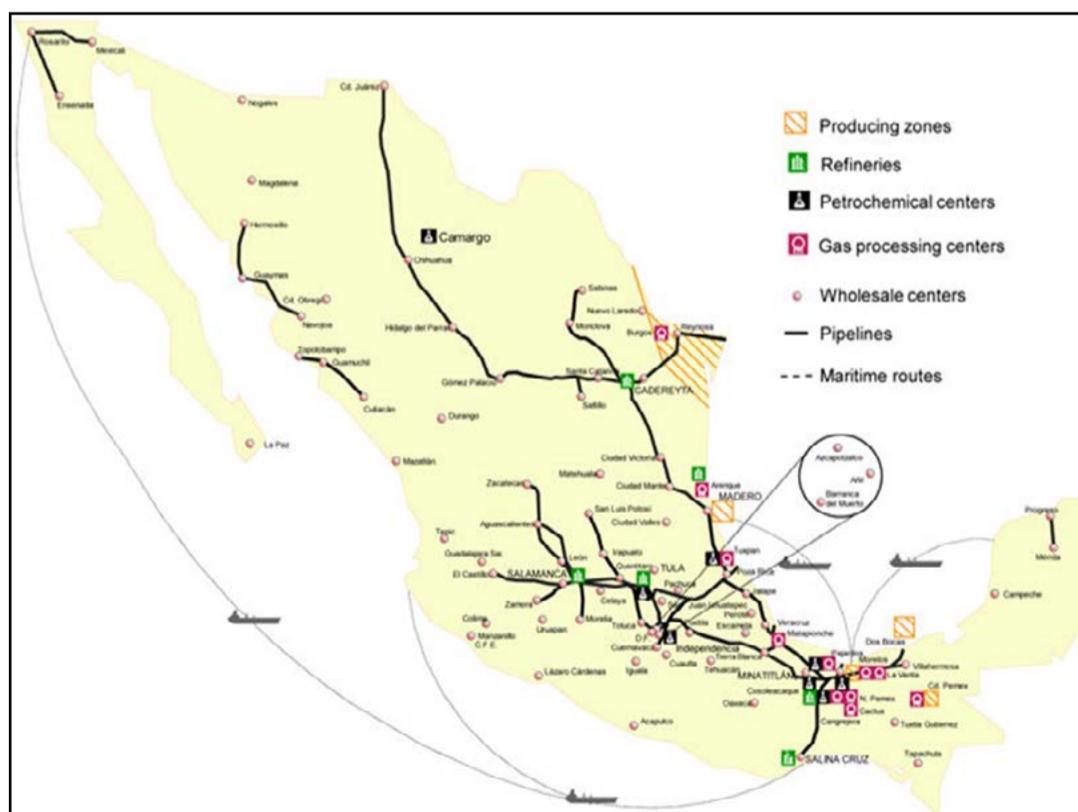
The Interior Department (SEGOB) today published the law toughening sentences and fines on those who steal hydrocarbons, alter measurement systems, market illicit products, or participate in bribes ... The stronger sanctions include 15 to 25 years in prison and fines ... for those who make clandestine taps or steal hydrocarbons in plants without permission or alter the measurement systems, the law will apply a sentence of 10-18 years and a fine ...

Source: Mariana Labastida, “Grupos criminales quieren entrar a la zona minera, dice el alcalde sobre los ataques en Xochipala” [Criminal groups want to enter the mining zone, says mayor about attacks in Xochilapa], *El Sur*, 12 January 2016, <http://suracapulco.mx/2/grupos-criminales-quieren-entrar-a-la-zona-minera-dice-el-alcalde-sobre-los-ataques-en-xochipala/>

The mayor of Eduardo Neri (Zumpango) and coordinator of mayors of the PRD, Pablo Higuera Fuentes, said that those who died at the shootout on Sunday in the community of Xochipala were citizens not criminals. He also warned that the problem is that there are crime groups attempting to enter that area ... He emphasized that, “it is a problem that we have here on the mining route, and there are groups that want to introduce themselves”

Source: Enrique Villagomez, “Tortilleros protestan en Acapulco por asesinato de seis trabajadores” [Tortilla vendors protest in Acapulco after murder of six workers], *El Financiero*, 8 January 2016, <http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/nacional/tortilleros-protestan-en-acapulco-por-asesinato-de-seis-trabajadores.html>

Owners and workers in the Dough and Tortilla Industry in Acapulco protested the murder of six workers from whom organized crime demanded fees to let them sell their products ... “Today we closed more than 800 tortilla industries in [Acapulco neighborhoods] ... because that is where we are constantly victims of assaults by common criminals and now organized crime extorts us,” stated Arcadio Castro, president of the Dough and Tortilla Industry in Guerrero said. Last Monday in two separate incidents, four workers of two tortilla stores were executed by armed men who came to demand a “quota” from them ...



Mexican pipelines map.
Source: <http://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/932782/000119312515162672/d913051d20f.htm>

SEDENA Investing in Armor for Soldiers

OE Watch Commentary: Facing persistent violence from well equipped criminal gangs, the Mexican Defense Department (SEDENA) is attempting to modernize Mexican Army capabilities to mitigate risk to personnel. Among planned improvements are the purchase of ballistic shields for special operations forces, which are the Army's offensive forces for counternarcotics operations (first excerpted article). At the same time, SEDENA has purchased ballistic plate inserts for soldiers' tactical vests (second excerpted article). These also will be used for counter-narcotics forces.

Interestingly, both articles justify the purchase of body armor in the context of defense from criminal attack, but, in reality, this equipment will be limited to forces conducting offensive operations. Despite Mexican President Peña Nieto's desire to hand domestic security operations over to civilian forces, the Mexican military remains the most capable and trusted force for combatting drug cartels.

End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)



Mexican Army Special Forces Soldiers.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fuerzas_Especiales_Michoac%C3%A1n.jpg

Source: Benito Jimenez, "Quiere la Sedena escudos antifusil" [SEDENA Wants Anti-Rifle Shields], *Reforma*, 28 December 2015, <http://www.reforma.com/aplicaciones/articulo/default.aspx?id=728697&impresion=1>

Noteworthy among Army projects to strengthen the safety of its troops is the purchase of ballistic shields that can withstand shots from an AK-47 rifle ... During infiltration operations by Army Special Forces, soldiers use stun grenades to enter a residence. However, the soldiers who are in the lead lack ballistic protection ... SEDENA seeks an MRAPS shield (Mobile Rifle Armor Protective Shield, level III) ... SEDENA launched the contract request in first quarter of this year [trans. note: Mexico's fiscal year aligns with the calendar year] ... department sources said that a company is offering a shield made in the United States ... The amount purchased would depend on the price



SEDENA Soldier completing training with US Army.
Source: http://www.benning.army.mil/armor/earmor/content/issues/2015/JAN_MAR/Barron.html

Source: Adrián Roa, "La Sedena compra 4.409 placas balísticas para chalecos del Ejército de México" [SEDENA is buying 4409 ballistic plate jacket inserts for Mexican Army], *Info Defensa*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.infodefensa.com/latam/2016/01/06/noticia-sedena-compra-juegos-placas-balisticas-chalecos-ejercito-mexico.html>

SEDENA has purchased 4409 ballistic plate inserts to reinforce jackets that the Mexican Army currently uses. These plates have level III-A armor, are made of high-density polyethylene, and withstand fire from 7.62x51mm ... at the same time, Mexican military leaders managed to purchase MRAP shields for Army Special Forces ... with these defensive weapons, the department seeks to improve safety of its personnel from attacks perpetrated by so-called "organized crime."

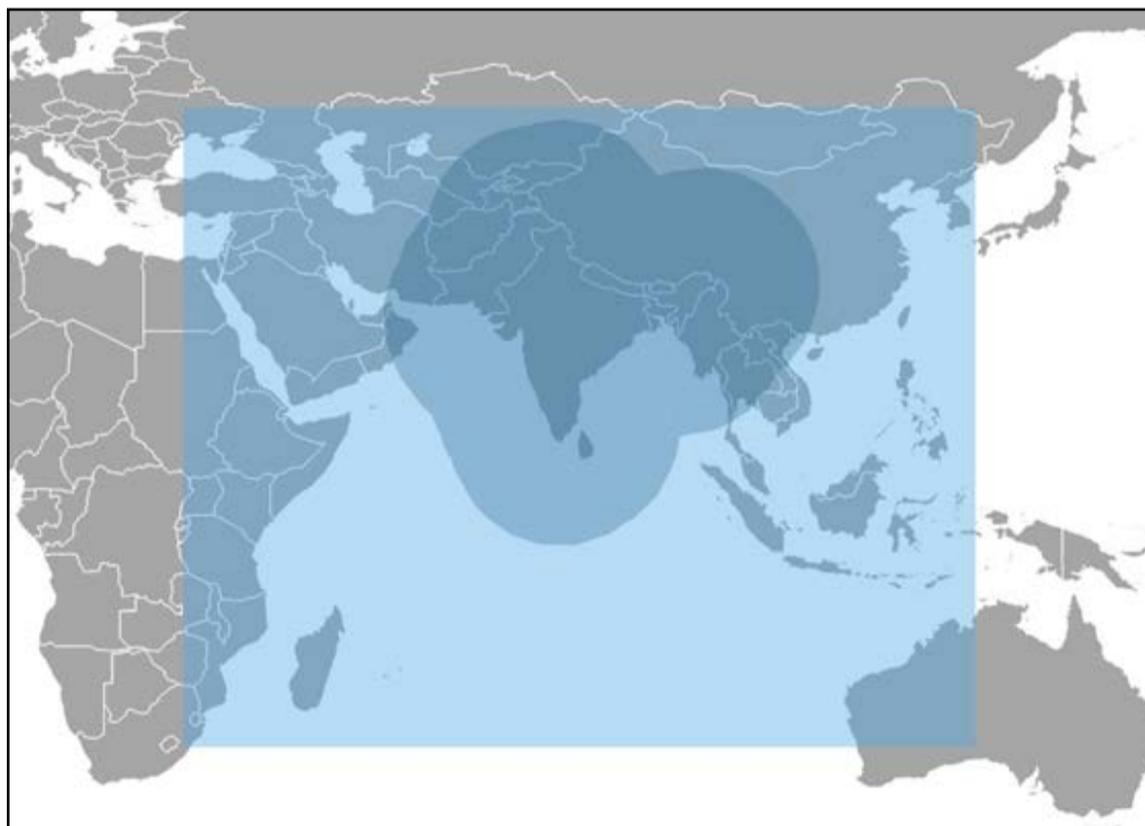
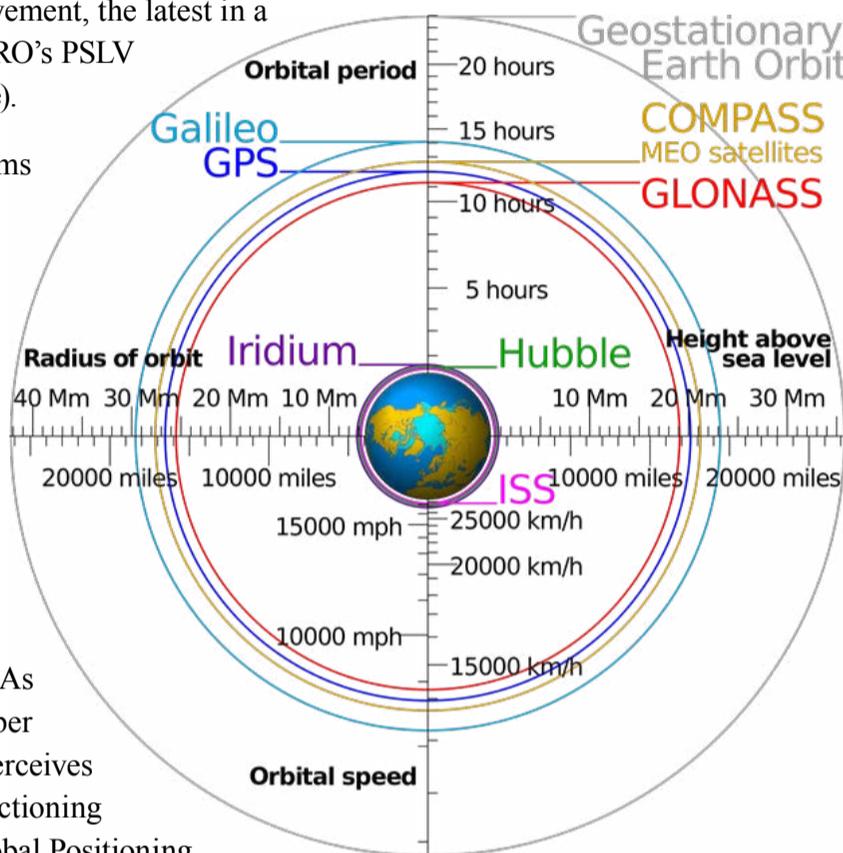


Mexican Army uniform/equipment.
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mexican_Army.JPG

India Continues Navigation Satellite System Deployment

OE Watch Commentary: The India Space Research Organization (ISRO) continues to deploy its Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) with the 20 January 2016 launch of its fifth satellite aboard India's domestic Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) and the planned February and March launches of the remaining satellites of the constellation. Indians view the IRNSS as a counterpart to the navigational systems of Russia, Europe, China, the US, and Japan (first excerpted article). They also see the launch itself as an achievement, the latest in a series of successes of ISRO's PSLV (second excerpted article).

Since navigation systems require a minimum of four satellites to operate, the IRNSS is already capable of providing service; additional satellites simply improve accuracy and service (third excerpted article). The IRNSS represents more than a simple matter of national pride, however. As discussed in the September 2013 OE Watch, India perceives a real need to have a functioning alternative to the US Global Positioning System (GPS) in the Indian subcontinent region, because Indian defense experts theorize that the GPS could be targeted in potential future conflicts. India is therefore divesting itself of dependence upon foreign satellite navigation, and is doing so in a hurry. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**



Top image: Comparison of orbit altitudes of various satellite navigation systems; note that the IRNSS is in geostationary orbit.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satellite_navigation#/media/File:Comparison_satellite_navigation_orbits.svg

Above image: IRNSS coverage map.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Regional_Navigation_Satellite_System#/media/File:IRNSS_Coverage.png

Source: IANS Staff Author(s), "Fifth Navigation Satellite IRNSS-1E to Be Launched on January 20: ISRO," *The Financial Express*, 4 January 2016, <http://www.financialexpress.com/article/lifestyle/science/fifth-navigation-satellite-irNSS-1e-to-be-launched-on-january-20-isro/187707/>

India will launch its fifth regional navigation satellite on January 20 ... The space agency will put the sixth (IRNSS-1F) and seventh satellites (IRNSS-1G) in the earth's lower orbit in mid-February and by March 31 respectively. The Indian navigation satellite system will be similar to the global positioning system of the US, Glonass of Russia, Galileo of Europe, Beidou of China and Quasi Zenith satellite system of Japan ...

Source: Staff Author(s), "ISRO Gearing Up for First Launch in New Year," *Daily Excelsior*, 14 January 2016, <http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/isro-gearing-up-for-first-launch-in-new-year-pslv-c31irNSS-1e-mission/>

... With 32 successive successful missions, the PSLV-C31 ... will launch IRNSS-1E, the fifth satellite of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) ... the preparations for the launch were on at the SHAR Range in Sriharikota ... as in the previous four launches of IRNSS satellites, PSLV-C31 will use XL version of PSLV ... Its predecessors, IRNSS-1A, 1B, 1C and 1D were launched by PSLV-C22, PSLV-C24, PSLV-C26 and PSLV-C27 in July 2013, April 2014, October 2014 and March 2015 respectively ... The navigation payload of IRNSS-1E will transmit navigation service signals to the users. This payload will be operating in L5-band and S-band ... the ranging payload of IRNSS-1E consists of a C-band transponder which facilitates accurate determination of the range of the satellite.

Source: Pierrot Durand, "All IRNSS Satellites Will Be in Orbit by March, ISRO," *French Tribune*, 6 January 2016, <http://frenchtribune.com/teneur/1624573-all-irNSSsatellites-will-be-orbit-march-isro>

ISRO Satellite Centre (ISAC) Director M Annadurai ... said that IRNSS 1F and 1G satellites are also in advanced stages of integration and will be launched soon. The satellites are being integrated at the Bangalore satellite centre ... Scientists said that four satellites would be sufficient to start the service but said that seven will make data more accurate and efficient ...

Malaysia is In, Indonesia is Out, and There is Uncertainty About the Saudi-led Coalition

OE Watch Commentary: Although Saudi Arabia has included Malaysia in its military coalition of 34 Islamic countries to combat terrorism, Malaysia has stated that it has no military commitment in the joint efforts. According to excerpts from the accompanying article in the *Rakyat Post*, Malaysian Defense Minister Datuk Seri Hishamuddin Hussein said that joining the coalition is more of a joint agreement and understanding that combating terrorism is the right move. Rather than commit to the military coalition, he said that he supports Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's idea to form a special court to try terrorism cases and individuals related to militant or terrorist groups. In addition, he said anything that can speed up the judicial process should be done so that it would not allow perpetrators to escape the law.

Indonesia was also approached by Saudi Arabia's foreign minister in mid-December to join the coalition, but opted out. According to excerpts from the accompanying article in *The Jakarta Post*, Indonesian President Widodo said that the Indonesian government did not want to follow other countries that use military force to combat radicalism, but preferred using a soft approach, as it is more effective. Local commentary from Malaysia and Indonesia remarks that Saudi Arabia has yet to define the role the coalition. According to Indonesian Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Luhut Pandjaitan, "The stance of Indonesia's government is that we want to handle the IS [Islamic State group] with a soft approach, including by promoting Islam as gracious and full of compassion, not a brutal religion like the IS portraying."

Local commentaries also raise the point that Saudi Arabia has yet to clarify the purpose of its coalition. According to commentary in Malaysia's *New Straits Times Online*, "it is too soon at this stage to speculate whether this will work or fail. Many of the states named in the alliance are still in the dark as to what the Saudi government has in mind." Separate commentary in *The Jakarta Post* sounds similar: "confusion over [the coalition's] role, even among its own members, may undermine its ambitions of tackling militancy and deflecting international criticism of Riyadh."

End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)

Source: "Malaysia Not Involved in Anti-Terrorist Military Coalition, Says Defence Minister" *Rakyat Post*, 15 December 2015. <http://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2015/12/15/malaysia-not-involved-in-anti-terrorist-military-coalition-says-defence-minister/>

"The initiative taken by Saudi Arabia this time around have no military commitment, but is more of a joint agreement and understanding that combating terrorism is the right move."

Hishamuddin also said that he supported Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's idea to form a special court to try terrorism cases and individuals related to militant or terrorism groups.

In addition, he said anything that can speed up the judicial process should be done so that it would not allow the perpetrator to escape the law.

Source: "RI Opts out of Saudi-led Military Coalition." *The Jakarta Post*, 17 December 2015. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/12/17/ri-opts-out-saudi-led-military-coalition.html>

Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Luhut Pandjaitan said Indonesia had no intention of joining the military alliance, as the government was prioritizing the use of soft power in its war on terror.

"The stance of Indonesia's government is that we want to handle the IS [Islamic State group] with a soft approach, including by promoting Islam as gracious and full of compassion, not a brutal religion like the IS portraying," ...

The President said the government did not want to follow other countries that used military force to combat radicalism and preferred using a soft approach as it was more effective.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Armanatha Nasir said that Saudi Arabia's foreign minister had approached Jakarta twice in the past few days to ask it to join a "center to coordinate against extremism and terrorism".

... confusion over its role, even among its own members, may undermine its ambitions of tackling militancy and deflecting international criticism of Riyadh.



Malaysian Defense Minister Datuk Seri Hishamuddin Hussein at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on May 31, 2014.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hishammuddin_Hussein#/media/File:Hishamuddin2014.jpg

Source: "Will Saudi's Coalition to Fight Terror Work?" *New Straits Times Online*, 24 December 2015. <http://www.nst.com.my/news/2015/12/118841/will-saudis-coalition-fight-terror-work>

It is too soon at this stage to speculate whether this ... will work or fail. Clearly, many of the states named in the alliance are still in the dark as to what the Saudi government has in mind.

Indonesian Navy Puts Itself in a Better Position to Thwart Piracy

OE Watch Commentary: In an attempt to improve security in the country’s territorial waters, the Indonesian Navy’s Western Fleet plans to launch a piracy prevention program. According to excerpts in the accompanying article in *The Jakarta Post*, Rear Admiral Achmad Taufiqoerrachman says that the program would be targeted especially at younger people, since many of those arrested for piracy have been teenagers who are unaware of the crimes they were committing. The area targeted by the campaign includes Riau Islands, as well as areas in and around the Malacca Strait and Natuna Island, which have long been known as hotbeds of pirate activity. Taufiqoerrachman says, “This program aims to raise awareness among people so that they will not participate in any sea crime activities should criminals ask them to rob and hijack vessels, or steal their parts.” The Western Fleet plans to go to villages where most of the piracy suspects come from and involve the local police and regional administrations.

The Malacca Strait is an important global shipping route for vessels carrying anything from crude oil to finished products from all over the world, and this campaign comes at a time when the number of criminal activities there has declined significantly. According to Taufiqoerrachman, “now is the time to conduct this public campaign, so that the area can continue to be free from any sea criminal activities.”

In 2014 Southeast Asia saw 141 piracy incidents with a vast majority of them in Indonesian waters. By addressing regional piracy on the ground through local interventions to meet directly with impressionable younger people who are not as aware of the seriousness of their actions, Indonesian authorities are in a better position to counteract piracy on a route that is vital to regional and global trade. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: “Navy Steps up Campaign against Endemic Piracy.” *The Jakarta Post*, 26 December 2015. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/12/26/navy-steps-campaign-against-endemic-piracy.html>

In an attempt to improve security in the country’s territorial waters, the Indonesian Navy’s Western Fleet ... plans to launch a piracy prevention program.

“This program aims to raise awareness among people so that they will not participate in any sea crime activities should criminals ask them to rob and hijack vessels, or steal their parts,” Armabar’s commander Rear Admiral Achmad Taufiqoerrachman ...

Taufiqoerrachman said that the program would be targeted especially at younger people as many of those arrested by Armabar were teenagers who were unaware of the crimes they were committing.

“We will go to villages where most of the piracy suspects come from and start the campaign,” he said.

The first area targeted by the campaign includes Riau Islands as well as areas in and around the Malacca Strait and Natuna Island, which have long been known as hotbeds of pirate activity.

In the program, Armabar will involve the local police and regional administrations.

Taufiqoerrachman said the program came at the right time as the number of criminal activities in the Malacca Strait had declined significantly.

... Now is the time to conduct this public campaign, so that the area can continue to be free from any sea criminal activities,” he said.

The strait is an important global shipping route for vessels carrying anything from crude oil to finished products from all over the world.

Source: “South-east Asia Emerging as Hot Spot for Piracy Attacks: Report.” *Straits Times*, 14 January 2015. <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/12/26/navy-steps-campaign-against-endemic-piracy.html>

The region saw 141 piracy incidents - the vast majority of them in Indonesian waters - in 2014.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesian_Navy#/media/File:Kri-diponegoro-1600-1200.jpg

Coastal Megacities in Southeast Asia Face Increasing Threats from Natural Disasters

OE Watch Commentary: Insurers and disaster risk experts say booming infrastructure and business investment, often with little regard to the threats from building close to the sea or rivers, are heightening dangers, as coastal megacities in Southeast Asia face an ever-growing threat from more powerful storms. According to excerpts from the accompanying article in *The Straits Times*, with coastal megacities growing at breakneck speed, insurers fear costly disasters are only a matter of time. Adding to concerns are rising sea levels, more extreme rainfall events and predictions of increasingly powerful typhoons and cyclones because of climate change.

According to excerpts in the accompanying article, the Meteorological Service Singapore said scientific studies have shown an increase in the proportion of more intense tropical cyclones in the Western Pacific. There was a decreasing trend in tropical cyclones in parts of the South China Sea and an increasing trend along the east coast of China over the past 40 years.

As described in the excerpts, the 2011 Thai floods killed nearly 900 people, inundated parts of Bangkok, Thailand, and severely damaged major industrial parks outside the city, causing more than US\$10 billion in insurance losses. In Manila, Philippines, floodwaters from Tropical Storm Ketsana in 2009 rose more than six meters and inundated more than 80 percent of Manila.

According to a local expert, Preety Bhandari, Head of the Asian Development Bank's Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management Division, "With such rapid increase in population, the coastal megacities are at high risk from natural hazards." Some cities lacked the capacity to properly plan and regulate urban development, increasing the risk from storms and flooding. "Unfortunately, it will be the poor, living in low-lying hazard-prone areas of these cities and with limited access to basic infrastructure, who are the most at risk." **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: "Asia's Coastal Megacities at Nature's Mercy." *The Straits Times*, 29 August 2015. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/asias-coastal-megacities-at-natures-mercy>

Asia's rapidly expanding coastal megacities face an ever-growing threat from more powerful storms.

Insurers and disaster risk experts say booming infrastructure and business investment, often with little regard to the threats from building close to the sea or rivers, are heightening the dangers.

But with Asia's coastal megacities growing at breakneck speed, insurers fear costly disasters of a similar or greater scale are only a matter of time. Adding to concerns are rising sea levels, more extreme rainfall events and predictions of typhoons and cyclones becoming more powerful because of climate change.

"With such rapid increase in population, the coastal megacities are at high risk from natural hazards," Ms Preety Bhandari, head of the Asian Development Bank's Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management Division, told The Straits Times. Some cities lacked the capacity to properly plan and regulate urban development, increasing the risk from storms and flooding, ...

The 2011 Thai floods killed nearly 900 people, inundated parts of Bangkok and severely damaged major industrial parks outside the city, causing more than US\$10 billion in insurance losses. ...

Floodwaters from tropical storm Ketsana in 2009 rose more than 6m and inundated more than 80 per cent of Manila.

The Meteorological Service Singapore (MSS) said scientific studies have shown an increase in the proportion of more intense tropical cyclones in the Western Pacific. It told The Straits Times there was a decreasing trend in tropical cyclones in parts of the South China Sea and an increasing trend along the east coast of China over the past 40 years.

"Unfortunately, it will be the poor, living in low-lying hazard-prone areas of these cities and with limited access to basic infrastructure, who are the most at risk."

Floods in Bangkok, Thailand in 2011.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:2011_Thailand_floods#/media/File:Defense.gov_photo_essay_111016-M-ZN194-145.jpg

China Reports Second Aircraft Carrier Will be Different from First

OE Watch Commentary: China is drawing closer to becoming a blue water navy. The country's second aircraft carrier is currently under construction, and, according to the following excerpted article, military observers believe it will be much different from the Liaoning, China's first aircraft carrier, which had been purchased from Ukraine and commissioned by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in 2012.

The most significant difference is that the new design will be completely indigenous, from the materials making up the hull of the ship to the weapon systems and technologies onboard. According to the article, the new aircraft carrier will have a "brand new propulsion system, as well as an independently-designed hull that will be built with Chinese-developed special steel." It will be designed to accommodate China's J-15 fighter jets. Its weapons systems and technologies will include China's latest phased array radar, short-range anti-aircraft missiles, and quick-firing cannons.

China is making great progress in its technological pursuits. The article is an excellent indication of the country's commitment to transform itself into an innovative powerhouse as it turns increasingly toward developing and using domestic technologies. Additionally, it is an indication of China's desire to extend its reach well beyond its borders. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

"...the launch of the new aircraft carrier will also give the Chinese Navy an upper hand when it comes to maritime disputes."

Source: "China's 2nd Aircraft Carrier Totally Different from Liaoning," *People's Daily Online*, 3 January 2016, <<http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0103/c90000-8998430.html>>.

China's 2nd Aircraft Carrier Totally Different from Liaoning

Cao Weidong with the Chinese Navy's Academic Research Institute says virtually everything on the new Chinese-designed aircraft carrier is going to be different from the "Liaoning."

"China's naval strategy has seen a significant change from inshore a defense strategy to escort missions on the high seas. The deployment of the new aircraft carrier will make the PLA navy more capable of conducting escort missions and protecting waterways along the 21st maritime Silk Road."

Cao Weidong says the launch of the new aircraft carrier will also give the Chinese Navy an upper hand when it comes to maritime disputes.



Liaoning aircraft carrier inducted in Dalian in September 2012.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Liaoning_aircraft_carrier_Sept_2012.jpg

China's White Paper on Arab Policy: Strengthening Cooperation

OE Watch Commentary: The Chinese government recently released its first “Arab Policy” white paper, which focuses completely on cooperation and various exchanges with the Arab countries. The accompanying excerpts from that white paper demonstrate China’s growing commitment to strengthening its military, economic, and political ties with the Middle East.

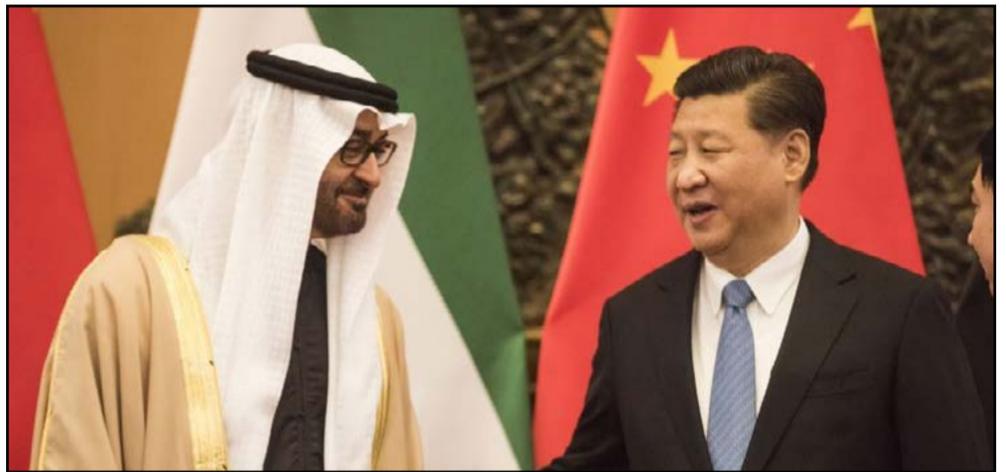
China has held diplomatic relations with all 22 Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen) since 1990, with some of these relations being established as early as 1956. Energy is at the core of Chinese-Arabian cooperation, but the white paper also focuses on infrastructure construction, trade and investment facilitation, and high technology exchanges in areas such as nuclear energy, space satellite, renewed energy, political, and social cooperation.

Some of the more salient points are on cooperation in the following areas:

- **Energy:** China desires to upgrade and increase cooperation efforts in energy, including nuclear power plants;
- **Technology:** China hopes to broaden participation by Chinese companies and financial institutions in cooperation in the areas of space technology, (including space education and training, satellites, application of the Beidou Navigation Satellite system), including manned space flight. China is also interested in accelerating the development of the “China-Arab inter-governmental science and technology innovation cooperation mechanism.” The white paper expresses an interest in establishing joint national laboratories, joint research centers, and specialized science parks. It is also pushing to enable joint enterprises to go global and encourage Chinese high-tech enterprises to establish research and development centers in Arab states.
- **Security:** Both sides will expand “military personnel exchange, deepen cooperation on weapons, equipment, and various specialized technologies, and carry out joint military exercises.”

As the white paper points out, like China, the Arab nations are all developing countries, with their combined territories, population, and economic aggregate accounting for 1/6, 1/4, and 1/8 of the world’s, respectively. Growing cooperation between both sides is noteworthy. The paper stresses mutual win-win scenarios based on cooperation. It emphasizes its commitment to peace and stability. However, based on the instability in many of these regions, China’s commitment to these countries, and similar ideologies, these growing ties could confront the United States with new opportunities or challenges. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“China and Arab countries will adopt the “1+2+3” cooperation pattern to upgrade pragmatic cooperation by taking energy cooperation as the core infrastructure construction and trade and investment facilitation as the two wings, and high and new technologies in the fields of nuclear energy, space satellite and new energy as the three breakthroughs.”



Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince and UAE Armed Forces Deputy Supreme Commander Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nayhan talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Source: http://gdb.voanews.com/2D5BB3DB-CB9B-4A62-B3DB-5A9AA77930D7_mw1024_s_n.jpg

Source: “China’s Arab Policy Paper,” *Xinhuanet*, 13 January 2016, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2016-01/13/c_135006619.htm>.

China's Arab Policy Paper

China is willing to have pragmatic cooperation in the principle of mutual benefit and win-win results with Arab states. In particular, in the process of jointly pursuing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative, China is willing to coordinate development strategies with Arab states, put into play each other's advantages and potentials, promote international production capacity cooperation and enhance cooperation in the fields of infrastructure construction, trade and investment facilitation, nuclear power, space satellite, new energy, agriculture and finance, so as to achieve common progress and development and benefit our two peoples.

Joint efforts will be made by China and Arab countries to promote the “Belt and Road” initiative under the principle of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefit. China and Arab countries will adopt the “1+2+3” cooperation pattern to upgrade pragmatic cooperation by taking energy cooperation as the core infrastructure construction and trade and investment facilitation as the two wings, and high and new technologies in the fields of nuclear energy, space satellite and new energy as the three breakthroughs”.

We will deepen China-Arab military cooperation and exchange. We will strengthen exchange of visits of military officials, expand military personnel exchange, deepen cooperation on weapons, equipment and various specialized technologies, and carry out joint military exercises. We will continue to support the development of national defence and military forces of Arab States to maintain peace and security of the region.

Xi Restructures Military Departments, Directs them to “Focus on Winning Wars.”

“Xi pointed out that the Central Military Commission authorities “should seek to win as its greatest responsibility, to strengthen ideology and readiness to fight, to concentrate on military and war studies” and research on warfighting.”

OE Watch Commentary: As part of a military overhaul of a system known for being cumbersome and dominated by the ground forces, the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) 4 general headquarters (staff, politics, logistics, and armaments) have been reorganized into 15 new agencies under the Central Military Commission (CMC). The new structure includes six new departments (joint staff, political work, logistical support, equipment development, training, and national defense mobilization) and three commissions (discipline inspection, politics and law, and science and technology), as well as the general office, administration, auditing, international cooperation, reform and organizational structure, and strategic planning. The new structure of the general staff is aimed at helping Beijing consolidate Party control and transform the PLA into a force capable of performing modern joint operations.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, who is also General Secretary of the Communist Party of China’s Central Committee and Chairman of the CMC, met with the new chiefs of each agency on 11 January and delivered an important speech in which he described the restructuring as “a breakthrough” and “a crucial step” toward building a stronger military. He also urged the reorganized organs of the CMC to focus on winning wars as their central task.

In his speech, Xi said that the CMC organs must concentrate on the study of military affairs, wars and how to fight battles, and strengthen their awareness in preparing for war at any time. They must measure their work only by the fundamental standard of whether troops’ fighting abilities can be improved.

Xi also urged the organs to waste no time in adapting these changes in the operational command system and in transforming into a smooth-running and effective joint command system. Finally, he also exhorted the assembled leaders to initiate a “learning revolution,” liberating their minds and enhancing their study efforts on war and military studies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Marsh)**



Source: Wang Shibin (王士彬) and An Puzhong (安普忠), “习近平会见军委机关各部门负责同志并发表重要讲话” (Xi Jinping met with comrades responsible for various departments of the Central Military Commission and delivered an important speech), *China Military Online* (中国军网), 11 January 2016, http://jz.chinamil.com.cn/n2014/tp/content_6852622.htm

Xi Meets with Comrades Responsible for Various Departments of the Central Military Commission

Following the announcement on 11 January that the four headquarters of the PLA were being reorganized into 15 new agencies under the Central Military Commission, Chinese President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech. He referred to the process as “complete,” and described it as “a breakthrough in our military leadership and command system.... The results of the full implementation of [this] landmark reform strategy” will be “a strong army with Chinese characteristics,” a “key step” in the way forward.

Xi met with the leaders of the 15 new CMC organs and urged them “to focus on strengthening the military objective in the Party,” and referred by name to some recent misconduct scandals in the military. He again made reference to the “four ironclads” and said that they will “play an important role in the realization of the Chinese dream,” a dream that includes a strong army.

On the topic of military capabilities, Xi directed those assembled to “focus on winning wars.” He pointed out that the Central Military Commission leaders “should seek to win as their greatest responsibility, to strengthen ideology and readiness to fight, to concentrate on military and war studies” and to expand research on warfighting.

In training on “fundamentals of combat,” Xi said, “the sole criterion should be whether or not it improves combat effectiveness.” Military leaders should “actively adapt to the comprehensive, deep-seated changes in the operational command structure” and should as quickly as possible “find a position and play a role in the formation of a smooth and efficient joint operational command system.”

The restructuring “must embody military strategic principles that are demanded by the new [global] situation,” Xi added. Finally, Xi urged his comrades to initiate “a military revolution in learning” and “to strengthen research into the major practical problems” of military preparation, and “to constantly improve war planning,” command, and troop-leading.

Unrestricted Warfare Author Qiao Liang on Geopolitics

OE Watch Commentary: Qiao Liang begins his book, *Unrestricted Warfare*, by noting that global governance seems to have overtaken geopolitics as a way to understand international affairs. However, he then goes on to show how this assumption is not true.

He notes how important geopolitics is to Russia and China. Then he states that there is a reason the United States focuses on geopolitics. It is because the US wants global resources to flow the way it wishes, and the US needs to control geopolitics to meet the demand of its “currency-politics as a financial hegemon,” which is how it makes profits. It controls the flow of global capital and other resources by securing financial hegemony. The US pushes capital in the direction it wishes and thus is not on the same level as other countries in the manner in which it goes about supporting its national interests. Geopolitics is an appendant and tool of its currency-politics. Qiao then goes on to indicate how to contain the US. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

“How can we not resolutely safeguard our sovereignty in the South China Sea? How can we not feel worried about the possible cutoff of the Malacca Strait? Why else do we have interests in the Khokhok Kra and attach so much importance to the Gwadar Port and the China-Pakistan Railway? All these concern stem from geopolitics because they are the corridor or even lifeline for China’s economic benefits both for now and for the long time to come.”

Source: Qiao Liang, “Major General: How Should China Contend Against the US,” *China Military Online* (in English), 6 January 2016.

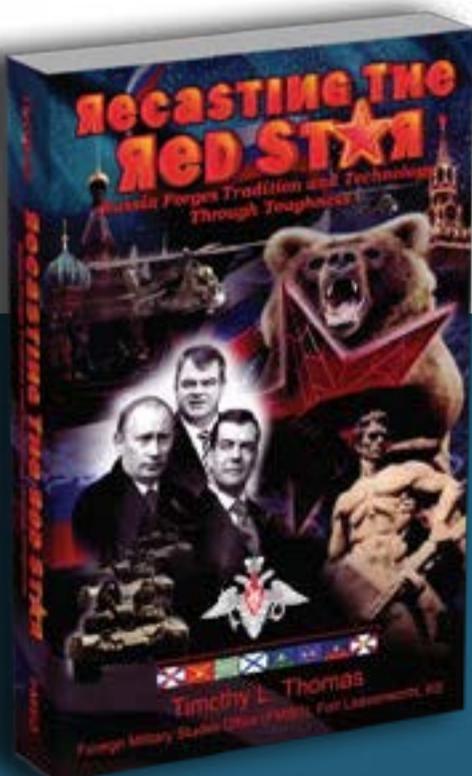
To effectively contain the United States, other countries shall think more about how to cut off the capital flow to the US while formulating their strategies because that’s the way to control America’s lifeblood. Why could the 9/11 in 2001 hit the US so hard? Apart from political and mental impact, a much heavier blow was that it drove more than US\$300 billion out of the country within a month.

If we connect and analyze all kinds of geopolitical events in this way, we must have a deeper understanding of geopolitics and currency-politics instead of simply emphasizing the importance of the former but ignoring the latter’s decisive influence on the world.

The US is the first financial empire in the world, and will be the last one as far as I’m concerned. There will be no more empire or financial hegemony after the US because the Internet age has arrived, in which currency has become highly electronic and online consumption and remote transaction are driving away paper money.

Then what is China faced with in a world when geopolitics and currency-politics still exist? I think it’s an age when the US dollar, Euro and RMB will all play a part. After that, currency will be replaced by a new model of denomination.

In this process, China should follow the trend and seize opportunities to realize its own interests. From geopolitics to currency-politics and to the current age that we can hardly name yet, only those who can adapt to changes will be the final winner.



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

China's New Mindset: Beyond Landpower

OE Watch Commentary: During the 20th century China was primarily a land-based military power. The PLA pacified its westernmost Xinjiang Province, which borders Central Asia, and engaged in land warfare across China's borders with Korea, Vietnam and India. However, China abstained from naval warfare across the strait with Taiwan for the last 60-plus years. An article from 10 January 2016 in *South China Morning Post* explains that in the 21st century China anticipates that it will also become a sea power and that even now during relative peacetime it must prepare for that eventuality.

According to the accompanying excerpted article, despite it being peacetime, China needs to be pro-active. Quoting a retired colonel, the article argues that a modern land force needs to be able to protect the country's interests abroad. Another military analyst says China's military mindset must change and consider overseas investments. Accordingly, one of China's recent initiatives in December 2015 was to adopt a new counterterrorism law to allow Chinese special forces to operate overseas. The article says that protection of Chinese investments is the purpose for this law.

The Chinese Navy's rescue of Chinese workers from Libya during the uprising in that country in 2011 is one type of operation that this law would enable. Moreover, it could potentially enable China to also target adversaries ranging from Islamic State to Al-Qaeda, both of which have targeted Chinese citizens overseas in recent years.

China does not yet appear willing to use its law to carry out operations against anti-Chinese terrorist outside of China's borders. However, as China's naval footprint grows and it expands its port facilities and investments from South Asia to Africa, it may inevitably become the more pro-active sea power that the article describes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“The army needs to change from a ‘defensive’ mindset to being more proactive, including overseas.”



Source:
 “Operation Fresh Mindset: China’s Land Forces Need New Attitude, Top Army Officers Say,”
South China Morning Post, 10 January 2016

China's New Mindset: Beyond Landpower

Army officials called for a new “mindset” – a move that analysts said signals plans for the People’s Liberation Army to be less defensive and more proactive, including abroad.

“The existing structure is land force-dominated, which is not conducive to having an integrated command system,” [Retired Colonel] Yue Gang said. A long process is expected to make the military less centered around land forces. But the process would be gradual, Yue said, adding that if it was too fast it could trigger concerns that the military’s existing strengths would be wiped out.

The thinking that the army should do nothing when our territory is not invaded is outdated,” he said. “China is expanding its interests abroad with more investments and the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative. Our military should not be as passive as it used to be.”

China's Concept of Military Strategy By Timothy L. Thomas

China's concept of military strategy is very different from that of the United States. This article examines the various components of the strategic thought of the People's Liberation Army and how its theory of strategy can be applied in contemporary times. Among other things, the article offers US analysts a template for confronting Chinese strategy.



<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/China/China's%20Concept%20of%20Military%20Strategy.pdf>

Spanish Nationals Favored as Drug Mules to Traffic Cocaine into Europe

OE Watch Commentary: Starting around 2009, Peruvian and Colombian authorities reported increased arrests of Spanish drug mules. Today, Spanish nationals are commonly referred to as the favored drug mules of trafficking organizations in Latin America. *El Confidencial* reiterated this by comparing arrest statistics of Spanish nationals in the aforementioned countries to arrests of other drug mules, concluding that no other nationality even comes close (see excerpt below). Worse yet for Spanish nationals is that prison sentences for convicted drug mules caught with 10 kilograms or more are particularly harsh and range from around 7-15 years, which begs the question: why are so many willing to risk everything for a relatively small financial gain that usually ranges between €5000-€10,000?

This source highlighted that Spain's difficult economic situation is likely a driving factor for drug mules, indicating that an estimated six million individuals in the country are currently jobless. In some instances trafficking organizations are even known to recruit drug mules at Spain's State Public Employment Service (INEM), where they are offered monetary compensation to transport quantities ranging from 8-10 kilograms of cocaine. Unfortunately, the drug mule businesses is all or nothing, and if shipments do not make it to their final destination, the mules receive no monetary compensation, despite the fact that they incurred the highest risk and may spend years in foreign prisons. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: "Los españoles, las 'mulas' favoritas del narco para introducir cocaína en Europa" (Spanish nationals favored as drug mules to traffic cocaine into Europe). *El Confidencial*. Accessed from http://www.elconfidencial.com/mundo/2015-03-10/los-espanoles-las-mulas-favoritas-del-narco-para-introducir-cocaina-en-europa_98838/

In recent years, Spanish nationals were ranked as the most commonly arrested and convicted drug mules in Peru and Colombia. Take for example 2013 statistics in Peru when authorities arrested 283 Spanish nationals. During the same year, Spanish drug mules comprised 17% of the entire prison population in the country. Arrest statistics were not much different in Colombia where 236 Spanish drug mules were arrested during 2013. Mexican and Venezuelan nationals are also infamous as drug mules, but as this source points out, Colombian authorities only arrested 28 total during 2013. This source further indicated that more than 1,800 Spanish nationals are currently serving drug related prison sentences in areas throughout the world, but primarily in Latin America.

Spanish National Police Chief Manuel Menendez provided insight as to why so many are willing to risk everything as drug mules in the following statement: "take into account that things in Spain are very difficult. Over 6 million are currently unemployed. Salaries have decreased and many families are experiencing rough economic times. Drug traffickers realize this and are known to wait outside of INEM to recruit those in need. These organizations also have contacts at local airports. In fact, we have seen individuals from all walks of life involved with drug trafficking activity in recent years from cleaning personnel, to maintenance, and especially baggage handlers. A common factor that unites drug mules is that they have likely lost their home, their business, or are deeply indebted."

Russian Helicopter Repair Center Slated for Serbia

OE Watch Commentary: Serbia officially declared itself a militarily neutral state in 2007; however, Serbia's actions in the past several years have drawn attention to its close relationship with Russia, such as Serbia's refusal to impose sanctions on Russia in the wake of the Crimean affair.

As the accompanying excerpted article notes, some analysts see the establishment of a helicopter repair center in Belgrade for the repair and maintenance of Russian-made helicopters as a political move to increase Russian influence in Serbia instead of simply a mutually beneficial economic agreement. The Serbian prime minister said in the article that he hopes this center will boost economic opportunity. Currently, the main Russian helicopter repair center resides in Ukraine, whose political relationship with Russia has fragmented in the past several years due to the Crimean affair. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

"Analysts [are] divided as to whether the centre will benefit the country economically or merely amounts to an attempt by Moscow to boost its political influence over Belgrade."

Source: Dragojlo, Sasa and Sinisa Jakov Marusic. "Serbia-Russia Helicopter Deal Divides Experts." *Balkan Insight*. 14 January 2015. <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-russia-helicopter-deal-divides-experts-01-13-2016>>

"The Serbian Defence Minister, Bratislav Gasic, and the First Deputy Head of the Russian Service for Military Technical Cooperation, Andrei Markov, signed an agreement on Tuesday to establish a regional centre in Belgrade for the repair and maintenance of Russian-made helicopters.

However, the deal has received a mixed reception in Serbia, with analysts divided as to whether the centre will benefit the country economically or merely amounts to an attempt by Moscow to boost its political influence over Belgrade.

... "We will ask for more experts and probably hire a lot of people in Serbia," [Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic] said, adding that Serbia is supposed to take over maintenance of helicopters which until now have been repaired in Poland and the Czech Republic."

Some in Montenegro Protest against the Country's NATO Aspirations

OE Watch Commentary: Montenegro was invited to become the 29th member of NATO in December 2015 and intends to join in 2016. However, this announcement came with a mixed response from Montenegro's citizens, as well as a strong negative reaction from Russia.

Anti-NATO supporters in Montenegro align closely with the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serb minority in Montenegro. Many blame NATO for Serbia's loss of Kosovo. As the accompanying excerpted article indicates, opposition parties are urging a referendum on the issue in the hope of stopping membership. On 13 January several thousand people gathered for a peaceful anti-NATO celebration of the Serbian Orthodox New Year with the blessing of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Russia also threatened to halt all joint investments and business projects with Montenegro if it joins NATO and sees the expansion of NATO as a threat to its security. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

“While the government of Milo Djukanovic sees joining NATO as a strategic priority, Montenegrins remain bitterly divided about membership.”

Source: Tomovic, Dusica. “NATO Invites Montenegro To Become Member.” *Balkan Insight*. 02 December 2015. <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/nato-offers-membership-to-montenegro-12-02-2015>>

“Montenegro received a long-awaited invitation to become the 29th member of NATO in Brussels on Wednesday.

... While the government of Milo Djukanovic sees joining NATO as a strategic priority, Montenegrins remain bitterly divided about membership.

... The pro-Serbian opposition and anti-NATO organizations urged the authorities on Monday to hold a referendum on membership.

Russia has described NATO's extension into the Balkans, where Moscow enjoys historically close relations with fellow Orthodox Christians, as a ‘provocation’. Moscow has said that a membership invitation to Montenegro will be another blow to European security and relations between Russia and NATO.”

Protests In Kosovo Over Border Deals With Serbia and Montenegro

OE Watch Commentary: One of the most important next steps in Kosovo's statehood is demarcating its official borders, a process that the accompanying excerpted article reveals is a contentious one. Border talks with Montenegro have been ongoing since 2011, with Serbia currently labeling its border with Kosovo as an “administrative boundary line” instead of a legal state border.

Border demarcation is causing domestic turmoil in Kosovo as protestors oppose both the border agreements with Montenegro and Serbia. The European Commission set eight conditions for Kosovo to gain EU visa liberalization, one of which is demarcating its official border with Montenegro. However, protestors feel Kosovo is giving away too much territory.

As the article notes, Serbia's border agreement requires Kosovo to approve the Serbian Municipal Agreement, which grants some autonomy to Serbian minorities in Kosovo. Kosovo's opposition parties are staunchly opposed to this measure although the Kosovo Constitutional Court approved the measure in December 2015. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

“Border demarcation with Montenegro and Kosovo's deal with Serbia... have sparked a series of often violent protests in Kosovo.”

Source: Perparim, Isufi and Kaltrina Rexhepi. “Kosovo-Serbia Border ‘Will Be Raised in Brussels’.” *Balkan Insight*. 14 January 2016. <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-aims-border-demarcation-with-serbia-in-2016-01-13-2016>>

“Kosovo's Minister for Dialogue, Edita Tahiri, told BIRN Pristina ‘plans to discuss the border demarcation between the two states, Kosovo and Serbia, in 2016’.

... The proposal comes at a time when another border demarcation process with Montenegro is pending due to the controversies it caused inside Kosovo.

“Demarcation with Montenegro was expected to go smoothly but it caused many troubles. Demarcation with Serbia will be even more difficult and it requires more responsibility,” Spahiu said.

... Border demarcation with Montenegro and Kosovo's deal with Serbia that allows for the establishment of the Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities have sparked a series of often violent protests in Kosovo, as opposition parties bitterly object to both agreements.”

A New Mechanism in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

OE Watch Commentary: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) established the Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) in 2004 so that member states could coordinate and share intelligence on regional security threats. The excerpt from the accompanying article reports that the SCO has created a component within RATS to combat cyberterrorism, and there are a couple of things that should be noted about this.

Around two years ago the SCO created what it called a cyber expert group to do many of the same things the new mechanism will do. This mechanism could be an expansion of the previous effort, but it appears to be focused on combating individuals or groups involved in terrorism, extremism, and separatism through the internet against an SCO member state.

In October 2015 the SCO held a joint exercise that for the first time focused on responding to a terrorist group inciting people through social media to commit acts of terrorism in a SCO member state. The various security services and government authorities involved in the exercise trained on eliminating the various social media and arresting anyone who had been influenced into taking action. The exercise scenario is similar to what these governments have already been doing with various media being produced by the Islamic State, specifically blocking online access with their respective internet service providers to any sites hosting material from terrorist groups. This has not, however, prevented people from finding other ways to access it.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the exercise is that it appears Uzbekistan participated in it. The government of Uzbekistan rarely participates in joint military exercises through the SCO, though occasionally it will send observers. While the RATS claims to coordinate and share information among SCO member states on various threats, reports on their activities are rare. If this new mechanism takes a more active role and all SCO members buy into it, it would be something to keep an eye on. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“In his speech, Xinfeng introduced the situation of cyberterrorism for the SCO’s RATS”

Source: “РАТС ШОС создал механизм по борьбе с кибертерроризмом” (The Regional Antiterrorism Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization created a mechanism to combat cyberterrorism), *12news.uz*, 25 December 2015. <http://www.12news.uz/news/2015/12/ратс-шос-создал-механизм-по-борьбе-с-ки/>

The Regional Antiterrorism Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization created a mechanism to combat cyberterrorism

The Director of the Executive Committee of the Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Zhang Xinfeng took part in a special meeting of the Counter-terrorism Committee of the UN Security Council on December 16-17, 2015...the meeting was attended by the 15 members of the UN Security Council, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter...

...In his speech, Xinfeng introduced the situation of cyberterrorism for the SCO’s RATS. He noted that RATS created a mechanism of cooperation to combat terrorism on the internet, developed laws and regulations, established joint working groups of experts and regularly organize meetings during which they exchange methods on information gathering...

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

Procurement in Uzbekistan's Armed Forces

OE Watch Commentary: There are periodic articles in the media that examine the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan (see, for example: January 2015 OE Watch, “The State of Uzbekistan’s Armed Forces”), including its equipment, security cooperation partners, and overall capabilities. The excerpt from the accompanying article takes another look at Uzbekistan’s Armed Forces, providing some information about what has been taking place in the past few years.

The beginning of the article notes information on Uzbekistan’s Armed Forces is difficult to find, but that this does not stop various think-tanks or other publications that write on military affairs from rating Uzbekistan’s Armed Forces as being the strongest in Central Asia. The article does not suggest Uzbekistan’s forces are not capable of dealing with threats, but that it has gone through some of the same restructuring and procurement issues that its neighboring states have faced.

Despite a lack of information on Uzbekistan’s Armed Forces, it is possible to assess what has been taking place by looking at recent procurement. The article notes that Uzbekistan received security assistance with the delivery of armored vehicles this past year, in addition to purchases of aircraft from Korea Aerospace Industries (the T-50 trainer) and Airbus (the C-295W transport) in an effort to be less dependent on Russia. The article does not list an agreement Uzbekistan reportedly reached with China to purchase the SQ-9 surface-to-air missile systems around a year ago, so it is possible this deal has been delayed or never went through. Regardless, reports of deliveries of weapons or equipment are available because they come from various media outside Uzbekistan.

Perhaps the most notable part of Uzbekistan’s security cooperation mentioned in the article is the debt restructuring with Russia that happened in 2014 and how this could lead to deals for small arms and equipment. The recently acquired armored vehicles and aircraft are alternatives to Russian equipment, but they are not replacements for the small arms, various aircraft (attack and transport helicopters, fighters or bombers), or other items in the Uzbek Armed Forces’ inventory that are utilized by the mobile or special operations units mentioned in the article. Uzbekistan may have left the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization in 2012, but it is evident that the Uzbek government has maintained a partnership with Russia. As long as there are compatible weapons and equipment between the two, this is likely to continue.

End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)

“However, experts estimate that Russia will remain the main supplier of small arms and equipment to Uzbekistan”

Source: “Армия Узбекистана – закрытая, но лучшая в ЦА” (The Army of Uzbekistan – closed off, but the strongest in Central Asia), *Anhor*, 12 January 2016. <http://anhor.uz/news/armiya-uzbekistana-zakritaya-no-luchshaya-v-ca>

The Army of Uzbekistan – closed off, but the strongest in Central Asia

January 14 marks of the main holidays that has appeared in recent years of independence in Uzbekistan – the Day of the Defenders of the Motherland...For the majority of experts the armed forces of Uzbekistan presents itself not just as a riddle, but a total secret. Everything is classified top secret – the number of officers and soldiers, and not only new equipment, but also uniforms and food. Despite this, it is repeatedly called one of the most combat capable in the Commonwealth of Independent States in published reports and reviews of the armies of the world’s leading international institutions...

...The Soviet Union formed military units for global scale purposes... Uzbekistan had to radically change the structure and deployment of units and create a new staff structure...the main threat to national security are extremists and terrorists, which could potentially penetrate from Afghanistan and other neighboring states...the Uzbek Army had to be mobile, quick, and effective in conditions acting independently from a support base...Military districts were created and mobile and self-sufficient units were deployed to the most important areas of the border, especially battalions of special operations forces...

...(Uzbekistan) is not abandoning efforts to escape dependence on Russian weapons...At the end of last year the Americans completed the transfer of 308 mine-resistant ambush protected vehicles, as well as 20 armored recovery vehicles...Information about the sale of 12 T-50 supersonic training aircraft to Uzbekistan appeared in South Korean media...The (Uzbek) Ministry of Defense has been silent about the purchase of Chinese Chengdu Pterodactyl UAVs and the Airbus C-295W transport aircraft. However, experts estimate that Russia will remain the main supplier of small arms and equipment to Uzbekistan... Putin made a historic visit to Uzbekistan at the end of 2014, during which the restructuring of Uzbek debt to Russia was resolved...



Standard of the Uzbekistan Armed Forces.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Uzbekistan_Armed_Forces.svg

The Criminal Links of Suspected Members of Terrorist Groups in Kyrgyzstan

OE Watch Commentary: A couple of operations carried out by Kyrgyzstan's security forces in Bishkek against criminals with suspected links to terrorist groups in 2015 gained a lot of attention because of civilian casualties and damage to property (see: November 2015 OE Watch, "Examining the Prison Break in Kyrgyzstan"). Excerpts from the accompanying articles report on a recent incident in which members of the Alpha unit of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Committee killed two men who were wanted for the murder of a policeman in November. While the ordeal took place with no friendly casualties or property damage, the articles note connections these men had with other criminals and possibly a terrorist group. The articles provide a little more information about the recent incidents in Kyrgyzstan.

Both articles mention possible connections between the July raid and an attack on a religious scholar in November. The attackers in the latter incident stabbed the man near his home in Bishkek and then fled the scene. The victim, who was thought to have been targeted due to his various incendiary comments on Islam and the threat of extremist groups, survived. Two suspects were arrested in Turkey a few days after the attack. The article from *Delo.kg* published photographs of the weapons and equipment seized from the two men after the operation, including a pair of makeshift sound suppressors for Makarov pistols and one for a Kalashnikov variant, in addition to bomb-making components and other items (cell phones, knives, and small radios). The article suggests that there might be other terrorist groups still at large, though no other reports have backed up this claim.

The article from *Vecherniy Bishkek* refers to the criminal past of both men killed in the operation. It has been noted in the other incidents in 2015 that most of the individuals involved had criminal records, including serving prison sentences for violent crimes. Based on these articles and other media reports, the murder of the policeman in November seems likely unplanned, but rather the result of the two suspects having been stopped on the street. If these articles are another indication of the type of threat that exists in Kyrgyzstan, it appears that criminals may have adopted some extremist characteristics, but their targets are specific people, and not focused on terrorism on a larger scale. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“Both former criminals were killed in the brief shootout. One of the soldiers received a gunshot wound and there were no civilian casualties...”

Source: Kuzminykh, Yuri. “Террористы найдены и обезврежены” (The terrorists have been found and neutralized), *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 15 December 2015. <http://members.vb.kg/2015/12/15/panorama/2.html>

The terrorists have been found and neutralized

Soldiers from “Alpha” eliminated two terrorists during a special operation in Bishkek...the criminal pair was involved in especially serious crimes, including the murder of a policeman in the 8th city district on November 19...members of the Interior Ministry revealed that the pair had an association with the terrorist group eliminated in July of this year. The murderer of the policeman was not a rookie in the criminal world – he had been convicted of robbery and illegal possession of firearms...

Last Thursday at 2200 the GKNB located the suspects and the soldiers of “Alpha” blocked off the neighborhood. The terrorists opened fire in response to the offer to surrender. The order was then given to eliminate them. Both former criminals were killed in the brief shootout. One of the soldiers received a gunshot wound and there were no civilian casualties...



A couple of Makarov pistols with makeshift sound suppressors were found at the scene of the operation that eliminated two fugitives on the night of December 10, 2015 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
Source: http://zanoza.kg/doc/329667_nochu_v_vostoke_5_ynichtojili_ekstremistov_vozmojno_ybiyc_ychastkovogo.html

Source: Zhuk, Oleg. “Операция с ликвидацией” (The operation with elimination), *Delo*, 16 December 2015. <http://delo.kg/index.php/2011-08-04-18-06-26/9144-operatsiya-s-likvidatsiej>

There was no long shootout this time of storming of houses and apartments and no unnecessary casualties. Another counterterrorism operation was carried out by the State Committee for National Security in Bishkek on the night of December 10-11 and it went almost unnoticed by locals...Security officers found an arsenal of four Makarov pistols with ammunition, F-1 grenades, homemade bomb components, several cell phones and a mask in the snow at the site of the operation. According to officials, the group intended to commit terrorist acts in the Bishkek and Chui Oblasts...

...Interior Ministry officers raided the house of the suspect Amankul uulu Turatbek and they found 267 cartridges for a 5.45 (mm) Kalashnikov; 134 cartridges for 7.62 (mm); 20 cartridges for a Makarov, and a Kalashnikov and a suppressor for it...Turatbek was the brother of Kanatbek Usubaliyev – one of the militants of the group eliminated during the special operation in Bishkek in July of this year...The security services have not reported how many members of underground terrorist cells are at large. It is possible that the group took part in the recent assault on theologian Kadir Malikov...

Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy and the Changing Nature of War

OE Watch Commentary: On 31 December 2015 the Russian Federation released its 2015 *National Security Strategy*, an update of the 2009 version. Russian national security strategy documents cover a wide swath of issues, including national defense, state and social security, quality of life, economic growth, science & technology, health, education, culture and the environment. Keeping with this broad scope of interest, national security strategies are a product of the Russian Security Council, which is an interministerial body that is chaired by high-level officials, weighted heavily with the military, intelligence, and domestic security services. For those familiar with recent Russian pronouncements on security issues, Russia's new 2015 *National Security Strategy* provides few surprises. Although there is verbiage about NATO and the hostile intentions of the United States, what is surprising is that the bulk of the document actually deals more with domestic than foreign policy issues, such as the economy.

The accompanying excerpted articles highlight some of the changes from the 2009 to 2015 versions, with emphasis on external issues/threats, and include an interview with Russian Security Council Secretary and former Federal Security Service Director Nikolay Patrushev. One change that the document incorporates (as did the 2014 Russian military doctrine) is the mention of "color revolutions" and other references to Russian thoughts on the changing nature of war. Russia has strongly advocated that the US/West has abandoned forced regime changes through the overt imposition of force (Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq) in favor of the use of more "indirect and asymmetric" methods such as color revolutions, the Arab Spring, and the Maydan movement. Russia believes the desired goal of these actions is to topple unfriendly regimes, and eventually Russia itself. The accompanying graphic is a recreation of a slide presented by Chief of the Russian General Staff and Russian Security Council member General Valery Gerasimov at the Russian Ministry of Defense's third Moscow Conference on International Security on 23 May 2014. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: "Russia's National Security Strategy for 2016 in 9 Key Points," RT Online, December 31, 2015, <<https://www.rt.com/news/327608-russia-national-security-strategy/>>, accessed 15 January 2016.

Russia's national security strategy for 2016 in 9 key points

1. "Color Revolutions" and corruption among key threats to Russia's security

Listed among threats to national security are "color revolutions" and their instigation, the undermining of traditional values, and corruption.

2. US complicates things with bio weapons threat

The growing number of countries in possession of nuclear weapons has also increased certain risks, the decree says. Indeed the risk of countries gaining possession of and using chemical weapons, as well as biological weapons, has risen as well, it elaborates.

3. NATO expansion goes overboard

The North Atlantic alliance advance towards Russia's borders is a threat to national security, according to the document. Processes of militarization and arms build-ups are unfolding in regions neighboring Russia, it says, adding that "the principles of equal and indivisible security" are not being respected in the Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian and Asia-Pacific regions.

4. Ukraine figures

US and EU support of the coup in Ukraine has led to a deep split in Ukrainian society and prompted an armed conflict, the decree stated. The rise of far-right nationalist ideology and the intentionally-created image of Russia as an "enemy" in Ukraine have made it a "long-term source of instability in Europe and directly at the Russian border."

5. No to nukes?

Russia may be ready to discuss curbing its nuclear potential, but only based on mutual agreements and multi-lateral talks, the document states. Curtailing Russia's nuclear potential will only occur if it were also to "contribute to the creation of appropriate conditions that will enable a reduction of nuclear weapons, without damaging international security and strategic stability."

6. Info warfare

Secret services have become increasingly active in using their capabilities in the struggle for international influence, the document highlighted.

7. When to use military force

The strategy allows the use of military force only in cases when other measures to "protect the national interests" are ineffective.

8. Money matters

Russia's economic stability is in danger mainly because of its low level of competitiveness and its resource-dependent economy. Among other threats is "a lag in the development of advanced technologies, the vulnerability of the financial system, the imbalance of the budgetary system, the economy going offshore, the exhaustion of the raw materials base, the strength of the shadow economy, conditions leading to corruption and criminal activities, and uneven development of regions."

9. What's next for the economy?

Understanding the problems faced by the country's economy, the Russian government plans to take measures to deal with them. To ensure economic security, the country will need to balance its budget, prevent capital outflows, and reduce inflation, the document states. "To resist the hazards to economic security, the government... will carry out a national social and economic policy involving ... strengthening of the financial system, ensuring its sovereignty and the stability of the national currency". Russia also considers developing relations with China, India, Latin America and Africa as highly important.

(continued)

Continued: Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy and the Changing Nature of War

Source: Ivan Yegorov, "Challenge Accepted; Nikolay Patrushev: The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation Has Been Updated," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 22 December 2015, <<http://www.rg.ru/2015/12/22/patrushevsite.html>>, accessed 15 January 2015.

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation Has Been Updated

[RG]: *Nikolay Platonovich, a draft revision of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020 has been submitted to the president for approval. What caused this? Was the previous version of the Strategy unsuitable or were some kind of drastic changes required?*

[Patrushev]: The federal law "On strategic planning in the Russian Federation" requires that the National Security Strategy be updated every six years. The current Strategy was adopted in 2009. It has shown its effectiveness during these years. Russia has demonstrated its ability to defend its sovereignty, independence, and state and territorial integrity. Its role has grown in addressing critical international problems and settling interstate conflicts and crises. However, new challenges and threats to national security have arisen recently. The USA, with the support of a number of Western countries, intends to maintain its dominance in world affairs and, therefore, is attempting to restrict Russia's independent foreign and domestic policy. The threats associated with NATO's military activities are ever more dangerous. The desire to increase and modernize offensive potentials, deploy new kinds of weapons, and create a global missile defense system, including around Russia, is eroding the structure of global security. The words by the leaders of some Western countries that NATO is a defensive alliance created to ensure world security only cover up the aggressive nature of the alliance...

Along with political and military threats, the global demographic situation, problems of natural environment, and food security are becoming more difficult. The scarcity of fresh water and the consequences of climate change are becoming more evident. Epidemics, some of which are caused by new, previously unknown viruses, are becoming more prevalent. The new version of the Strategy sets the task to counter these and other dangers, while keeping unchanged the national priorities, main principles, and approaches of ensuring national security...

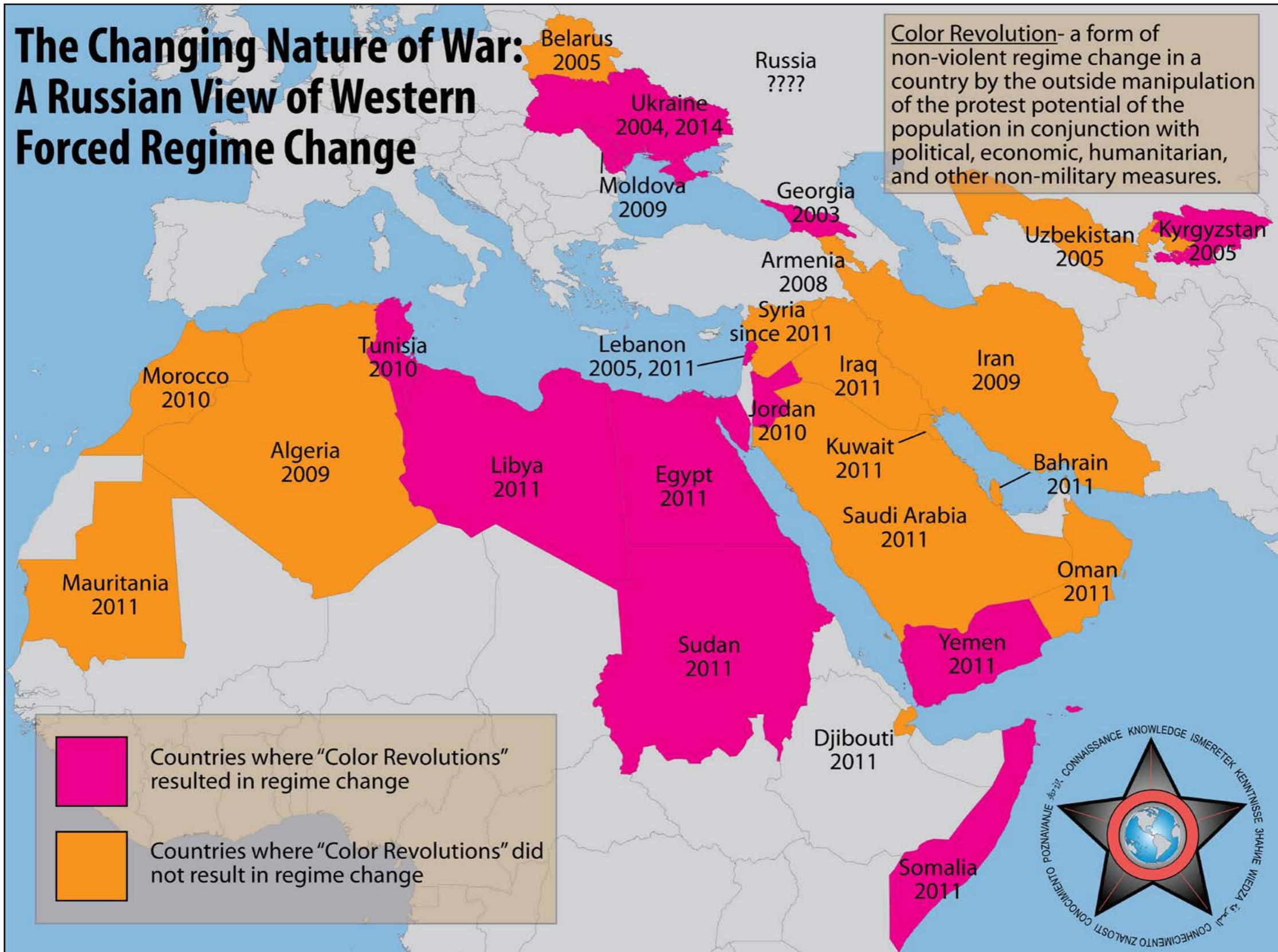
[RG]: *Nikolay Platonovich, we are talking about one of the main strategic planning documents in our country, which sets the objectives and defines the prospects for development of the state. Could you briefly reflect on the main idea and intention behind the changes?*

[Patrushev]: Let me correct you. We are talking about the fundamental strategic planning document...The point of the Strategy is to strengthen the unity of Russian society, ensure social stability, interethnic accord and religious tolerance, elimination of structural imbalances in the economy, and boost the country's defense capability. Russia's guarantee of success in this consists primarily in making maximum use of its internal resources and economic, political, human, cultural, and spiritual potential. At the same time, our country is open to the development of cooperation with other states in all areas of activity. The discussion of the draft Strategy involved a wide range of representatives from the business community, the Russian Academy of Sciences, federal ministries and departments, the presidential administration, and the government apparatus. This made it possible to define the objectives which will remain relevant in the long term and also to devise measures aimed at consolidating the efforts of state agencies, local self-administration bodies, and civil society for achieving the strategic goals of the country's development and ensuring its national security.

(continued)



Continued: Russia's 2015 National Security Strategy and the Changing Nature of War



Spirituality and Morality Part of Russia's New National Security Strategy

OE Watch Commentary: On 31 December 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin approved the latest iteration of Russia's *National Security Strategy*. Experts in the West widely discussed the document and many pointed out that, as its previous iteration in 2014, the 2015 strategy named NATO and, more broadly, the West among Russia's chief security threats. However, the accompanying excerpt from a Russian-language publication, *Ridus*, highlights another threat to Russian security mentioned in the document that did not receive the same level of attention in the West—concepts of spirituality and morality as part of national security strategy, outlined specifically in articles 6 and 11 of the new strategy, according to the accompanying excerpts.

The accompanying article's author, Igor Serebryanny, interviews President of the International Union of Experts Alexander Gusev, who says, for example, that according to the new strategy, "[t]he [Russian] state agrees to ensure the revival of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values. For example, to form in the younger generation a worthy attitude to Russia's history, to consolidate civil society around shared values."

According to Gusev, Russian citizens who do not follow the new strategy will be declared threats to national security. "If you do not recognize the rule of law or call for military action and ethnic strife, then you – are a threat to national security," writes Serebryanny, referencing Gusev. Serebryanny points out that since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards has been performing tasks that appear to be very similar with those that the new Russian strategy declares. While Gusev reassures that Russia will not set up organizations such as moral police, he adds that "for most Russian citizens the basis of spirituality and statehood lies in Orthodoxy and religious tolerance." **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: Igor Serebryanny, "Духовность россиян станет частью национальной безопасности," (Spirituality of Russian Citizens will become Part of National Security), *Ridus*, 12 January 2016. <https://www.ridus.ru/news/209367>

... *The National Security Strategy was approved by President Vladimir Putin on December 31, 2015...*

There is nothing paradoxical about the fact that the concepts of spirituality and morality are included in the new strategy, says president of the International Union of Experts Alexander Gusev. Because the objective of the strategy – is protection of the individuality of the citizen of Russia, not only from external but also from internal threats.

"The state agrees to ensure the revival of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values. For example, to form in the younger generation a worthy attitude to Russia's history, to consolidate civil society around shared values," he explained Gusev to Ridus.

These values in the new strategy are even a highlighted in separate articles - in particular, 6 and 11 ...

Does this mean that from now on the citizens who, for whatever reasons, do not want to consolidate, will be declared a threat to national security of Russia? "Yes, they will," - clearly states Gusev. If you do not recognize the rule of law or call for military action and ethnic strife, then you – are a threat to national security.

...In the Islamic Republic of Iran the institution of the Revolutionary Guards acts since 1979, whose tasks are very similar with those that the new Russian strategy declares.

But this does not mean that Russia will now create a moral police or federal service of spiritual security, reassured Gusev.

... And yet, for most Russian citizens, the basis of spirituality and statehood lies in Orthodoxy and religious tolerance, the expert adds...



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

Russia's Security Strategy and North Korea

OE Watch Commentary: One week before North Korea allegedly tested a thermo-nuclear device in early January, the Kremlin released its latest *National Security Strategy*. While the document makes no direct reference to the North Korean nuclear threat, it does contain language referring to the dangers of proliferation. As the first excerpt points out, in the paragraph where the Korean Peninsula is mentioned, the strategy contains a general comment warning against the “practice of overthrowing legitimate political regimes and provoking intrastate instability.” According to the *National Security Strategy*, such activity is particularly dangerous “to the persisting seats of tension in the Near and Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and the Korean Peninsula.” From the Kremlin’s perspective, the fear of US-conspired color revolution would appear to trump nuclear proliferation.

Even though the official Kremlin leadership advocates for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, there is considerable sympathy and understanding regarding Pyongyang’s desire to become a nuclear-armed state. According to the calculus of many Russian security officials and pundits, nuclear weapons are the only effective deterrent against the hegemonic designs of the US. As Head of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Alexei Pushkov comments in the second excerpt, “after the occupation of Iraq, the bombing of Syria, the attempts to overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, which, by the way, has recently been confirmed by the American press, some governments believe that the only possible security guarantee is the creation of their own nuclear weapons.” Pushkov’s comment echoes that of other Kremlin officials, who, since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014, have spoken more belligerently about the possible use of nuclear weapons to protect their country’s interests.

Pushkov goes on to argue that negotiations among “leading countries” similar to those which dealt with the Iranian nuclear question “should be organized to settle the North Korea problem.” This statement aligns with Russia’s new security strategy, which refers to “increasing the Russian Federation’s ... role in shaping a polycentric world...” Russia’s willingness to cooperate on solving global challenges, however, has become somewhat undermined by a strategy which posits that “the United States and its allies, ... are seeking to retain their dominance in world affairs.” In their desire to “shape a [new] polycentric world,” the Kremlin may be willing to tolerate a nuclear-armed North Korea. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“A solid basis has been created at this time for further increasing the Russian Federation’s economic, political, military, and spiritual potentials and for enhancing its role in shaping a polycentric world....”

Source: “Утверждена Стратегия национальной безопасности России,” [The Russian Federation’s *National Security Strategy* Is Approved] *President of Russia website*, 31 December 2015. <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/51129>

...7. State policy in the sphere of the safeguarding of national security and the socioeconomic development of the Russian Federation contributes to the implementation of the strategic national priorities and the effective protection of national interests. A solid basis has been created at this time for further increasing the Russian Federation’s economic, political, military, and spiritual potentials and for enhancing its role in shaping a polycentric world....

...12. The strengthening of Russia is taking place against a backdrop of new threats to national security that are of a multifarious and interconnected nature. The Russian Federation’s implementation of an independent foreign and domestic policy is giving rise to opposition from the United States and its allies, who are seeking to retain their dominance in world affairs. The policy of containing Russia that they are implementing envisions the exertion of political, economic, military, and informational pressure on it....

...18. The practice of overthrowing legitimate political regimes and provoking intrastate instability and conflicts is becoming increasingly widespread. In addition to the persisting seats of tension in the Near and Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and the Korean peninsula, new “hot spots” are emerging, and zones that are not controlled by any states’ authorities are expanding....

“Negotiations Similar to Iranian Are Needed for Settlement of N. Korea Nuclear Problem – Pushkov,” Interfax, 6 Jan 2016.

Alexei Pushkov, the head of the State Duma committee on international affairs, believes that negotiations involving leading countries similar to the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear problem should be organized to settle the “North Korea problem.”

“I believe we now need to think about conducting the same negotiations on North Korea that were conducted on Iran, with the same participants and, of course, with China,” Pushkov told Interfax on Wednesday. He said the statement by North Korea on a hydrogen bomb explosion confirms again that the existing world order has become extremely imbalanced....

Pushkov reiterated that this shows that North Korea’s technical level is rather broad. “North Korea has one explanation for its nuclear efforts: it’s the fact that there is an aggressive state in the world that threatens all other countries,” the politician said. “I believe that it is a serious argument and it cannot be ignored,” Pushkov said. After the occupation of Iraq, the bombing of Syria, the attempts to overthrow the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria, “which, by the way, has recently been confirmed by the American press, some governments believe that the only possible security guarantee is the creation of their own nuclear weapons,” the parliamentarian said....

National Security Strategy of Russia: Struggles, Objectives, Goals, Deterrence

OE Watch Commentary: Russia's December 2015 *National Security Strategy* defined or explained several terms that may be very important in understanding where Russia might focus its military and diplomatic actions in the future. The *Strategy* used the term struggle on two occasions. The term implies an active confrontation among various factors for control and is a focal point that the West should pay particular attention to for future action. The *Strategy* notes that there is a struggle underway for resources, market access, and control over transportation arteries. There is also a struggle for influence in the international arena, which includes the use of political, financial-economic, and information instruments.

These areas appear to represent the essence of the *Strategy's* objectives, all of which contribute the acquisition of as many equal partners as possible in various parts of the world. Goals include national defense goals, which are the creation of conditions to develop and ensure military security. They are achieved by implementing military policy through strategic deterrence, preventing armed conflict, improving military organization and the forms and methods for the deployment of the Armed Forces, and increasing mobilization readiness. Strategic deterrence is said to be the result of the interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, information, and other measures, such as maintaining the capacity for nuclear deterrence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

“The process of shaping a new polycentric model of the world order is being accompanied by an increase in global and regional instability. We are seeing an exacerbation of contradictions linked to the unevenness of world development, the deepening of the gap between countries’ levels of prosperity, the struggle for resources, access to markets, and control over transportation arteries. The competition between states is increasingly encompassing social development values and models and human, scientific, and technological potentials. Leadership in exploiting the resources of the world’s oceans and the Arctic is acquiring particular significance in this process. An entire spectrum of political, financial-economic, and informational instruments have been set in motion in the struggle for influence in the international arena. Increasingly active use is being made of special services’ potential.”

Source: Edict of the Russian Federation President, “On the Russian Federation’s National Security Strategy,” *President of Russia* website, 31 December 2015.

The Russian Federation builds its international relations on the principles of international law, the ensuring of states’ reliable and equal security, peoples’ mutual respect, and the preservation of the diversity of their cultures, traditions, and interests. Russia is interested in developing mutually advantageous and equal trade and economic cooperation with foreign states and is a responsible participant in the system of multilateral trade. The Russian Federation’s objective is to acquire as many equal partners as possible in various parts of the world.

The strategic national defense goals are to create conditions for the peaceful and dynamic socioeconomic development of the Russian Federation, and to ensure its military security.

The strategic national defense goals are to be achieved within the framework of implementing military policy through strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts, improving the state’s military organization and the forms and methods for deploying the Russian Federation Armed Forces, other troops, military formations and agencies, increasing the Russian Federation’s mobilization readiness, and the readiness of civil defense forces and resources.

Interrelated political, military, military-technical, diplomatic, economic, informational, and other measures are being developed and implemented in order to ensure strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts. These measures are intended to prevent the use of armed force against Russia, and to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Strategic deterrence and the prevention of armed conflicts are achieved by maintaining the capacity for nuclear deterrence at a sufficient level, and the Russian Federation Armed Forces, other troops, and military formations and bodies at the requisite level of combat readiness.

Flying the Unfriendly Skies: Air Defense in the Russian Ground Forces

OE Watch Commentary: Although there has been much discussion of late about Russia's long-range operational/strategic air defense assets (S-300, S-400, S-500, etc.) found in the Aerospace Defense Forces, the vast majority of Russian air defense assets are of the short-/medium-range variety and are found in the Russian Ground Forces. Russia has long been a strong proponent of air defense at all levels, due to fears of US/NATO air superiority.

Russia has continued this tradition into the present and has expanded air defense capabilities to counter not only hostile airplanes and helicopters, but also cruise missiles and UAVs. The Russian Ground Forces have medium- and short-range air defense assets in dedicated air defense brigades, but maneuver brigades also have significant organic short-range air defense capabilities, residing in the maneuver brigade's two air defense battalions, with four different air defense systems that provide the brigade an overlapping zonal defense. The accompanying excerpted articles discuss the evolution of short-range air defense capabilities within Soviet/Russian maneuver units, and the accompanying graphic depicts the standard disposition of the maneuver brigades' air defense assets while deployed in a defensive position.

The most common air defense systems found within the brigades are:



9K330 "Tor" (SA-15 "Gauntlet"), a short-to-medium-range heavy tracked, lightly armored, platform that packs 8 missiles that are primarily designed to engage cruise missiles and other precision guided munitions at a distance of up to 12 kilometers and flight ceiling of 6 kilometers. Each maneuver brigade typically has 12 launcher vehicles within the batteries of the Air Defense Rocket Battalion;

2K22 "Tunguska" (SA-19 "Grison"), a short-range missile-gun heavy tracked, lightly armored system that has 8 short-range missiles designed to engage low-flying aircraft and cruise missiles at a distance of up to 8 kilometers and flight ceiling of 3.5 kilometers. The Tor has twin 2A38M (30 mm) guns that are useful for engaging extremely close targets, where the expenditure of a missile would be uneconomical (such as a small UAV), targets that have electronic warfare (EW) protection capabilities (that missiles cannot engage), and, when necessary, ground targets. Each maneuver brigade typically has 6 launcher vehicles within a battery of the air defense rocket-artillery battalion;

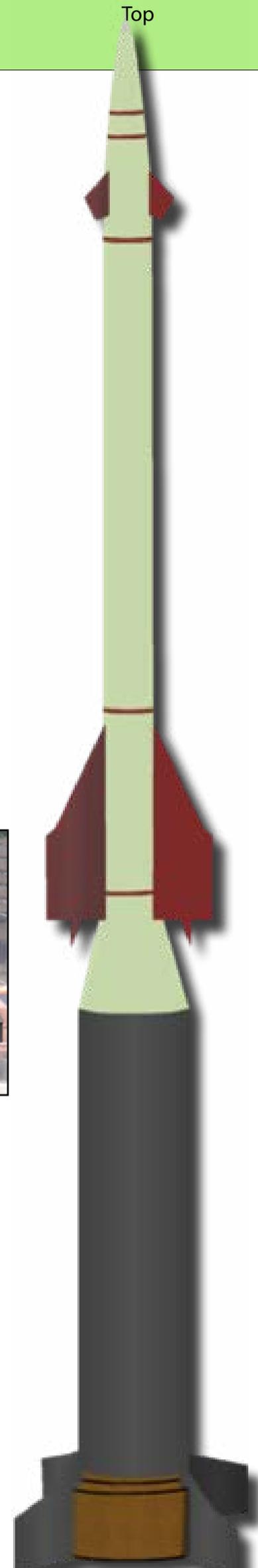


9K35 "Strela-10" (SA-13 "Gopher"), a close- (very short) range missile system, usually built upon a MT-LB (light tracked) chassis. The Strela-10 has four close-range, visually sited missiles capable of engaging targets at a distance of up to 5 kilometers and flight ceiling of 3.5 kilometers. The system was reportedly designed to complement the Tunguska, as the Strela-10 costs less and is much less susceptible to EW countermeasures, due to its targeting system. Each maneuver brigade typically has 6 launcher vehicles within a battery of the air defense rocket-artillery battalion;

9K310 "Igla" (SA-18 "Grouse"), a close- (very short) range, man-portable air-defense system (MANPADS), capable of engaging targets at a distance of up to 5 kilometers and flight ceiling of 3.5 kilometers. Each maneuver brigade typically has 27 MANPADS within a battery of the air defense rocket-artillery battalion.



Although this list of air defense assets is formidable, it is not all of the maneuver brigade's air defense capabilities. Russia has touted the ability of its next generation of antitank missiles (9M220 "Ataka") and automated unmanned turrets to engage low- and slow-flying targets. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



The 9M311 Missile of the "Tunguska".
All images on this page are sourced from Wikimedia Commons.

(continued)

Continued: Flying the Unfriendly Skies: Air Defense in the Russian Ground Forces

Source: Aleksandr Luzan, “The Fight above the Forwardmost Defensive Positions- Part I,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 18 November 2015, <<http://vpk-news.ru/articles/28054>>, accessed 15 January 2015.

The Fight above the Forwardmost Defensive Positions- Part I

...studying the forms and methods of conducting traditional combat operations, and elaborating practical measures of protective cover for subunits, units, and formations against air-attack weapons (SVN) on the Forwardmost Defensive Positions in conditions of combat contact with the enemy, are more urgent matters today than ever before.

When it is futile to modernize old equipment

The problem of air defense of the forwardmost defensive positions became manifest as far back as the fifties and sixties, when army aviation began to develop apace and likely enemy troops' saturation with helicopter gunships increased significantly. To provide protective cover for Ground Troops subunits and units above the forwardmost defensive positions, corresponding air-defense missile and artillery battalions were formed within the Soviet Army's motorized rifle and tank regiments and began to be armed with ZSU-23-4 “Shilka” self-propelled antiaircraft mounts and “Strela-1M” surface-to-air missile [SAM] systems (ZRK), and also with “Strela-2M” first-generation man portable antiaircraft missile systems... But, during the war in Vietnam, a new class of helicopter gunships with fairly long-range antitank guided missiles appeared in the United States...

What is needed are “long arms”

According to the design conception, the “Tunguska” self-propelled antiaircraft missile and gun system can destroy “Apache” helicopters from long distances, before the Apaches can engage their onboard weapons, making it possible to reduce the types of air defense systems in the regiment, as well as to guarantee protective cover for armored objects in mobile forms of battle and on the march... However, the strike distance by the cannon port in the “Tunguska” was 4 km, but that did not enable new-generation fire-support helicopters to be destroyed at the antitank guided missiles' maximum launch distances. That required a missile system such as the “long arm,” which could have destroyed fire-support helicopters at distances up to 10 km...

Unresolved defects

...the greatest drawback was that the missile system turned out to be neither round-the-clock nor all-weather and, at the time of firing, no automatic target-tracking conditions were created, with the result that it was practically impossible to destroy maneuvering air-attack weapons. Destroying even a hovering helicopter demanded extraordinarily high-level professional skills on the operator's part. This was due to the onboard radar station's poor ability to detect fire-support helicopters across the entire range spectrum range in timely fashion, and also to the low probability of destroying precision weapons with the surface-to-air missile's fragmentation/continuous-rod warhead, and to the low power-to-weight ratio of the missile's passive propulsion section when firing on a maneuvering target...At the time of the antiaircraft missile and gun system's acceptance into service, many of the identified shortcomings found expression in the corresponding documents, and a plan was adopted for rectifying them before and during the deployment of serial production...

Unfortunately, the “Tunguska” in all its modifications can no longer resist [newer Apaches armed with Hellfire missiles]...There is a major effort to equip the Ground Troops air defense with the “Pantsir-S1,” in place of the “Tunguska.” ...Apart from the “Tunguska” antiaircraft missile and gun system, the motorized rifle (tank) regiments' antiaircraft battalions – under the present structure, the combined-arms (tank) brigades — have in their armories close-range SAM systems like the “Strela-10,” which are a further development of the “Strela-1M.”...

Source: Aleksandr Luzan, “The Fight above the Forwardmost Defensive Positions- Part II,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 25 November 2015, <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28156>>, accessed 15 January 2015.

The Fight above the Forwardmost Defensive Positions- Part II

A truncated “Luchnik” and the obsolete “Strelas”

But the “Luchnik” is not without certain drawbacks, either. For example, due to the use of infrared homing heads (as also in the “Strela-10M”), we have not managed to increase the distant boundary of the kill zone – it has remained at 5,000 - 6,000 meters. Therefore, for effective engagement with modern fire-support helicopters before they activate onboard weapons, and also for extending the air defense's capabilities over the forwardmost defensive positions and in the close tactical zone, the “Luchnik” SAM system should be considered and used only in combination with the “Tunguska” antiaircraft missile and gun system...

Apart from that, the “Luchnik” in its present configuration does not guarantee destruction of low-emission (“cold”) mini-UAV's and, because of this, it cannot wholly replace the “Strela-10M,” which incorporates a photo-contrast SAM guidance channel. A solution to this situation is, however, coming into view. As was already indicated, the new-generation “Verba” portable antiaircraft missile system is equipped with a three-channel homing head. One of the channels — an ultraviolet (UFK) one – is not sensitive to a target's heat emission and fundamentally guarantees mini-UAV targeting and destruction, which is extremely relevant at the present time. Thus, it is realistic to execute the task of destroying mini-UAV's and to wholly replace the “Strela-10M,” by arming the “Luchnik” SAM system's launcher with a certain number of “Verba” portable antiaircraft missile systems...

The solution is to be in the lead

Air defense of the forwardmost defensive positions has its specific features. The main one is that is the Ground Troops air defense forces' prerogative...imperfections in the construction and organization of air defense of the forwardmost defensive positions are to a significant degree impacting units' and subunits' survivability at forwardmost defensive positions against air-attack weapon strikes. In the final analysis, miscalculations and errors in organizing air defense of the forwardmost defensive positions have to be paid for not only by disabled arms, military equipment, and destroyed infrastructure elements, but also, to a significant extent, by blood and human lives. This is why the forwardmost defensive positions's air defense system should be maximally elaborated and brought into balance during peace time, in the process of its construction and creation. One should also take account of the fact that it is the most massive system and that every one percent of improvement in its effectiveness produces significant quantitative results and substantially reduces the losses inflicted on our own front-line troops...

Continued: Flying the Unfriendly Skies: Air Defense in the Russian Ground Forces

Air Defense Scheme for a Motorized Rifle Brigade in the Defense

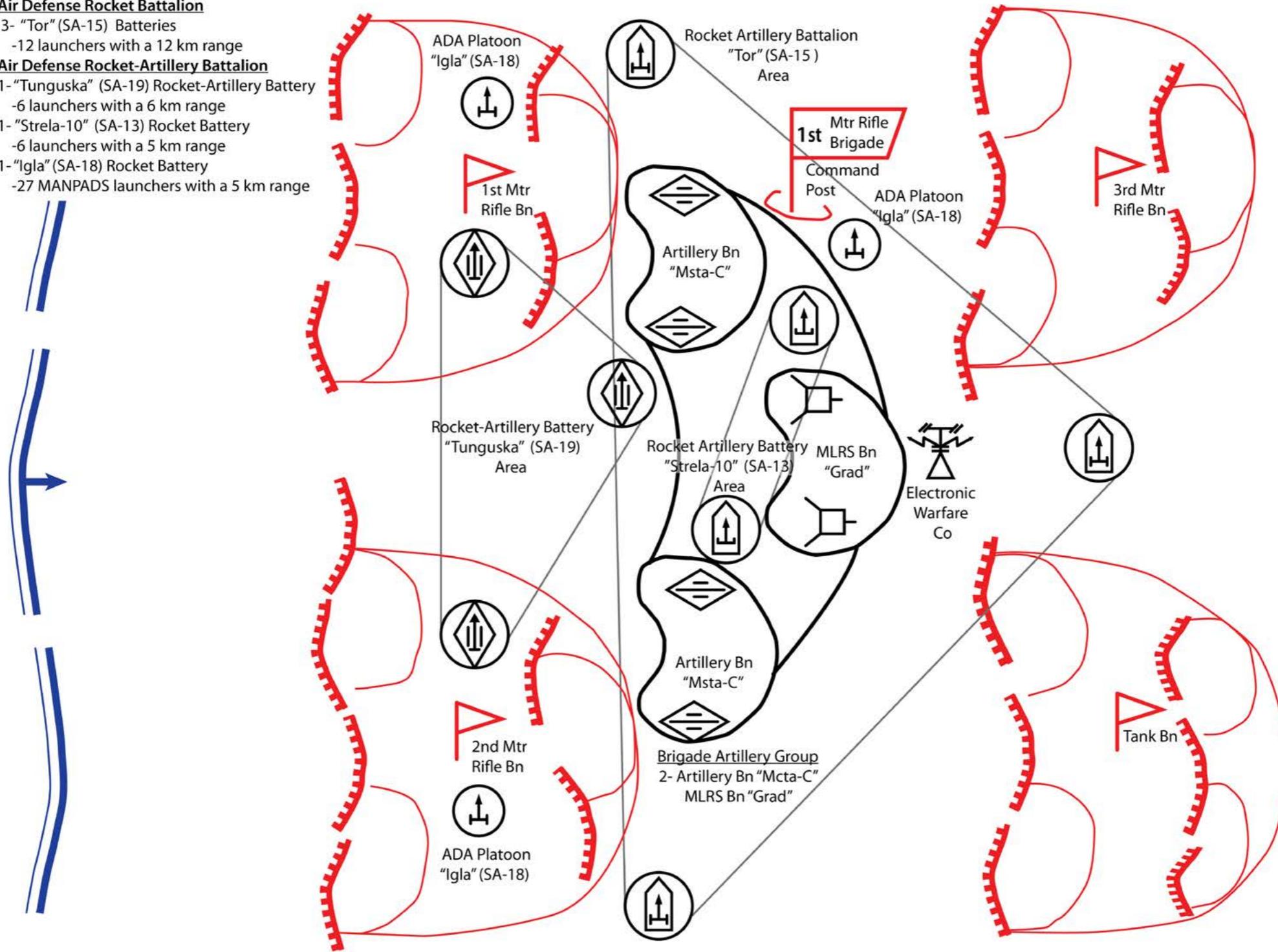
The Brigade's Organic Air Defense Units

Air Defense Rocket Battalion

- 3- "Tor" (SA-15) Batteries
- 12 launchers with a 12 km range

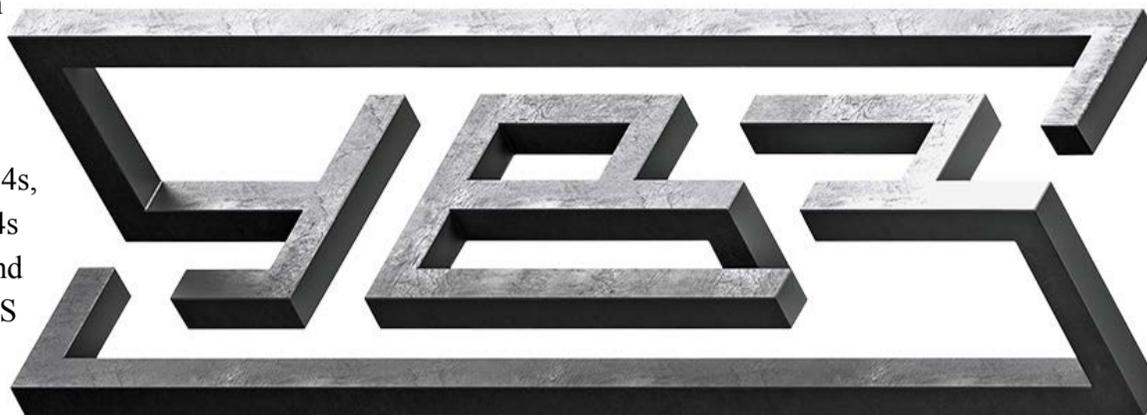
Air Defense Rocket-Artillery Battalion

- 1- "Tunguska" (SA-19) Rocket-Artillery Battery
- 6 launchers with a 6 km range
- 1- "Strela-10" (SA-13) Rocket Battery
- 6 launchers with a 5 km range
- 1- "Igla" (SA-18) Rocket Battery
- 27 MANPADS launchers with a 5 km range



More Bang for the Buck: The Modernized T-72

OE Watch Commentary: There has been much hype about the introduction of the Russian T-14 tank and its “Armata” chassis, but the bulk of Russia’s armored power will still reside in the T-72 series of tanks (Russia does have T-80s and T-90s in its inventory; the vast majority of its tanks are T-72s). At no time has Russia stated the desire to completely replace its tank fleet with T-14s, and there have been pronouncements that the T-14s would be found in only certain combined army and tank groups (approximately equivalent to small US Army Corps). Although the T-72 is still seen as being the backbone of most Russian maneuver formations for the foreseeable future, current Russian T-72s are much different than those that rolled off the assembly lines when the system was first produced in the early 1970s.



UralVagonZavod Logo

Source: <http://uvzshop.ru/i/share-fb-default.png>

As the accompanying excerpted article discusses, the Russian Federation has embarked on a massive modernization program for the venerable T-72 that involves a frame off refurbishment of the chassis and the additions of new cannons, engines, machine guns, optics, stabilization systems, reactive armor, and electronics. After this modernization the T-72 is redesignated a “T-72B3,” and is essentially a new tank. In terms of characteristics, the T-72B3 has much more in common with the T-90, than with older T-72s, and it is almost certain that that many T-72s can be refurbished for the price of one T-14. Interestingly, the Russian news channel *RT* has produced a documentary series about this process titled, “Tanks: Born in Russia” <https://rtd.rt.com/films/tanks-born-in-russia/> & <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBRLKmbip431B-VikRZZRINvCGsFVTjs8G>. The documentary follows one tank through the refurbishment process at the behemoth UralVagonZavod Factory, the producer of many Russian combat vehicles, including the T-72, T-90, and the T-14, in Nizhny Tagil, Russia.

Another interesting aspect of the modernization of the T-72B3 and the introduction of other more sophisticated equipment is the need for skilled technical support and maintenance. The increasingly sophisticated nature of Russian military equipment has greatly challenged the Russian Ground Forces maintenance system, which has its roots in the Soviet conscript army. In the past, maintenance that could not be done at the unit level was contracted to “Oboronservis,” a quasi-governmental contractor. The 2008 “New Look Reforms” restructured the Russian logistics and maintenance systems in favor of organizational and depot-level maintenance being performed by private contractors. This system has generally failed, and most organizational maintenance responsibilities have returned to uniformed serviceman. However, the maintenance of many of the advanced systems still requires highly trained civilian

(continued)

	T-72	T-72B3	T-90
Entered service	1973	2013	1993
Crew	3 men	3 men	3 men
Dimensions and weight			
Weight	41 t	~ 45 t	46.5 t
Length (gun forward)	9.53 m	9.53 m	9.53 m
Hull length	6.86 m	6.86 m	6.86 m
Width	3.46 m	3.46 m	3.46 m
Height	2.19 m	2.2 m	2.23 m
Armament			
Main gun	125-mm smoothbore	125-mm smoothbore	125-mm smoothbore
ATGW		9M119 Svir or 9M119M Refleks	9K119M (AT-11 Sniper-B)
Machine guns	1 x 7.62-mm, 1 x 12.7-mm	1 x 7.62-mm, 1 x 12.7-mm	1 x 7.62-mm, 1 x 12.7-mm
Elevation range	- 5 to + 14 degrees	- 5 to + 14 degrees	- 6 to + 14 degrees
Traverse range	360 degrees	360 degrees	360 degrees
Ammunition load			
Main gun	39 rounds	45 rounds	43 rounds
Machine guns	2 000 x 7.62, 300 x 12.7	2 000 x 7.62, 300 x 12.7	2 000 x 7.62, 300 x 12.7
Mobility			
Engine	V-46 diesel	V-92S2F diesel	V-84MS diesel engine
Engine power	780 hp	1130 hp	840 hp
Maximum road speed	60 km/h	~ 70 km/h	60 km/h
Range	500 km	~ 500 km	550 km
Maneuverability			
Gradient	60%	60%	60%
Side slope	40%	40%	40%
Vertical step	0.85 m	0.85 m	0.8 m
Trench	2.8 m	2.8 m	2.85 m
Fording	1.2 m	1.2 m	1.2 m
Fording (with preparation)	5 m	5 m	5 m

<http://www.military-today.com/>

Source: “Oldies but Goodies: Upgraded ‘Invulnerable’ T-72 Tanks Join Russian Army,” *Sputnik Online*, 20 December 2015, <<http://sputniknews.com/russia/20151220/1032041217/russia-tanks-upgrades.html>>, accessed 15 January 2015.

Oldies but Goodies: Upgraded ‘Invulnerable’ T-72 Tanks Join Russian Army

A final batch of upgraded T-72 tanks has been supplied to the armed forces by Russia’s flagship tank and fighting vehicles maker Ualvagonzavod.

The souped-up version of the Soviet-designed main battle tank that entered production in 1971 is virtually invulnerable now, boasting ballistic add-on armor protection against RPGs and weapons of mass destruction, as well as an automatic fire detection and explosion suppression system.

(continued)

Continued: More Bang for the Buck: The Modernized T-72

specialists. The accompanying excerpted article from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* notes how some depot-level services of Oboronservis are being picked up by UralVagonZavod (the original manufacturer of several different systems found within the Russian military), a sign that Russia is still trying to repair the damage done by the unsuccessful 2008 “New Look Reforms.”

Another interpretation is that Oboronservis (which had service complaints long before 2008) may not be capable of repairing some of the new technologies, and the original manufacturers may be the only maintenance option possible. (As a side note, Western maintenance officers and NCOs may be relieved to know that their Russian counterparts are now also experiencing the joys of equipment contracts and warranties problems, as the article discusses.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Thermal gunner night sights are available, which allow night launches of ATGMs.

The list of upgrades also includes a more powerful engine, better overall protection, a better gun and a modern multichannel gunner sight — all bringing the veteran fighting machine up to par with modern-day armored combat requirements.

Designed and built by UralVagonZavod, the T-72 is considered by many experts as the best mass-produced tank of the second half of the 20th century. The T-72 and its modifications are currently produced on license (and without) in many countries around the world.

The T-72 is armed with a 125 mm smoothbore cannon with guided missile firing capability.

The cannon comes in tandem with a 7.62 mm Kalashnikov machinegun and a turret-mounted heavy anti-aircraft machinegun.

The 41-ton T-72 is powered by a multi-fuel V-12 air-cooled 840 hp engine that can run on three types of fuel: diesel, gasoline and kerosene.

Two 200-liter auxiliary fuel drums can be fitted on the rear of the hull. The T-72 can be fitted with a snorkel for deep fording, and takes about 20 minutes to prepare for amphibious use.



Source: Oleg Valentinov, “With Tank Through Life: Servicing of Arms and Military Equipment Remains A Big Problem,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 28 October 2015, <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27722>>, accessed 15 January 2015.

Oboronservis no longer exists, but its cause lives on. Rather, it should live on, but there are subtle differences. The tasks of repairing and servicing arms and military equipment that were assigned to the disgraced department still need to be resolved...

What happens to a tank, a gun, or electronic apparatus in the process of operation and at the end of it? Who must be accountable for servicing, repair, and recycling, and how? The Defense Ministry, for example, is already posing for the third time the task of going over to the full life cycle in the servicing of

equipment and armament. Yevgeniy Krivoshein, spokesman for the Russian Federation Armed Forces Main Communications Directorate, said that the troops still have quite a lot of electronic equipment that was produced in the Soviet Union. The time is now approaching to write it off and replace it with more modern equipment. But who will do this? Must servicemen be involved in repairing equipment, and if so, to what level of complexity?

The defense industry also complains about the Defense Ministry. It turns out that they are not always confident in the reliability of contract relations. This was spoken of, in particular, by Vyacheslav Khalitov, deputy general director of UralVagonZavod. For example, fines relating to the T-72B3 tank for breaking the contract terms amount to 5 percent of the machine’s cost...A group has been set up at the plant to draw up a statute on managing the life cycle of arms and military equipment. It turns out that there are no such documents at the federal level, and this will be the first one to create a methodology and a body of concepts that may in the future form the basis of law-establishing documents...

UralVagonZavod is now incorporating into itself repair plants of Oboronservis. At present many of them find themselves in a state of suspension, meaning that servicing provision for equipment is at a standstill. So we must pose the question more broadly and think about creating regional service centers for the servicing of arms and military and specialized equipment...We must debureaucratize the drawing up of contracts and resolve pricing problems. For example, UralVagonZavod’s attempts to cooperate constructively with the Russian Federation Defense Ministry’s Legal Department are not meeting with a response. Counterclaims and discussion in court only make it harder to service arms and military hardware properly. The conclusion is simple: The normative-legal base does not correspond to the realities.

The defense industry complex and the Russian Federation Defense Ministry must become equal partners. But for now, as Konstantin Kostromin, director of the United Aircraft Corporation’s Department for Managing the Product Life Cycle, admitted, the producers and the military have a totally different understanding of even the essence of contracts.

The Modernization of Russian Ground Force's Air Defense Assets

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation Ground Forces are in the midst of a mass modernization of air defense systems. These upgrades include systems that carry more missiles, have better radar and C2 capabilities, and have missiles with greater ranges and better abilities to circumvent electronic warfare countermeasures.

The 9K330 “Tor” (SA-15 “Gauntlet”) is a short-to-medium-range heavy tracked, lightly armored, platform that packs 8 missiles that are primarily designed to engage cruise missiles and other precision guided munitions at a distance of up to 12 kilometers and flight ceiling of 6 kilometers. The Tor is being replaced by the “Tor-M2,” which sports 16 missiles with an increased flight ceiling (10 kilometers) and can engage up to four targets simultaneously, while firing on the move (as the accompanying YouTube video depicts).

The 2K22 “Tunguska” (SA-19 “Grison”) is a short-range missile-gun heavy tracked, lightly armored system that has twin 2A38M (30 mm) guns and 8 short-range missiles designed to engage low-flying aircraft and cruise missiles at a distance of up to 8 kilometers and flight ceiling of 3.5 kilometers. The 96K6 “Pantsir-S1” (SA-22 Greyhound) was initially thought to be the successor to the Tunguska, as it has a similar missile-gun combination, but is armed with 12 short-range missiles designed to engage low-flying aircraft and cruise missiles at a distance of up to 20 kilometers and flight ceiling of 15 kilometers. Despite similar appearances, the Pantsir-S1 does not appear to be the successor to the Tunguska. Instead, the Pantsir-S1 is being used to protect strategic (long-range) air defense assets of the Aerospace Defense Forces, such as the S-300 and S-400. The role of the Pantsir-S1 as a strategic protection asset may be one reason that the system can be provided on a wheeled chassis. As one of the accompanying excerpted articles discusses, Russia is now planning on developing a successor to the Tunguska, equipped with a 57mm autocannon.

The 9K35 “Strela-10” (SA-13 “Gopher”) is a close- (very short) range missile system, usually built upon a MT-LB (light tracked) chassis. The Strela-10 has four close-range, visually sited missiles capable of engaging targets at a distance of up to 5 kilometers and flight ceiling of 3.5 kilometers. The Strela-10 is being replaced by the “Luchnik-E,” which has 8 missiles with a 6-km range and 3.5 km flight ceiling, with the most important capability improvements being the addition of all weather and day/night firing capabilities.

The 9K310 “Igla” (SA-18 “Grouse”) is a close- (very short) range, man-portable air-defense system (MANPADS), capable of engaging targets at a distance of up to 5 kilometers and flight ceiling of 3.5 kilometers. It is being replaced by the 9K333 “Verba,” which has similar characteristics as its predecessors, but has a better guidance system and increased abilities to circumvent electronic warfare countermeasures.

The 9K37 “Buk” (SA-11 “Gadfly”) is not a part of Ground Forces maneuver units, but is instead found within the Ground Forces’ air defense artillery brigades. The Buk is a short-to-medium-range missile system on a heavy tracked platform that has 4 missiles with a range of up to 30 kilometers and flight ceiling of 14 kilometers. The Buk is being replaced with the 9K317M “Buk-M3” (SA-17 “Grizzly”). As the accompanying excerpted article states, the Buk-M3 is equipped with 6 missiles that have ranges of up to 70 kilometers and flight ceiling of 35 kilometers. The most interesting purported capability, is the ability to engage not only air targets, but also ground targets. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Screenshot of Tor-M2 Video

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-C_84DiPCLQ



“Buk” Missile System

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ae/COY_3PK_Бук-M2Э.jpg

(continued)

Continued: The Modernization of Russian Ground Force's Air Defense Assets

Source: "Aircraft Killer: New Russian Buk-M3 SAM System to Enter Service Soon," *Sputnik Online*, 9 January 2016, <<http://sputniknews.com/russia/20160109/1032883553/buk-new-anti-aircraft-weapon.html>>, 15 January 2016.

Aircraft Killer: New Russian Buk-M3 SAM System to Enter Service Soon

In 2016 the Russian Armed Forces are about to receive a new and deadly addition to their arsenal – Buk-M3 surface-to-air missile system (NATO reporting name: SA-17 Grizzly).

The new type of missile used by the launcher is more compact than the ordnance used by its predecessors, allowing Buk-M3 to carry a payload of six instead of four missiles. At the same time, the new missile outclasses previous models in terms of its technical characteristics: it can destroy any type of airborne target in existence, can be used against naval and ground targets, and is extremely resistant to electronic countermeasures. The Buk-M3 carries its payload in launch containers instead of positioning missiles on external rails. This new feature significantly reduces the time between shots as the launcher no longer has to rotate and elevate the missiles in the direction of a new target: the rockets are launched vertically and adjust their trajectory midair.

The new radar employed by the Buk-M3 allows it to detect airborne flying at extremely low altitudes (5 meters and higher), and increases the maximum destruction range of the weapon to 70 kilometers. The tele-thermal imaging target designator used by the launcher allows it to detect and track targets regardless of the time of day and weather conditions. According to Zvezda TV channel, a battalion of Buk-M3 can simultaneously track and engage up to 36 targets, with the probability of hitting a target with one missile reaching a 0.9999 percent certainty. The weapon system can also intercept and destroy airborne targets flying at a speed of 3 kilometers per second (for example, the speed of a missile fired by a US-made MGM-140 ATACMS surface-to-air missile launcher doesn't exceed 1.5 kilometers per hour)...



Pantsir-S1 on KAMAZ-6560 chassis

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantsir-S1#/media/File:MAKS_Airshow_2013_\(Ramenskoye_Airport,_Russia\)__\(521-05\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pantsir-S1#/media/File:MAKS_Airshow_2013_(Ramenskoye_Airport,_Russia)__(521-05).jpg)

“...the new missile outclasses previous models in terms of its technical characteristics: it can destroy any type of airborne target in existence, can be used against naval and ground targets, and is extremely resistant to electronic countermeasures.”

Source: "Since 2014, Four Airborne Units Have Received 'Verba' MANPADS," *RIA Novosti Online*, 10 January 2016, <http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20160110/1357281313.html>, accessed 15 January 2016.

Since 2014, Four Airborne Units Have Received 'Verba' MANPADS

From 2014 to 2015, Russian Airborne units in Novorossiisk [7th Air Assault Division (Mtn)], Ivanovo [98th Airborne Division], Tula [106th Airborne Division], and Pskov [76th Air Assault Division] have received the 'Verba' man-portable air defense systems MANPADS, said Ministry of Defense spokesman for the Airborne, Evgeny Meshkov.

“The newest combat equipment was supplied in bundles which included the Verba man-portable surface-to-air defense system with the Barnaul-T automatic control system, as well as a single learning and training set,” said Meshkov.

The Russian army's airborne troops have also received computer packages for training and preparing MANPADS specialist operators... The Verba MANPADS is ten times more effective in overcoming pyrotechnical glitches that its Iгла predecessor, while covering a range two and a half times greater...

Source: "The 'Shilka' and 'Tunguska' Will Be Replaced by a New Anti-Aircraft Artillery System," *RIA Novosti Online*, 24 December 2015, <http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20151224/1348255179.html>, accessed 15 January 2015.

The 'Shilka' and 'Tunguska' Will Be Replaced by a New Anti-Aircraft Artillery System

“The 'Shilka' and 'Tunguska' Will Be Replaced by a New Anti-Aircraft Artillery System,” RIA Novosti Online, 24 December 2015, <http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20151224/1348255179.html>, accessed 15 January 2015.

A new 57mm anti-aircraft artillery system will be developed in Russia to replace the “Tunguska” and “Shilka” air defense artillery systems, said Lieutenant-General Alexander Leonov, Chief of Air Defense Troops for the Russian Ground Forces.

The anti-aircraft artillery system ZSU-23-4 “Shilka” was designed for all weather and day/night air defense protection, either in a fixed position or on the march, but could also engage lightly armored ground targets. The “Shilka” was put into serial production in 1964, and was used in many military conflicts, for the intended purpose, providing air defense, and also for firing at ground targets. The anti-aircraft gun-missile system “Tunguska-M” was designed to protect against attack helicopters, as well as the destruction of lightly armored ground and surface targets...

The Russian Approach to Robotization: Evolution Not Revolution

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has adopted an evolutionary, as opposed to revolutionary, approach to robotization. In practice, this means that, instead of trying to develop completely new systems, a majority of Russian efforts in this area have focused on grafting robotic capabilities onto existing platforms. These efforts have included not only experimenting with remote controlled and semiautonomous heavy tracked platforms (such as the Armata, Kurganets, T-90, and even T-72 chassis), but also fielding small robotic turrets on traditional (manned) heavy and light chassis. (For more information on Russian robotic turrets, see “Unmanned Turrets to Increase ISR Capabilities and Lethality” OEW, November 2015.)

These developments mesh well with Russia’s considerable experience fielding auto-loading tanks and self-propelled artillery systems, a necessity for fielding any robotized weapons platform. The excerpted accompanying articles discuss Russian robotics developments and other “incremental” technology advancements that are useful not only for future robotic platforms, but also for current systems. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm, “The Craftsmen of Russia’s Arbalet,” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* Online, 16 December 2015, <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28489>>, accessed 15 January 2016

The Craftsmen of Russia’s Arbalet

“The most challenging thing in developing a robot is not about some individual part or mechanism. The most challenging thing is eventually putting the robot together, making it work as a single organism. But we have gotten used to being on familiar terms with sophisticated precision systems,” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* has been told by General Director Vladimir Lebedev...

The Kovrov Electromechanical Plant (KEMZ) is the manufacturer of unique precision articles in the absence of which state-of-the-art armament systems, specifically stabilizers, onboard information management systems, and so forth, are inconceivable...Kovrov plant output is currently to be found in the fire control systems of T-72 and T-90 tanks, BMP-2 and BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles, BMD-4M airborne fighting vehicles, and BTR-82 armored personnel carriers. But the plant’s particular pride is equipment for the newest multifunction platform, the Armata, and BMPs and BTRs of the Kurganets family...Kovrov Electromechanical Plant is simultaneously the developer and manufacturer of a unique line of robots that are currently being supplied to the various security agencies. And the enterprise’s range was recently augmented by remotely controlled combat modules for installation on armored vehicles, light armored equipment, and such like...

Ultra-High-Precision Fire in Any Weather

At the RAE 2015 exhibition held in Nizhniy Tagil this year visitors to the site, which is important in terms of the world arms market, were able to see not only in the static display but also in demonstration performances the Tigr and Tayfun armored vehicles fitted with the remotely controlled Arbalet (continued)

“The most challenging thing in developing a robot is not about some individual part or mechanism. The most challenging thing is eventually putting the robot together, making it work as a single organism.”

— General Director of the Kovrov Electromechanical Plant- Vladimir Lebedev

Source: Aleksey Ramm, “Strike, Another Strike: Three Types of Robotic Combat Machine Are Being Built on a Common Platform,” *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer* Online, 23 December 2015, <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28600>>, accessed 15 January 2013

Strike, Another Strike

Amidst all the diversity of the models on show [at the “Innovation Day” exhibition], the standout item there was the “Udar” [Strike] combat vehicle – a development of the “Signal” All-Russia Scientific Research Institute from Kovrov...

At first sight, the Kovrov institute’s product is a kind of hybrid of the reliable BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicle, which has been tested by decades of use, and the latest remote-controlled module developed by the Tula-based Instrument Design Bureau (KBP), which is being installed on the latest “Kurganets” IFV’s. But that is the most superficial impression. The “Udar” is not just a combat vehicle, but a complex robotic system capable of performing a wide range of combat tasks. “There is now the possibility for the operator to control the system remotely while still retaining the option of rapidly switching the vehicle to crew-operated mode. It is expected that the system’s behavior and movement will become more artificial-intelligence based, encompassing route-planning, avoidance of obstacles, and operating in a team equipped with UAV’s...

A Hard Road

...“Signal” engineers set about tackling a more difficult task – to build a medium-weight robotic system based on standard combat vehicles. That project acquired the name “Udar.”

“Why did we choose the BMP-3? [as the basis for the construction of the “Udar”] With the exception of the ‘Kurganets,’ this is currently the most modern BMP in the Russian Army. Also, in order to create such a chassis for a robot from scratch would have required much work, which would have taken years. And finally, the troops have plenty of spare parts for the BMP-3, and the soldiers know how to repair them...the BMP-3 is a fairly complex machine, with a lot of electronics in it. “The robotized platform contains some 20 electronic units distributed along the whole vehicle’s body. We have, of course, tried to minimize the weight and size characteristics so that they do not occupy much space in the personnel compartments. Our largest electronic unit is slightly over 0.5 meters long and weighs around 20 kilograms; the smallest, which is 10 centimeters long, weighs only several (continued)

Continued: The Russian Approach to Robotization: Evolution Not Revolution

Continued from page 49, left column

modules [robotic turrets] developed and manufactured jointly by the Kovrov Electromechanical Plant and the Oruzheynyye Masterskiye company...The Arbalet [automated, unmanned turret] is an initiative jointly developed by our company and Oruzheynyye Masterskiye, which we undertook in 2013. We made a close study of world experience, we familiarized ourselves with Italian and Israeli items, and only then did we begin work," Nikolay Kokoshkin recalls.

If we take a look at the state-of-the-art foreign articles we are struck by the fact that their effective range of fire rarely exceeds 600-700 meters. But the machine guns and automatic grenade launchers installed on the remotely controlled modules are capable of engaging targets at a much greater range, often in excess of 1.5 km, but the fire-control systems on these modules do not ensure accuracy of fire at such distances. "It is thought that the optoelectronic systems are the most important factor for a remotely controlled module. This is not so. The most important thing for a module is the stabilization of its armament," Kokoshkin continues...Soviet and, now, Russian stabilizers have been developed with an eye to stringent conditions: to have minimum weight/size parameters, to be well protected, and at the same time to ensure a high level of precision guidance...

Combat Engineer, Recovery Vehicle, and Loader

...The latest combat robots are equipped not only with the most advanced optoelectronics, incorporating a night vision device and thermal imager, but also with a communications and information exchange system that employs an encrypted jamming-resistant channel. This enables the operator not merely to monitor the actions of his "men" at ranges up to 2 km but also to acquire a stable picture via their surveillance systems, even if missions are being performed at complex technical installations such as plants or power stations...

"We believe that the option of a robot being followed by an operator with a remote-control console does not constitute a robotic system. An operator must control five, six, seven robots. And they are performing comprehensive missions. For instance, at a fire in a shopping mall several robots are sent in simultaneously to conduct reconnaissance, and they perform a complete inspection of the premises," Nikolay Kokoshkin speculates...

"The creation of a robotic system requires the resolution of many theoretical and even conceptual problems, specifically with regard to optimization, artificial intelligence, machine vision, and so forth. There are also the purely technical aspects, the platform has to be stable, it has to be able to negotiate different obstacles. The next challenge is to build artificial intelligence capabilities..."

"In the next decade remote-controlled and robotic platforms will account for about 30 percent of the Russian combat power..."

Continued from page 49, right column

grams...It is noteworthy that, by demand of the Russian military, the robotized BMP-3 must retain manual control from the driver-mechanic's regular operating position, and this imposes serious limitations on the dimensions of all the systems and subassemblies...

"The employees are currently developing the control, movement, and video-image algorithms for the "Udar" and plan to apply methods of identifying shapes, the tactical situation, and behavior on unfamiliar terrain. These are all fairly complex algorithms"...Going forward, gradual conversion of the "Udar's" remote control system to an artificial intelligence control system is envisaged, according to "Signal" VNI Chief Designer Sergey Filippov..."The enterprise employees are currently creating more complex algorithms, including the use of so-called rough logic. But we are moving toward the result in stages..."

Toward the target without satellites

..."Our inertial system now provides for adjustment according to a satellite signal, but an inertial system's so-called adjustment requires about five or six minutes after the machine is set in motion. But we are conducting work that will make it possible not only to significantly reduce that time but also to minimize satellite-linked adjustment and, going forward, to keep it only as a reserve option in peacetime conditions," Sergey Filippov says.

Robots in action

...We are currently going through the stage of finalizing the technical specifications with the Russian Defense Ministry. The document's signing is planned for sometime before the end of this year... One should understand that the 'Udar' is a multifunction robotic platform on which various equipment or weapons will be installed, depending on the task at hand," the chief designer says... According to the Russian military department's requirements, three types of machine must be installed on the "Udar" platform: reconnaissance/strike, engineer support, and transportation/evacuation....

It should be noted that the control system being developed will enable an operator to control the actions of not just one robot but an entire robot-equipped subunit which is able to perform a wide range of tasks. Admittedly, such a level of control demands complex systems of communication with a wide channel that is capable of supporting continuous information exchange between the command post and the "troopers," as well as video-image transmission in real time. "VHF channels have a good range but a low traffic capacity, while the opposite applies in the higher frequencies – the range is shorter but the channel is 'wider.' We are doing research. We are considering various alternatives, in particular, UAV's, a relay-station machine, and so forth. They all have their downsides and advantages..."

(continued)

Continued: The Russian Approach to Robotization: Evolution Not Revolution



General Director of the Kovrov Electromechanical Plant- Vladimir Lebedev.

Source: <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/Ry3iXsZRLBg/maxresdefault.jpg>

Source: Yuriy Avdeyev, “Tank Breakthrough. T-90 Modernization Will Enable Vehicle to Outperform All Foreign Tanks,” *Krasnaya Zvezda* Online, 25 December 2015, <<http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/27131-tank-proryva>>, accessed 15 January 2016.

Source: “Universal Soldiers: Combat Robots to Join Russian Army in 2016,” *RT* Online, 7 January 2016, <<http://sputniknews.com/russia/20160107/1032793253/russia-robots-army.html>>, accessed 15 January 2016.

Universal Soldiers: Combat Robots to Join Russian Army in 2016

Russia is rolling out a wide array of innovative robotic machines to optimize the performance of its armed forces in 2016. “Advanced robotic systems of a new generation designed for military application are tested within the framework of development work. A number of them will be delivered to the army in 2016,” Col. Gen. Pavel Popov said in an interview with Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star) newspaper. In the next decade remote-controlled and robotic platforms will account for about 30 percent of the Russian combat power in addition to dozens of land- and sea-based robotic systems as well as hundreds of UAVs already used by the Russian military...

Tank Breakthrough. T-90 Modernization Will Enable Vehicle to Outperform All Foreign Tanks

Our T-90 has recently been the center of attention for both national and foreign media. Military experts are voicing their opinions concerning its development prospects and promotion on the arms market...The point is that the Uralvagonzavod NPK is using the T-90 platform as the basis for a program that will turn all current foreign tanks into yesterday’s hardware. In the opinion of Vyacheslav Khalitov, Uralvagonzavod NPK’s deputy general director for specialized technology, the T-90 is entirely suitable for robotization. The designers have been working actively in this area for some years now. They plan to build a remote control that will enable an operator to issue commands to a robotic vehicle at ranges up to 5 km. But subsequent developments will improve these abilities...



Russia: See the new fighting module Arbalet-DM at RAE-2015.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jydhKpVw1iY>

New Ground Forces Divisions and RVSN Regiments in 2016

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation's recent announcement about the formation of three new Ground Forces divisions and five Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN) regiments should come as little surprise. Russia has been quite vocal about the situation in Ukraine and its opposition to NATO activities in Eastern Europe. It has already announced the creation of a new combined arms army group and tank army group (about the equivalents of small US army corps) in the Western Operational Strategic Command, to which these units will be subordinate. (For more information see "New Combined Arms, Tank, Air Force & Air Defense Armies to be Formed" OEW, September 2015.) These divisions will not be built from scratch, but will be created from three existing brigades that will be "upsized." This change reverses some of the 2008 "New Look Reforms," which converted most Russian divisions and regiments into more easily deployable brigades that are better suited for the smaller conflicts Russia was expecting to face in 2008. Russia's decision to reconstitute a regimental/division structure (as opposed to simply just adding a few more brigades) may be an effort to better posture some elements of the Russian Army to fend off or threaten NATO as needed.

The addition of new army groups and maneuver divisions coincides with other force structure changes for the Ground Forces. Although no official announcements have been made, the Ground Forces appear to be moving to a more modular structure. Previously, army groups would have a hodgepodge of subordinate units. There now appears to be an effort to develop a standard package of capabilities that will give every army group at least one headquarters and one reconnaissance, artillery, combat engineer, pontoon-bridge, NBC Defense, surface missile, and air defense brigade or division.

As for the five new RVSN regiments, the creation of new RVSN units and capabilities has been under discussion for quite some time. Russia has been deeply perturbed about US efforts to deploy an anti-ballistic missile defense system and the alleged creation of the "Prompt Global Strike" program: Russia believes that the US has created a "Prompt Global Strike" program that will eventually be capable striking most targets in the world with conventional munitions within one hour of the decision to strike being made. Russian security circles believe these two programs were created for the purpose of eliminating Russia's strategic deterrence capability. In an effort to maintain strategic deterrence capabilities (vis-à-vis the US) despite these programs, the Russian Federation has embarked on a program of ICBM upgrades (to circumvent anti-ballistic missile defenses) and the creation of more mobile strategic nuclear forces, to include a rail-based ICBM platform that will complicate targeting for any "Prompt Global Strike" or similar program.

In Russian security circles there is a concept of "equal security," which is also mentioned in Russia's 2015 *National Security Strategy*. It can be argued that these above-mentioned force additions, and many other of Russia's efforts to modernize, reform, and restructure its Armed Forces, are linked to maintaining "equal security" with NATO and the US. The accompanying excerpted articles detail some of these capability enhancements. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Nikolskiy, "Russia's Western Border Will Be Covered by Three New Divisions," *Vedomosti Online*, 12 January 2016, <<http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2016/01/13/623777-granitsu-prikroyut>>, accessed 15 January 2016.

Russia's Western Border Will Be Covered by Three New Divisions

A most important objective of the Defense Ministry in the new year is the organization in the western sector of three divisions, Minister Sergey Shoygu announced on the first conference call of the leadership of the defense department of 2016...The minister classed as other important tasks of the defense department the placement on alert duty of five regiments of the Strategic Missile Troops equipped with new missiles, the staging of the Kavkaz 2016 exercises, which will be this year's most wide-ranging maneuvers, continuation of the re-equipment of the army, consolidation of positions in the Arctic, and the completion of the building of new arsenals for munitions storage and the military infrastructure on the Kuril Islands. Shoygu also pointed out that a new service of the Armed Forces — the Air and Space Forces — was formed and that approximately 3,000 combat-training activities were conducted and eight various Ground Troops brigades were organized in the past year...

Two persons close to the Defense Ministry said that three divisions are being formed in the Ground Troops. Two combined-arms brigades, one of which, the 33d Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, will be converted to motorized rifle divisions...the third division will be a reconstituted tank brigade that will become the 10th Guards Tank Division in Boguchar, Voronezh Oblast...

Reserve Colonel Viktor Murakhovskiy says that the deployment of the new formations on Russia's western border was initially motivated by the need to respond to the reinforcement of the American troops in Poland and the Baltic and to cover the border with Ukraine, on which by the time of the start of the armed conflict in this country in 2014 there were no combined-arms formations at all. But another possibility is that these divisions, whose strength is thousands of personnel greater, could have been formed as a result of the decisions to create armies in the Western Military District (the 1st Guards Tank and the 20th Guards). Following the reforms of ex-Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov, there were no combined arms Ground Forces divisions (except for one stationed on the Kurils), the other current divisions in existence, Taman [2nd Guards Tamanskaya Motorized Rifle Division] and Kantemir [4th Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division] divisions were reconstituted in 2012 by Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu.

(continued)

Continued: New Ground Forces Divisions and RVSN Regiments in 2016

“Going by the available information, the “reform salvoes” heard this year are only the start of quite extensive military reform over the course of several years, during which it is planned not only to re-equip the Armed Forces but also to impart to them an organization and establishment which, the Russian military-political leadership believes, most corresponds to modern threats.”

Source: Aleksey Ramm, “Reforms and Results: What Happened in Russia’s Armed Forces in 2015?” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 23 December 2015, <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28606>>, accessed 15 January 2016.

Reforms and Results: What Happened in Russia’s Armed Forces in 2015?

It was quite a full year last year for Russia’s Armed Forces. First, the reforms begun by Sergey Shoygu from the moment he was appointed defense minister were actively pursued in 2015...The Air Force not only changed its name, but also underwent considerable organization and establishment changes...Second, Russia’s military-political leadership responded assertively to the foreign policy challenges, specifically to the ongoing war in the Donets Basin, and also to NATO actions in Europe aimed at “detering Russia’s aggressive policy.” Third, the active buildup of the force composition and strength level of Russia’s troops in the northern regions continued as part of the deterrence of the likely adversaries, and also of the defense of national interests in the Arctic. The present military reform is substantially classified and is practically without any coverage in the news media. But we shall attempt, nonetheless, to comprehend and tally the results of this year.

Challenge Accepted

The appearance of the 1st Guards Tank Army in the Western Military District was the most symbolic event. Despite conspiracy theories which arose, the fielding of the new operational formation was part of the Russian military-political leadership’s response to the Ukrainian crisis and the actions of NATO...Aside from a tank army, the Ground Troops were reinforced in 2015 by several new artillery and missile brigades...the 80th Motorized Rifle Brigade in Murmansk Oblast— appeared also... Two new brigades, part of the units Supreme Commander’s Reserve- the 1st Guards Combat-Engineer Brigade and the 28th Pontoon-Bridge Brigade, were also formed...

Arctic Positions

We learned of the formation of the new North Operational-Strategic Command, which is composed not only of the Northern Fleet but also units and formations of the Air Force and Ground Troops, at the end of 2014. But even in this year the new operational-strategic command has been reinforced by the 80th Motorized Rifle Brigade stationed in Murmansk Oblast...Despite the absence of official data, it may be assumed that the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade, the 1st Air Defense Division, and units, task forces, and formations of the Northern Fleet this year became part of the North Operational-Strategic Command...A newly organized air defense missile regiment (equipped with the modernized version of the S-300PM SAM system), which is part of the 1st Air Defense Division, also came on alert this year.

From Air Force to Air and Space Forces

The most symbolic event of this year was the reorganization of the Air Force as the Air and Space Forces... As part of the reform of the Air and Space Forces of Russia, all the air and air defense commands formed earlier at the time of transition to the new look are now armies (the 1st, 2d, 3d, and 4th commands are now the 6th, 14th, 11th, and 4th armies respectively). The command of air and missile defense based in the Moscow Oblast is now the 1st Air and Air Defense Army, and the Space Forces, the Air and Space Forces 15th Army.

Aside from the reform of operational formations...air are bases being reorganized as air divisions, brigades, and regiments...The 546th Army Aviation Air Base is now the 16th Army Aviation Brigade, and the 387th and 393d bases, helicopter regiments. Some information indicates that this year both long-range aviation air bases (the 6950th and 6952d) were reorganized as the 22d Heavy Bomber Division...

Awards

Briefly summing up the results, it may be said that this year was kicked off an active phase of Armed Forces reform that was begun by Sergey Shoygu back in 2012. True, the Ministry of Defense’s plans were heavily influenced by the Ukrainian crisis, which compelled the countering not only of possible problems on the part of Ukraine, but also the policy of “deterrence of Russia” announced by NATO. Going by the available information, the “reform salvoes” heard this year are only the start of quite extensive military reform over the course of several years (most likely through 2020), during which it is planned not only to re-equip the Armed Forces but also to impart to them an organization and establishment which, the Russian military-political leadership believes, most corresponds to modern threats.

(continued)

Continued: New Ground Forces Divisions and RVSN Regiments in 2016

“...in Russia, as usual, everything is confidential but nothing is secret.”

Source: Konstantin Bogdanov, “A ‘Very’ White Paper: Does the Defense Ministry Want to Talk About Itself?” *Lenta Online*, 31 December 2015, <<http://lenta.ru/articles/2015/12/31/whitepaper/>>, accessed 14 January 2016.

A ‘Very’ White Paper: Does the Defense Ministry Want to Talk About Itself?

One of the main documents of the past year should have been published is the the Russian Defense Ministry’s “White Paper.” A public annotated exposition of the country’s military doctrine and plans for the development of its armed forces in the context of the main threats. Unfortunately, this document has not come into being...

In Secrecy of Action

World practice shows that it is not possible to accomplish the task of issuing a “White Paper” exclusively by the Defense Ministry and without the involvement of other governmental structures, experts who are independent of the Defense Ministry, or the public. The question is does anyone at the Znamenka [reference to the General Staff] see this as a task that should be accomplished at all?

The second approach to this tool, undertaken in 2014, meant the paper being drawn up directly by officers in the General Staff and the Defense Ministry’s central apparatus with the involvement of relevant experts from the main commands, districts and fleets. However, the low priority of the project as a whole, in combination with the persisting desire “to say something without saying anything”...The total classification both of the military budget and the state armaments program is closely linked to this problem. Beating drums in favor of reviving the armed forces are being increasingly heard in the public arena and a massive propaganda exploitation of the achievements of the military reform launched in 2009, as well as of the state weapons program compiled by the late Vladimir Popovkin in 2010, is being observed. The “polite people”, the Kalibr high-precision missiles, and numerous other results of the reforms of recent years that the general public is only learning about now...The Russian Defense Ministry is for the moment free of these bourgeois prejudices and enjoys this freedom [of not conducting open reporting], reporting only at closed meetings to the country’s leaders. And hence the special language that the Defense Ministry prefers to speak in with the outside world.

Correcting Names

In fact, while observing the life of the armed forces the public has already got used to the special gibberish of military public affairs. The Chernigov 76th Guards Air Assault Division will evidently always be called the “Pskov formation of the airborne troops”, although no-one can say what the point of this is. That is the way it is...Any information concerning the Strategic Missile Troops is also concealed behind vague “Irkutsk” or “Novosibirsk” formations, although there has long been no secret about which specific “formations” are located there. So for all we know an entire generation of Russian citizens will die without knowing that there are two Taman divisions in the country. Because one is persistently called “the motorized rifle formation of the Western Military District” and the other the “Tatishchev formation of the Strategic Missile Troops”...It is hard to say what the point is in hiding their names from our own people. Especially since in Russia, as usual, everything is confidential but nothing is secret.



Caucasus and Central Asia to Become Key Priority for Russian Military in 2016

OE Watch Commentary: On 1 January 2016 *Gazeta.ru* (Newspaper) published an article about the future of Russian military operations in 2016. According to the article, in addition to continued military engagement in Syria and Donbass, the Caucasus and Central Asia will also become strategically important. Indeed, the article emphasizes that the “Caucasus-2016” strategic exercises will be a critical element the Russian army’s combat training.

Ekaterina Zgirovskaya, the article’s author, cites Russian Defense Minister’s Sergei Shoigu announcement in December 2015 as an explanation for this strategic emphasis. He said that ISIS is expanding its zones of influence and there is a threat of transfer of their operations to Central Asia and the Caucasus. As is typical for pro-Kremlin writing in Russia, the article says that the Russian military is targeting ISIS, even though Western military experts document many times that the vast majority of Russia’s air strikes have not been against ISIS, but only against the armed opposition against Syrian dictator Bashar al Assad.

The article goes on to say that, upon Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision, the Army will put a main emphasis on training in difficult conditions, such as mountainous areas. According to the article, the Army has already begun to prepare to carry out this order. For the past two years, since Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine (which the article refers to as Crimea’s “joining’ Russia), new types of weapons, helicopters, ships, and military units have been pouring into the Southern Military District, which includes the territory of former North Caucasus Military District, the Black Sea Fleet, and the Caspian Flotilla. Importantly, the article highlights Armenia as an example of Russian Armed Forces’ preparations: the Army sent a couple dozens of helicopters to Armenia from Krasnodar Territory. In addition, Russia and Armenia signed an agreement to create a joint regional air defense system. Russia already has similar agreements with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

The mention of Armenia is important because Armenia remains Russia’s greatest ally in the South Caucasus, and one over whom Russia exercises near total control. Armenia also hosts a Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia’s second largest city. It is therefore not surprising that Armenia is growing in importance in Russia’s military efforts.

Finally, according to the excerpt, the Russian government declared Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and other countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as Russia’s major “friends” in 2016. Among Russia’s key military priorities for 2016, according to the article, is the development of military cooperation with allies and partners, especially through the CSTO. In this context, the Caucasus and Central Asia are becoming especially important to watch in 2016.

End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)

Source: Ekaterina Zgirovskaya, “Сирия, Кавказ, «Бук» и «Ярс». Что ждет армию России в 2016 году” (“Syria, Caucasus, ‘Buk,’ and Yars.” What Awaits the Russian Army in 2016”), *Gazeta.ru* (Newspaper), 1 January 2016. <http://www.gazeta.ru/army/2016/01/01/8004275.shtml>

...Syria, the Caucasus, CSTO and Donbass

For three months the Russian military is proving to the world that it can shoot not only in military exercises and army games, but also in a real fight. The world’s shooting range for air defense masters became Syria, where since 30 September 2015 at the request of President Bashar Assad’s Russia’s air group is shelling the bases and oil tankers of banned in Russia and in many other countries terrorist organization the Islamic State.

... Russian troops will also continue to carry out “certain functions” in the troubled Donbass...As Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced in December of last year, zones of influence of the “Islamic state” are expanding and “there is a threat of transfer of their operations to Central Asia and the Caucasus.”

Therefore, a key element the Russian army’s combat training in the coming year will be the strategic exercises “Caucasus-2016.” President Vladimir Putin stresses that “the main emphasis (of teaching) should be placed on training personnel to operate in challenging conditions, including in mountainous areas.” Last year “Center-2015” became the final training are where the military prepared to conduct Syria operations against terrorism.

Work in this direction has clearly begun already. In the Southern Military District united for almost two years now (since the times of Crimea’s joining [Russia]) new types of weapons, planes, helicopters, and ships are sent, new military units and connections are created. Intensification is observed in neighboring countries - for example, a couple of dozens of helicopters were sent to Armenia from Krasnodar Territory at the end of the year. In addition, Russia and Armenia signed an agreement to create a joint regional air defense system similar to that already in place with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

...Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and other countries of the CSTO are declared Russia’s major “friends” in 2016. According to Putin, the development of military cooperation with allies and partners, especially through the Collective Security Treaty Organization – is a priority for the Russian military.

...



Flag of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CSTO_Flag.png

Tied to Russia, Armenia's Economy Continues to Decline

OE Watch Commentary: As 2016 begins, Armenia's economy, tied to Russia's economy, continues to decline, according to the accompanying excerpts. The first, from Russian-language Armenian publication *Hayastannews.com*, cites Armenian economist Vilen Khachatryan, who believes the Armenian economy is at a "dead end," and highlights the particular problems that Armenian exporters had in 2015 due to problems in the Russian economy. "The lower the price of oil, the more dangerous the Russian market is for us," he said. He expects this trend to continue. Another point Khachatryan highlights is that Armenia is losing the Ukrainian market, as well as markets in the European Union and the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Customs Union, of which Armenia itself is now a member. He warns of economic problems for Armenia if Ukraine signs the Association Agreement with the European Union. Regardless of whether or not Ukraine signs the Association Agreement, Armenia's trade losses with Ukraine are still appreciable.

The second accompanying excerpt, from Russian business-oriented *Vzglyad (Viewpoint)*, highlights two points. First is the impact of energy prices on the Armenian economy. According to the excerpt, Armenian Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan asked Russia to lower prices on gas supplied to Armenia. As a Customs Union member, Armenia already gets a break on the prices, but it does not appear to be enough. Even prior to joining the Customs Union, Armenia was almost entirely dependent on Russia for energy. The second point is about economic costs to Armenia, had it not joined the Customs Union in the first place: approximately \$1 billion, according to Professor Ashot Tavadyan, Doctor of Economics and Head of the Department of Economic and Mathematical Methods at the Armenian State Economics University.

Armenia's economy was in a dire state prior to officially joining the Customs Union in January 2015 after the Kremlin, according to many reports, forced Armenia to reverse its policy of working towards an Association Agreement with Europe and join the Customs Union instead. Nonetheless, according to many analysts, joining the Customs Union indeed exacerbated the problem even further. The topic of Armenia's dire economic problems and other issues related to Armenia's joining the Customs Union heavily dominated headlines in Armenia in 2015. It appears likely that these topics will continue to dominate in 2016. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: "Армения утратила рынки и ЕС, и ЕАЭС" ("Armenia Lost EU and Customs Union Markets"), *HayastanNews.com*, 16 January 2016. <http://hayastannews.com/news/106685.html>

The year 2016 will be difficult for exporters. HayastanNews.Com reports about this with reference to Lragir.am, announced economist Vilen Khachatryan.

Problems of exporters in 2015 were due to difficulties in the Russian economy. Volumes of exports and imports declined significantly in 2015 and experts warn about the persistence of this trend in this year.

... "We have neither an investment bloc, nor high-tech production. So, the country is at a dead end, and export potential is maintained only by individual manufacturers," noted Khachatryan Vilen...

According to the economist, the ratio of the dollar against the ruble shows that there is a crisis in Russia and Armenian exporters will face new challenges in the Russian market. "The lower the price of oil, the more dangerous the Russian market is for us," he said, adding that this trend continues.

The second negative factor – is that Armenia is losing the Ukrainian market. Entry into force of Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU will lead to the fact that the nature of relations between Ukraine and members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) will change.

"This country cannot work with Armenia on the same principles as with the EU. Steps will be taken to prevent entry into the EEU through Ukraine with cheap European products. That is, products purchased in Ukraine will become more expensive for Armenia. Armenia had good economic relations with Ukraine, but we lost them," he said.

Vilen Khachatryan believes that Armenia has lost markets also in the European Union and in the EEU, and other countries benefited from this.

Source: "Армения попросила Россию снизить тарифы на газ" ("Armenia Asked Russia to Lower Gas Prices"), *Vzglyad (ViewPoint)*, 16 January 2016. <http://www.vz.ru/news/2016/1/16/789004.html>

Armenia turned to Russia with a request to lower prices on supplied natural gas, announced Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan at a meeting with a group of local entrepreneurs who produce and export household products and food.

The prime minister stressed that "the progress of economic relations with Russia and other partners substantially depends on energy prices that would not limit economic competitiveness." He noted that "the Armenian authorities have contacted the Russian government on the issue of energy prices and given the strategic nature of our partnership with Russia, we look forward to a positive decision."

"Domestic producers have expressed their concern about the negative impact of energy prices on competitiveness of local products and preservation of jobs," cites TASS the announcement of Cabinet of Ministers of [Armenia]

... The damage Armenia's non-accession to the EECU [Eurasian Economic Customs Union] would have amounted to approximately \$1 billion, according to department of economic and mathematical methods head at Armenian State Economic University, Doctor of Economics, Professor Ashot Tavadyan. ...

The Russian Commissar and the Fall 2015 Draft

OE Watch Commentary: In late December the Russian Ministry of Defense announced the results of the Fall 2015 draft campaign. As the first excerpt points out, the military drafted just over 147,000 young Russian men to serve for one year in the country's armed forces and other military formations (e.g. Internal Forces). The quality of the draftee pool appears to be improving, as more than 38,000 of the new conscripts were college graduates. The article also points out that nearly a thousand draftees will be serving in special science companies or within sports battalions.

Assessing new recruits in the military remains the primary duty of the Russian commissar, who provides a vital link between society and the military. As the second excerpt indicates, besides helping to carry out the semi-annual draft process, the commissar also works with "the executive authorities in the field [to] develop plans for the mobilization of human and transport resources in time of war." Moreover, according to the excerpt, the commissar is also responsible for maintaining military records and handling a wide variety of associated tasks, dealing with everything from processing awards to helping military veterans on matters dealing with pensions.

The author of the second excerpt concludes by providing a few recommendations for the commissar to improve communication with Russian youth. He points out that today's commissar must become literate with modern social media, since many young people rarely read newspapers or watch TV, relying instead on new forms of digital media. For instance, he suggests that the commissar could use social media to arrange meetings between prospective new draftees and those who have already completed their military service. Social media might also be used to publish the names of draft-dodgers. Most importantly, the author maintains that to counter the "information warfare attacks and propaganda of our liberal-wishers," today's commissar must learn to use these new forms of media to create a "positive image of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation." Russia's military leadership continues to improve the overall image of serving within the country's military. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Today the commissar is on the front-line in terms of information warfare attacks and propaganda of our ‘liberal-wishers’...”

Source: “Минобороны подвело итоги осеннего призыва,” [Defense Ministry announced results of the autumn conscription], *Lenta.ru*, 31 December 2015. <http://lenta.ru/news/2015/12/31/conscription/>

During the autumn conscription, 147,100 young men were conscripted into the Russian Armed Forces and other military formations... Among the new conscripts, there were over 38,000 with higher education.... Work continues on the developing scientific companies. There are currently 562 serving scientific battalions. Young men are also serving within sports companies. In 2015, there are 381 soldiers serving within sports battalions....

Source: Valery Astanin, “Военкоматы: миссия выполнима” [Recruitment offices: Mission Possible], *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozrenoye*, 18 December 2015. http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2015-12-18/10_voenkomat.html

In terms of the specifics of the tasks and the military commissariats are a unique body of military control... Through them run invisible threads linking the army with the people... For many Russians, the military commissariats are a symbol, a living history that the power of the army comes from the efforts of the entire nation....

...Over the years, military enlistment offices in cooperation with the executive authorities in the field are developing plans for the mobilization of human and transport resources in time of war, organize military registration, conscription of citizens for military service...

In the near future, military commissariats will become responsible for carrying out the mobilization of manpower.... This new reserve structure will significantly increase the amount of work for the recruiting office in dealing with military formations and units and staffing them with the required manpower.... The commissars are also responsible for keeping track of those who have served in uniform, whether defense in war or fighting natural disasters.... He also helps disabled soldiers in resolving social questions, assists in the preparation and documentation of military awards... and general military administration (pensions, benefits, compensation and the implementation of other payments provided by applicable law). ...

Today the commissar is on the front-line in terms of information warfare attacks and propaganda of our “liberal-wishers” on the negative projection of patriotic and military-patriotic themes in relation to the younger generation in our country...

That is why the portraying the military and military-patriotic themes to the majority of young people in Russia, in my opinion, it is necessary to take urgent measures to bring Internet resources for the system of military enlistment offices...

...The first refers to the widespread use of the work with the youth of social networks, which are now an integral part of their lives.... The commissar must create an atmosphere of modern information dialogue with young people in order to organize the work point to counter the emerging certainly negative and false information on military subjects and to distort historical events in the life of our state....

...The commissar should use social media to arrange meetings between prospective new draftees and those who have already completed their military service. ...In addition, he could possibly publish the list of those citizens who have not completed their military duty (draft dodgers)....

...The attraction of the Internet resource must now be used in military enlistment offices to the best advantage to create a sustainable positive image of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation...

Shooting Down Planes: A Tenuous Historical Comparison

OE Watch Commentary: Russian military pundits continue to speculate as to the reasons behind the Turkish decision to shoot down a Russian Su-24 in late November 2015. Since the incident occurred, the Russian media have created a prominent narrative whereby the Turkish leadership “stabbed their Russian neighbor in the back.” Disregarding Ankara’s claims that the aircraft had violated Turkish airspace (despite repeated warnings), Russian commentators have searched for alternative explanations. In the brief accompanying excerpt, Russian military expert Victor Gavrilov elaborates on one popularly accepted version, drawing a parallel between the Su-24 downing and the U-2 incident from 1960.

Gavrilov begins his argument by pointing out that Ankara’s desire to protect ethnic Turkmen in Syria from Russian air attacks is a “highly controversial theory” and not strong enough to justify this attack. Nor would the “great losses due to reduced shipments of contraband oil,” which Ankara purportedly buys from ISIS, be worth severing relations with Russia. Gavrilov mentions nothing about a Russian violation of Turkish airspace, and suggests that there must be some other more important reason which prompted the Turkish leadership to take such a drastic step. Given the focus of Russia’s propaganda over the past couple of years, the identity of the culprit is not hard to guess. According to Gavrilov, just like in 1960 when Washington denied they had dispatched a spy plane over the USSR, so today the US was the invisible third party which “carried out this provocation.”

Gavrilov then reminds his readers of the main history of the original U-2 flight, which was shot down over the USSR on 1 May 1960. He points out that this incident occurred just when relations appeared to be improving between the US and the Soviet Union. A high-level summit was scheduled for later that month, which might have led to an earlier period of détente among the superpowers. The author includes a portion of the transcript from the subsequent questioning of the U-2 American pilot, which suggests that his mission may have been authorized by some in Washington who were not interested in better relations with the USSR.

Having demonstrated that the US is forever conniving to weaken the Kremlin, Gavrilov goes on to posit that a similar cabal in Washington was likely responsible for the Su-24 shootdown. He repeats the allegation made by President Putin that the US may have given the flight plan of the Russian Su-24 to its Turkish allies. He concludes by proposing that the American masterminds behind this operation likely also understood the over-reaction of the Russian media against Turkey and have tried “to make the most of this situation.”

The U-2 incident was not the finest moment for American diplomacy during the Cold War, and it is clear why Russians today might hearken back to this incident. However, trying to implicate the US by drawing parallels between the recent loss of a Russian bomber in Syria and the shootdown of the U-2 in May 1960 only confuses and aggravates an already tense situation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Few believe that Turkey will condemn its main ally - the United States, which, as a “third party rejoices” that Russian-Turkish relations have become disordered.”

Source: Victor A. Gavrilov, “Инцидент с Су-24 и ретроспективные параллели: Кому выгодно обострение отношений между двумя странами,” [The incident with the Su-24 and parallel retrospective: Who benefits from the aggravation of relations between the two countries], *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozrenoye*, 18 December 2015. http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2015-12-18/1_incident.html

The incident with the Su-24 and parallel retrospective

That shooting down a Russian Su-24 was clearly unprofitable to Turkey is clear to all. Moscow and Ankara had a normal relationship, and it is clear that the Russian air forces in Syria did not threaten the security of Turkey. There is a highly controversial theory that the Turkish leadership wanted to strengthen its credibility in the Islamic world by ostensibly protecting their Turkmen relatives. Of course, it is likely that Erdogan, his family and entourage, suffered great losses due to reduced shipments of contraband oil from the impact of the Russian aviation on oil production and transportation facilities under the control of the outlawed terrorist group ISIS in Syria....

...So maybe, there’s some other reason? Namely - the presence of a “third party which rejoices,” who ordered others to carry out this provocation? ...The goal - to drive a wedge between Russia and Turkey, destroying billions of dollars in mutually beneficial projects between the two countries...

...And in this regard, certain historical parallels suggest themselves, namely the story of an American spy plane U-2 shot down by Soviet air defense near Sverdlovsk May 1, 1960....

...The US president was invited to visit the Soviet Union in 1960. Improved US-Soviet relations had a positive impact on the general international environment. On 16 May 1960, there was scheduled a meeting of heads of governments - the United States, the USSR, Britain and France. The meeting was designed to resolve the many differences between East and West, in particular the German question....There was a growing sense of detente. But the events that occurred in April and May, overturned the expectations of the world community. And at the center of these events turned out to be the reconnaissance flight by the U-2....

...On the morning of May 1, 1960, Khrushchev was woken-up by Defense Minister Rodion Malinovsky, reported that the Soviet radar station at 5 o’clock 36 minutes in the sky spotted a strange plane. Khrushchev demanded at any cost to bring it down... Khrushchev and his entourage regarded it as a political provocation.... Finally, in the region of Sverdlovsk, the U-2 entered the zone of the antiaircraft missile battalion and was hit by the first rocket that exploded behind the aircraft,... Powers was able to leave the aircraft and successfully descend by parachute.

...Powers was interrogated and in the following days.... He refused to admit that the actions of the US government were opportunistic in nature: “Some reasons they had, otherwise these (continued)

Continued: Shooting Down Planes: A Tenuous Historical Comparison

flights would not occur.”

...As for the effects of flight Powers in international relations, they were the most pitiable. The Paris meeting scheduled for May 16 did not take place, although the heads of government of the United States, the USSR and the UK arrived in Paris. Khrushchev refused to sit down at the negotiating table with US President Eisenhower as long as he did not repent and apologize for the U-2 flight. Eisenhower's visit to the Soviet Union, scheduled for June 10, was canceled, and the USSR's relations with the US deteriorated....

...Now compare...

...Looking at this incident with the Russian Su-24 bomber, on the one hand, it seems that all this has been and repeated in various versions....

Few believe that Turkey will condemn its main ally - the United States, which, as a “third party rejoices” that Russian-Turkish relations have become disordered. There are also a number of questions concerning the transfer of information about the time parameters and areas of action of our air force, which, as the Russian president said, were transferred to our coalition allies... allowing Turkish fighters to accurately strike our bomber and shoot it down....

Of course, the Russian president had no choice but to give a harsh response to Turkey in its brazen escapade. This, by the way, was expected by those who planned it (but not the Turks!). The only thing that is alarming - is sometimes the inadequate response of the Russian media, which suddenly became “anti-Turkish” and excitedly rushed to throw stones against Turkey and its leadership. ... Those who would like to make the most of this situation, it is possible, planned on such a reaction from the Russian media....



Adjusting the Correlation of Forces: Russia Adds Three Divisions to its Western Sector

OE Watch Commentary: In January 2016 Russian reporter Vladimir Mukhin wrote a lengthy article on the new organizational structure of the Russian Armed Forces in the Western and Southwestern sectors of the country. This new development appears designed to adjust the correlation of forces in the region to Russia's benefit. Mukhin reports that a NATO battalion from the US Army's 2nd Cavalry Regiment moved into Lithuania on 11 January and that on 14 January more equipment was delivered to Rukla. This year there has been an 8-fold increase in aircraft and a 13-fold increase in service personnel, Mukhin adds. Some 300 additional Western tanks have been relocated, enough for a division.

To counter this, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu is organizing three divisions near NATO. That would provide Russia with an edge against the divisions it is facing, composed of the First Tank Army, and the 6th (Leningradskaya Oblast) and 20th (Voronezh) Combined-Services Armies. Airborne troops will have air assault brigades, two electronic warfare companies, and UAV subunits composed of attack drones. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

“Briefing the president on 11 December 2015, Sergey Shoygu particularly stressed that “the buildup in the Armed Forces ‘combat potential’ will be continued in the coming year. In his words, measures will be adopted “to strengthen the troop groupings in the western, southwestern, and Arctic strategic sectors.” It is known from open sources that in 2016, apart from the Arctic sector and the strengthening of the groupings in Crimea and the North Caucasus, we will see the completion of the formation of the command and control structure and main formations of the Western Military District’s First Tank Army. The 6th (Leningradskaya Oblast) and 20th (Voronezh) combined-services armies will be reinforced with new formations. Moscow will obviously also respond to the NATO plans to create allied mobile formations close to the Russian Federation’s borders.”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Tanks Will Add Strike Power to General Shamanov’s Landing Force. Russia May Relocate Heavy Combat Equipment to the Western Sector in Response to the Creation of NATO Mobile Forces,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 12 January 2016.

It would appear that such conclusions are being made on the basis of facts. It is hard to argue with what was said at the annual enlarged session of the Russian Federation Defense Ministry Collegium last December. At that time Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu said that in NATO countries bordering on the Russian Federation “the contingent has seen an 8-fold increase in terms of aircraft and a 13-fold increase in terms of numbers of service personnel this year alone.” “Approaching 300 additional tanks and armored personnel carriers have been relocated” toward the Russian Federation’s borders, and “Aegis Ashore missile-defense systems are being deployed. There are 310 carrier aircraft capable of carrying something like 200 American nuclear aerial bombs in various stages of readiness.”

*“300 tanks and armored personnel carriers is enough equipment for a full division. And it has been located and deployed in East Europe within less than one year. And it is only five minutes’ flying time for aircraft capable of carrying nuclear weapons to reach our industrial areas and cities,” was how military expert Lieutenant General Yuriy Netkachev commented on the situation to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. “By setting tasks aimed at further militarization,” the general says, “the NATO leadership is only worsening the situation, prompting Russia to take counteractions.” There is no need to try to guess what these actions will be like. Despite the very severe economic crisis, Moscow has adopted a decision not to reduce expenditure on defense and security.*

Is the Western Sahara Dispute Nearing an End?

In recent decades the Middle East has been a region replete with conflicts. In the last four years alone civil war has erupted in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, contributing to the highest world refugee totals since World War II. Beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict, however, one of oldest and most intractable conflicts has been over possession of the Western Sahara, home to barely 500,000 people—equivalent to Fresno, California—spread over a 100,000 square mile patch of desert, an area the size of Colorado. It boasts only one town over 100,000 people. Indeed, if the Western Sahara were to be an independent country, it would compete with Mongolia as the least densely populated country on earth.

Origins of a Conflict

Nevertheless, this barren corner of Africa has been the center of conflict between Morocco and Algeria for four decades and the subject of contention between Morocco and various European powers for decades before that. In 1884 Spain, a late-comer to the colonial scramble for Africa, seized the coastal region that would become known as the Western Sahara (but which it initially divided into the southern Río de Oro and northern Saguia el-Hamra). Local tribes did not take colonial conquest easily and resisted Spanish administration for 50 years. While Spain largely pacified the area by 1934, quiet and acquiescence do not always correlate.

Morocco, meanwhile, never ceded its claims. Five of eight dynasties which have ruled Morocco since the ninth century AD—the Midrarids (823-977), the Almoravid (1062-1147), the Marinids (1217-1465), the Wattasids (1428-1549), and the Alaouites (1631-present)—controlled the Western Sahara, or at least its oasis towns; most actually trace their tribal roots to the territory. One additional dynasty—the Sadid Sharifs (1510-1659)—ignored the coast of the Western Sahara, but pushed Moroccan rule deep into what is now northern Mali.¹ In short, Moroccan nationalists find no shortage of evidence to support their claims.

In 1912 the Kingdom of Morocco briefly lost its independence when, against the backdrop of the Agadir crisis, the French established a protectorate over the kingdom (the Spanish had also established a protectorate in the Sahara and along the northern coast minus Tangiers). However, in the aftermath of World War II Moroccans began agitating for their independence, which they won in 1956. The Spanish forfeited their protectorate along the northern coast, but continued to hold the Western Sahara.

The following year Morocco formally laid claim to the territory, making its return Rabat's chief foreign policy goal. In 1963 Morocco successfully pushed the United Nations to formally designate the Western Sahara as a non-self-governing territory, and in 1965 the Moroccans spearheaded a UN General Assembly resolution demanding Spain forfeit its colony. Momentum seemed on the Kingdom's side. The imperial era was ending. Between Morocco's independence and 1975, when the Spanish ultimately decided to evacuate the Western Sahara, three dozen African countries gained independence, including Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony. Morocco hoped it could correct bloodlessly what it saw as a historical wrong.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union and its North African rival Algeria, a historic rival to Morocco, were also making plans. In 1973 they supported a handful of local Sahrawi residents in the Western Sahara who formed the Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro ("Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de

Oro," Polisario Front). The Polisario Front claimed to both represent the Sahrawi residents of the Western Sahara and be the rightful government of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic.

The Moroccan government meanwhile sought to lay the diplomatic groundwork for its annexation of the Western Sahara, regardless of Polisario demands. In 1974 it sought an International Court of Justice ruling on two questions: first, Was Western Sahara (Río de Oro and Sakiet El Hamra) at the time of colonization by Spain a territory belonging to no one (*terra nullius*)? And, second, What were the legal ties between this territory and the Kingdom of Morocco and the Mauritanian entity?² If the Moroccan leadership thought it had a clear-cut case, the International Court ruling disabused it of that notion, issuing a split decision, on one hand confirming that Morocco had deep historical ties to the Western Sahara, but on the other hand declaring that the Western Sahara was not *terra nullius*.

While proponents of Western Sahara independence suggest that the Court ruling de-legitimized Moroccan control, the implications are not so cut-and-dry. Firstly, the ruling was advisory only. Secondly, the judges split on the second question largely along Cold War lines: judges from Marxist and pro-Soviet nonaligned countries voted against Morocco while judges from Western countries voted for the Kingdom's claims. Lastly, the devil was in the details on the *terra nullius* issue. Finding that the Western Sahara was *terra nullius* at the time of the Spanish invasion did not mean that the Court agreed that the Western Sahara was a distinct entity. Rather, the judges' interpretation centered only upon the question about whether tribes and chiefs were theoretically capable of autonomy.³

Regardless, King Hassan II (r. 1961-1999) was not going to take no for an answer. On 6 November 1975, just weeks after the Court's decision, he dispatched 350,000 Moroccans to march unarmed into the Western Sahara. Spanish forces watched the "Green March" migrants march past the border, waving Moroccan flags and carrying copies of the Qur'an. The action ended all pretense of Spanish control. Just eight days later Madrid made it official, agreeing to divide the Western Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania.⁴ While the Moroccan Army moved into the northern two-thirds of the territory, the Mauritanian Army had difficulty consolidating control, finally ceding its claims in August 1979.

The Polisario Challenge

Algeria and, indeed, the broader Soviet and radical Arab blocs immediately moved to counter Morocco's possession of the Western Sahara. For this, the Polisario became their chief mechanism. The Polisario had already established itself, if not as a serious national movement, than as an irritant and terrorist group. It launched symbolic guerilla actions against Spanish garrisons, but its chief target was fellow Sahrawis who opposed the Polisario's Marxist philosophy and its political goals, or challenged the group's claim to speak for all Sahrawis. After all, not all of them sought independence or claimed a national identity. Because of intermarriage over centuries and the Saharan tribal roots of various Moroccan dynasties, many local Sahrawis considered themselves just part of Morocco's ethnic and tribal diversity, an attitude which infuriated the Polisario leadership.

After the Spanish withdrawal, however, the Polisario's campaign took a new direction. On 27 February 1976 it declared the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and launched a full-scale guerilla war to "liberate" the territory.

(continued)

Continued: Is the Western Sahara Dispute Nearing an End?

As Cold War conflicts went, the Western Sahara War was a relatively low-intensity conflict, but 7000 Moroccan soldiers and 4000 Polisario fighters, not to mention several thousand Sahrawi civilians, still died as a result of it. Fighting displaced tens of thousands. In August 1980, however, the Moroccans did the unexpected: they began a seven-year project to construct a 1500-mile-long, multilayered, sand and stone berm and trench system, reinforced with minefields and forward bases roughly along the Western Sahara's frontiers with Algeria and Mauritania. From a military perspective, the "Moroccan wall" was a resounding success. On 7 October 1989 the Polisario launched its final offensive against Guelta Zemmur, a Moroccan-held town in the east-central portion of the Western Sahara, but the attack went nowhere. The wall prevented the Polisario from resupplying its forces in the Western Sahara, and all the Moroccan Army needed to do then was to mop up. The Soviet collapse, and its reverberations in Cuba, a staunch Polisario backer, drained Polisario resources further. Seeing the writing on the wall, the Polisario accepted a ceasefire. On 29 April 1991 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 690, which created a United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), with the mission to arranging a referendum among the Sahrawi to determine the fate of the territory.

Morocco consolidated control over the Western Sahara with a brutal hand, but its behavior was nothing compared to the ruthlessness employed by the Polisario, who treated Sahrawi refugees as hostages in camps in the western Algerian province of Tindouf. It separated children from their parents and sent them to Cuba for re-education. Sahrawis who questioned Polisario dominance in the Tindouf camps faced imprisonment or execution. After the ceasefire the Polisario illegally kept more than 2400 Moroccan prisoners-of-war, including 400 which it kept for 14 years after initially denying their existence.

Breaking the Stalemate

Despite the ceasefire, the MINURSO referendum never occurred, as preparation broke down over qualification to vote. While the Polisario Front claimed more than 100,000 Sahrawi refugees populated the Tindouf camps, diplomats with experience in the camps and former refugees estimate the true figure at less than half that. In 2007 the European Union's Anti-Fraud Office detailed Algerian diversion of humanitarian aid destined for Sahrawi refugees and confirmed that Algeria and the Polisario greatly exaggerated the camps' population. Beyond that, the origin of the individual refugee matters. If the question is the disposition of the Western Sahara, then only those with roots in the region should vote. However, many of the Tindouf residents—perhaps half—have roots in Algeria, Mauritania, or Mali and so Morocco argues they should have no standing in the referendum. Algeria, for its part, has refused to allow an independent census. The imaginary Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic exists on paper only, although thanks to Algerian largesse, which sees the Polisario as a useful wedge against rival Morocco, the Polisario's diplomatic missions are bankrolled. There is no reason why stalemate must continue into perpetuity.

Moroccan stewardship of the Western Sahara changed in both tone and reality under Mohammed VI, who succeeded his father in 1999. Rather than rule the Western Sahara with an iron fist, he began to flood it with new investment.⁶ Living standards in Western Sahara are higher than in the rest of Morocco. Rather than simply exploit the region's mineral wealth or its fisheries, the government now focuses on sustainable development, the tourism sector, other businesses, and education.⁷ More importantly, Rabat has agreed to grant the Western

Sahara autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.⁸ The notion expressed by critics that Morocco seeks simply to exploit the Western Sahara's resources are a red herring.⁹ While the territory has phosphates, they are a pittance compared to the 50 billion metric tons—85 percent of the world's total—found elsewhere in Morocco.¹⁰

US policy has also shifted over the past decade. Morocco and the Western Sahara are the only oases of security and stability across Northern Africa and the Sahel, a fact highlighted when Tunisia, arguably the most successful country to undergo an Arab Spring transition, suffered a series of devastating terrorist attacks.¹¹ Counterterrorist analysts say that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, already flush with loose weaponry from Libya, now recruits in Polisario camps.¹² In the pre-9/11 era policymakers tolerated ungoverned spaces more than they do now. Given the recognition that, after a quarter century, the MINURSO referendum will likely not occur, American and French policy has shifted largely in favor of Moroccan suzerainty over the territory. In 2014, for example, President Obama directed in the Fiscal Year 2014 appropriations law that the United States assistance to Morocco "should also be available for assistance for the territory of Western Sahara,"¹³ and the Omnibus Spending Bill for 2016 specifically allows Morocco to use US aid anywhere in the country, including the Western Sahara.¹⁴

This has not been a one-way shift. While the Algerian government and the Polisario Front continue an uncompromising line, Rabat no longer simply seeks to annex the territory. In 2006 the Moroccan Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) proposed an autonomy plan for the territory, somewhat modeled on the Spanish autonomy model toward its regions and the Canary Islands. In 2007 Nicholas Burns, then-Undersecretary of State for Policy, called the Moroccan plan "a serious and credible proposal," and a bipartisan group of 229 congressmen—including nearly every member of the leadership—expressed support for the Moroccan proposal.¹⁵ On 6 November 2014, the 39th anniversary of the Green March, Mohammed VI announced "advanced regionalization," effectively complete autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.¹⁶ On the 16th anniversary of Mohammed VI's accession he announced further plans for empowering regions rather than centralizing control.¹⁷

The September 2015 local elections furthered implementation of the autonomy plan in Western Sahara by allowing Moroccans across the Kingdom to vote directly for local and regional representatives. While the Western Sahara (or Morocco, for that matter) is by no means affluent, the juxtaposition between Sahrawis living in the Western Sahara under Moroccan suzerainty and those whiling away time in Tindouf, Algeria, could not be greater. While Algeria has long leveraged its energy resources into support for the so-called Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, in recent years a number of countries have reversed their recognition of the Polisario's self-declared states. They accepted both the reality of Sahrawi development over recent decades and the fact that the autocratic Marxist model still embraced by the Polisario has very little relevance in the 21st century. It appears that after more than 40 years the Western Sahara conflict may finally resolve, albeit with a whimper rather than a bang.

Continued: Is the Western Sahara Dispute Nearing an End?

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