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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Perspectives of the Russian Intervention in Syria



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ON THE COVER: Bashar al-Assad in Russia (2015-10-21).
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Russia and the Syrian Kurds

13 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Russia's sudden and strong interference in Syria appears to have provided new opportunities for the Syrian Kurds. As the accompanying passages discuss, the Russians have apparently been "courting" the Syrian Kurds for their support, potentially strengthening their hand, to realize the latter's goal in northwestern Syria of achieving territorial continuity among the three Kurdish cantons. However, the passages also note Turkey's strong opposition to this, and the risks involved for the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) in cooperating with Russia, which, the passage warns, ultimately is trying to support a regime which persecuted and neglected the Kurds.

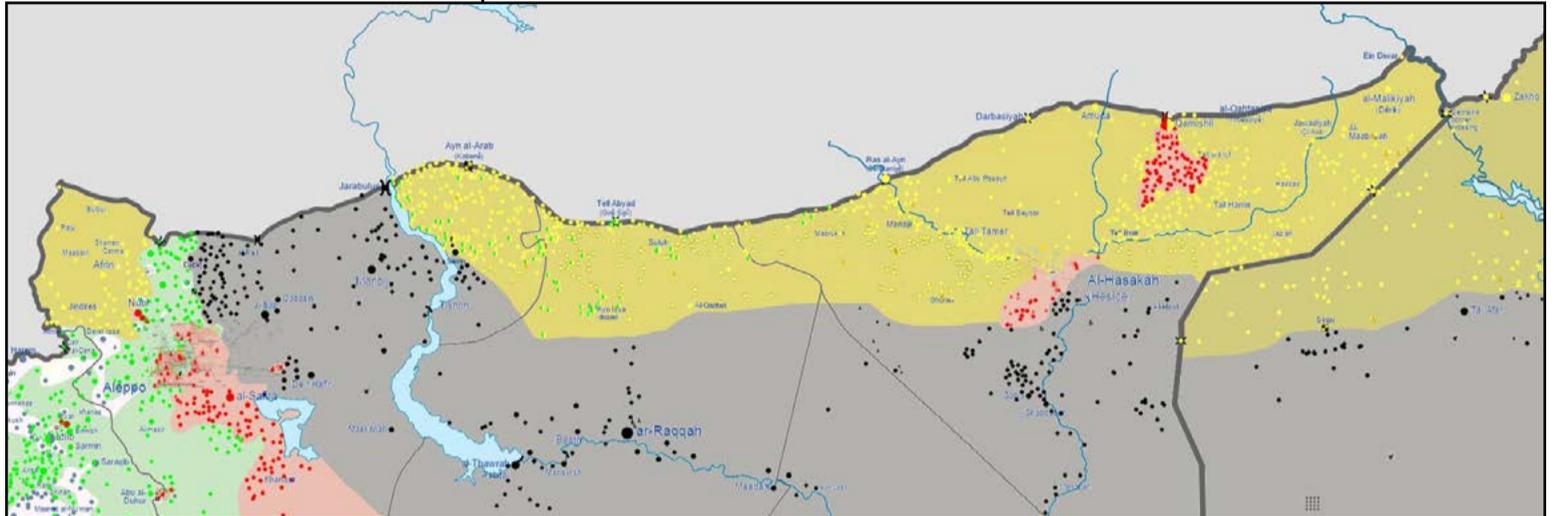
The PYD would like to join all three Kurdish cantons in northwestern Syria, currently separated by the Euphrates River and a piece of land between Jarablus and Azaz. The group had taken Tal Abyad from ISIS in June, thus achieving territorial continuity between Jazira and Kobani Cantons in northwestern Syria. Their goal ultimately was to pass the Euphrates River and join Afrin into the chain of Kurdish Cantons along the Turkish border. The first excerpt notes that a PYD official has told *Al-Monitor* that Russia has already communicated to them that it would like to work with them against ISIS and other extremist groups. However, the passage warns that in the past the Russians have disappointed the Kurds and will do so again, because they are ultimately supporting Assad - a leader who persecuted the Kurds.

The second excerpt from the Turkish press notes the Turkish official position on the PYD's plans, i.e., Turkey staunchly refuses to allow the group to achieve territorial continuity on a long part of its 560 mile border with Syria. Turkey considers the PYD to be one and the same as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been waging a guerilla war for self-rule inside Turkey since 1984 and which Turkey considers a terror organization. The passage also notes the Turkish claims that the PYD is trying to change the demographic structure in northern Syria, along with pressuring non-Kurdish groups in the region.

If the PYD crosses the Euphrates and extends its control along the Turkish borders, this would give it control over a stretch of territory from Iraq's Kurdish region toward the Mediterranean coast. Turkey fears this would embolden separatist ambitions among Kurds in its own southeast.

End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)

"...The Russians are trying to get the Kurds on their side with promises of recognizing the [Kurdish] cantons. But their real goal is to ensure the survival of the Assad regime, which persecuted and neglected the Kurds for years... and massacred tens of thousands of civilians. Let's not forget that."



Map showing the Euphrates River and Kurdish cantons in northwestern Syria, Afrin, Kobani and Jazira.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Kurdish-Islamist_conflict_\(2013-present\)#/media/File:Rojava_Kurdisch_kontrollierte_Gebiete.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Kurdish-Islamist_conflict_(2013-present)#/media/File:Rojava_Kurdisch_kontrollierte_Gebiete.jpg)

Source: "Kürtlerin 'Rus kartı' el yakar" (The Kurds' 'Russia card' is playing with fire), *Diken.com.tr*, 10 October 2015, <http://www.diken.com.tr/kurtlerin-rus-karti-el-yakar/>

"The Russians have already started courting the Kurds. An important female leader of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) confirmed to Al Monitor that 'Russia has told us that it wants to work with us against ISIS and other extremist groups.'

But the Russians had caused one of the greatest disappointments in Kurdish history. And now history is repeating itself. The Russians are trying to get the Kurds on their side with promises of recognizing the [Kurdish] cantons. But their real goal is to ensure the survival of the Assad regime, which persecuted and neglected the Kurds for years... and massacred tens of thousands of civilians. Let's not forget that."

Source: "Türk yetkili: PYD'nin Fırat'ın batısına geçmesi kabul edilemez" (Turkish official: It is unacceptable for the PYD to expand west of the Euphrates [River]), *Hurriyet.com.tr*, 13 October 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/turkiye-yetkili-pydnin-firatin-batisina-gecmesi-kabul-edilemez-40002102>

"A high-level Turkish official speaking to Reuters said, 'With its rapprochement with Russia, the PYD has adopted an attitude whereby it will take the region between Jarablus and Azaz, and extend toward west of the Euphrates. This approach is not acceptable. This is clear and it is no joke.'

Ankara notes that the PYD has links to the PKK and that they are trying to change the demographic structure in northern Syria, along with pressuring non-Kurdish groups in the region."

The Ankara Bombing: Turkey's Latest 9/11

20 October 2015

“[ISIS] regards all Kurds as enemies, because their brethren have been the only militia to defeat ISIS fighters, most notably in Kobani, the Kurdish town on Syria’s border with Turkey.”

OE Watch Commentary: On 10 October twin suicide bombings in Ankara killed nearly 100 and wounded several hundred people during a peace rally organized by Kurds and trade unionists. The bombings were the latest in a series of attacks in which the government suspects the involvement of ISIS, and comes ahead of the November elections. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss these attacks - among the deadliest against civilians in recent Turkish history.

Following the attacks, ethnic tension and national security concerns reached a high, with many criticizing the government for a lack of security measures and intelligence failures. As the first excerpt claims, ISIS had apparently issued several warnings of possible suicide bomb attacks in large cities inside Turkey. The piece claims that, despite this warning, the Security Intelligence and Law Enforcement agencies, along with the Central Intelligence Agency, did not show the necessary sensitivity, blaming law enforcement and intelligence agencies with a huge oversight.



The scene following suicide bombings at the main train station in Ankara.
Source: <http://news.yahoo.com/turkish-police-arrest-50-ankara-bombing-probe-110704109.html>

As the second passage notes, one of the interesting facts about this attack is that ISIS did not claim responsibility for it, even though the group typically does so. The piece discusses the possible reasons for this, noting some experts believe that ISIS may be trying to create chaos between Turks and Kurds.

The third passage echoes a similar claim, in which it quotes expert Amberin Zaman as saying that the ISIS has tried to exploit Turkey’s internal tensions for its own purposes. He also claims that ISIS regards all Kurds as enemies, because their brethren have been the only militia to defeat ISIS fighters, most notably in Kobani, the Kurdish town on Syria’s border with Turkey, adding that other Kurdish militias have also prevented ISIS fighters from taking Kurdish areas in northern Iraq.

Many Turks worry that their country is suffering from the spillover effects of the crisis in Syria. Since the crisis started, Turkey has absorbed over two million refugees. In addition, despite its refusal to be drawn into the quagmire, tensions along the border since July 2015 have resulted in Turkish military raids into Syria. ISIS fighters, which many fear are using Turkey as a transit point, in addition to recruiting ground, have targeted Turkey as well. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

Source: “Diyarbakır, Suruç ve Ankara saldırıları aynı odağı gösteriyor: Kahreden şüphe” (Diyarbakır, Suruç and Ankara attacks all point to the same center: A deadly suspicion), *Zaman.com.tr*, 12 October 2015, http://www.zaman.com.tr/gundem_diyarbakir-suruc-ve-ankara-saldirilari-ayni-odagi-gosteriyor-kahreden-suphe_2321368.html

“It has been revealed that the terror organization ISIS had issued several warnings that it may conduct suicide bomb attacks in large cities. Despite this, the Security Intelligence and Law Enforcement agencies, along with the Central Intelligence Agency, did not show the necessary sensitivity... The fact that potential attackers were not technically and physically followed is being considered a huge oversight.”

Source: “Ankara saldırısı sonrası DAİŞ neden sessiz?” (Why is ISIS silent after the Ankara attack?), *Haber10.com.tr*, 20 October 2015, http://www.haber10.com/guncel/ankara_saldirisi_sonrasi_dais_neden_sessiz-600841

“Expert Abdullah Agar notes that ISIS typically claims responsibility for its attacks, but also points out that not claiming responsibility could also be beneficial for the group: ‘They can cause chaos by not claiming responsibility, by raising the question, ‘Who did it?’ When they claim responsibility, they make it easier [to answer that question].”

The Director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, Prof. Henri Barkey also notes in an interview with the Voice of America that he does not expect ISIS to claim responsibility and that this would not be beneficial to them. Barkey says, ‘Everyone knows that ISIS did this, but by leaving it up in the air, they both send a message and achieve their goal. What they want to accomplish is to draw a wedge between the Turkish and Kurdish societies. And they are successful in doing this.’”

Source: Robin Wright, “The Explosions in Turkey,” *The New Yorker*, 11 October 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-explosions-in-turkey>

“The Islamic State has tried to exploit Turkey’s internal tensions for its own purposes, Amberin Zaman, a columnist for the independent Turkish news site Diken, told me. ‘ISIS can now organize within Turkey. It regards all Kurds as enemies, because their brethren have been the only militia to defeat ISIS fighters, most notably in Kobani, the Kurdish town on Syria’s border with Turkey. Other Kurdish militias have also prevented ISIS fighters from taking Kurdish areas in northern Iraq.’”

Turkey to Keep Military Presence in Afghanistan

19 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: The Taliban's attack on Kunduz and the Afghan security forces' efforts to retake the strategic city have raised concern about the strength of Afghan state forces. Several NATO allies, including Germany, Turkey and Italy, have declared their willingness to remain in Afghanistan alongside the US troops there. The accompanying passages discuss this development.

The first excerpt notes that the Taliban's brief takeover of Kunduz was a first in 14 years. It also mentions that Kunduz is the fifth largest city in Afghanistan and has strategic importance due to it being the country's door to Central Asia. It notes that the capabilities of the Afghan security forces were already being questioned following the transfer of power at the end of 2014 from US-led NATO forces to the Afghan forces. The second piece discusses that the Taliban's brief takeover of Kunduz has raised concern about the strength of Afghan state forces and mentions that Germany, Turkey and Italy are to remain in Afghanistan at their current levels.

The Turkish president had visited Afghanistan in October 2014 and affirmed the special relationship between the two countries, promising that Turkey would commit around 700 troops to Afghanistan beyond 2015. Turkey has a strong religious, historical and cultural relationship with Afghanistan. Afghanistan established diplomatic relations with Turkey shortly after the former gained independence in 1919, and was the second country to recognize the Republic of Turkey. The two countries have signed numerous friendship and cooperation agreements since 1921. These warm relations that date back to the founding of both countries have continued until the present.

Today, Turkey views its presence in Afghanistan not only as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission, but also as a "brotherhood duty" to help the Afghan people restore peace. Turkey's shared Islamic religion and cultural ties with Afghanistan have made it easier for it to play an active role in Afghanistan. However, in contrast to other ISAF nations Turkey did not participate in combat operations. It operates civilian-run provincial reconstruction teams and hosts many diplomatic initiatives to bring the region's countries, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan, together for talks. Turkey also provides important training programs for Afghan police and security forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“Germany... has around 850 troops in Afghanistan, followed by Italy with 760 and about 500 for Turkey, according to the latest NATO data.”



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani.
Source: <http://www.taraf.com.tr/haber-erdogan-asker-afganistanda-kalacak-166274/>

Source: “Afgan ordusu Kunduz’u geri almaya çalışıyor” (The Afghan army is trying to take back Kunduz), *Turkiyegazetesi.com.tr*, 29 September 2015, <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/dunya/309571.aspx>

“The Taliban, which had lost its control after the 2001 U.S. operations, has achieved control over a town for the first time in 14 years. Kunduz, which is Afghanistan’s fifth largest city, is strategically important due to it being the country’s door to Central Asia. Following the U.S.-led NATO forces’ transfer of responsibility to local authorities at the end of 2014 and their subsequent withdrawal, it was being questioned how much Afghan security forces could fight the Taliban. It is also significant that the fall of Kunduz corresponds to one year in office for the Ashraf Ghani government.”

Source: “Germany, Turkey and Italy to keep military presence in Afghanistan,” *Today’s Zaman*, 19 October 2015, http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_germany-turkey-and-italy-to-keep-military-presence-in-afghanistan_401984.html

“The Taliban’s brief takeover of a provincial capital has raised concern about the strength of Afghan state forces and both the United States and its NATO allies now say that events, rather than timetables, must dictate gradual troop reductions... A senior NATO official said Germany, Turkey and Italy were willing to remain in Afghanistan at their current levels... Germany, as the top NATO-country contributor, has around 850 troops in Afghanistan, followed by Italy with 760 and about 500 for Turkey, according to the latest NATO data.”

Iran: President Rouhani Meets Disabled Veterans

21 September 2015

“Because of the eight years [Iran-Iraq war]... The world recognized us for our resistance.”

OE Watch Commentary: Every year the Islamic Republic observes “Sacred Defense Week” to commemorate the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. This year, on the eve of the week, both Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani hosted high profile events in order to honor the seriously wounded, those with more than 70 percent disability. The introduction to a photo essay commemorating the Rouhani event is excerpted here.

The Iran-Iraq War, often called “Sacred Defense” or the “Arrogance [United States]-imposed War” in regime rhetoric, was a formative event for the Islamic Republic. In style of fighting it was akin to World War I: replete with trench warfare, mustard gas, and barbed wire, albeit with missiles targeting cities behind the frontlines. Hundreds of thousands of Iranians and Iraqis were killed in the fighting, and many more were grievously wounded.

Disabled veterans have long been a shadow lobby inside the Islamic Republic and a source of both embarrassment and annoyance to the Iranian government. Iran is not friendly to the disabled: Jubs, essentially wide and deep gutters distinctive to Iran, line Tehran’s streets, channeling mountain runoff through the city, making even so much as crossing the street difficult if not impossible for many disabled. The issue is not just that simple and easy-to-remedy grievances have been ignored for decades. Many feel aggrieved: they sacrificed their health and livelihood to the defense of the revolution, only to return to a system in which clerics became fabulously wealthy but which provided them with very little social safety net. Adding insult to injury, the multi-billion Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan (Foundation of the Oppressed and Disabled, www.irmf.ir/en/), often funded outside “resistance groups” or politically connected projects, but left those it was theoretically meant to protect in the lurch.

The hard currency windfall which the Islamic Republic will receive as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the so-called Iran deal, will put the leadership of the Islamic Republic to the test: with upwards of \$100 billion to enter the Iranian economy with the unfreezing of assets, lifting of many sanctions, and new investment, Iran’s disabled veterans are seeking compensation and augmented assistance. Whether the Iranian leadership is sincere in its efforts to help its veterans and whether they can overcome vested interests which seek to monopolize the windfall, however, remains to be seen. For the Islamic Republic, however, the answer has security implications, as Tehran’s failure to meet the needs of Iran-Iraq War veterans poisons attitudes toward the government among not only the war wounded, but also their families, a constituency who were once among the most hardline ideologues supporting Khomeini’s vision. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

Source: “Dawmin Kongareh Melli Tajlil az Janbazan” (Second National Congress Honoring Disabled Veterans), *Fars News Agency*, 21 September 2015. <http://www.farsnews.com/imgrep.php?nn=13940630000512>

Second National Congress Honoring Disabled Veterans

The Second National Congress Honoring Disabled Veterans was held Monday at the Presidential Center, with His Excellency, Hassan Rouhani, president of the Republic of Iran. The President of the Republic said, “If today we are able to speak loudly and with power to protect our rights before the world, it is because of the eight years we stood together and the world recognized us for our resistance.”



President Rouhani greets a disabled veteran

Source: Islamic Republic News Agency, <http://www.irna.ir/fa/Photo/2948766/> Source: IRNA, <http://img7.irna.ir/1394/13940630/2948766/2948766-4540464.jpg>

Iran: Gambling on Oil Prices

18 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Iran's economy has long been dependent on oil and gas. Each year its budget is calculated based on an estimate of what the average annual price of a barrel of oil will be. If the price of oil exceeds estimates, then Iran finds itself awash in cash, which it can allocate to many discretionary projects; should the price of oil fail to meet budgetary estimates, then Iran finds itself eating into its already depleted cash reserves or implementing unpopular austerity measures.

The decline in the price of oil has hit Iran hard. Whereas just two years ago Iran calculated its budget on the assumption that oil would be \$90/barrel, Saudi Arabia's decision to increase supply has precipitated a sharp decline in the price of oil. While Riyadh's target might have been undercutting the US shale oil industry (and a potential Chinese shale oil industry as well), the impact on Iran was just as severe.

Unfreezing of assets and lifting of sanctions have effectively allowed Iran to avoid an economic catastrophe, as two-thirds of its budget supports salaries, and with oil falling below \$72/barrel, it could have trouble meeting payroll (see "Two-Thirds of Iran Budget are Salaries," OEW February 2015). Nevertheless, the lifting of sanctions and renewed investment in the Iranian energy sector—from India, for example—may not necessarily be as lucrative as some officials hope.

Under sanctions Iran still managed to sell some oil, albeit at a discount. While Iran need not slash the prices on its own oil with sanctions lifted, further production will depress oil prices by increasing supply. Reduced demand from potential recession in China might exacerbate the problem. Indeed, in the excerpted article Rokneddin Javadi, managing director of Iran's state oil company, warns that oil prices might remain below \$45 over Iran's next fiscal year.

Even if Iran does receive a hard currency windfall as it re-enters the global energy market, inflation might also dampen the ability of the Iranian government to alleviate the financial struggles which ordinary Iranians face. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin).**

“A one-million barrel increase in Iran's oil production will not have a decisive impact on prices.”



Iran's Largest Oil Fields

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration
http://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/countries_long/Iran/images/oil_fields.png

Source: “Rawnama-ye az Qarardadha-ye Jadid Nafti dar Konferans Tehran dar Aban Mah” (Celebrating the Initiation of New Oil Contracts at a Tehran Conference in November), *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 18 September 2015. <http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/81763911/>

New Oil Contracts to be Announced at Tehran Conference

National Iranian Oil Company Managing Director [Rokneddin Javadi], with regard to the impact of Iran's return upon prices, added, “A one-million barrel [per day] increase in Iran's oil will not have a decisive impact on prices.” He added: Due to the increased supply in global oil markets, depressed oil prices are likely to continue. This official also added that the economic crisis in countries like China would reduce demand, he continued, “My prediction is that oil prices will not drop below \$40 or \$45 per barrel.” Javadi, referring to official discussion with Indian oil officials, said, “There were negotiations with this country with regard to the ‘Farzad B’ gas field long before the flow was stopped due to sanctions, but recently they have expressed interest and raised their original offer, and this is being reviewed.”

Iran: Khamenei Speaks about the Purpose of the Revolutionary Guards

16 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Western diplomats hope that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the so-called Iran deal, might usher in a new era in relations with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Islamic Revolution, after all, is more than 36 years old, and many revolutions moderate with time. Indeed, many diplomats interpreted Hassan Rouhani's 2013 election victory as a sign that the Islamic Republic had turned its back on the rhetoric and radicalism of outgoing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad's significance was, in part, that he was the first president of the Islamic Republic whose legitimacy came from the IRGC rather than from the seminary. During his eight-year tenure he moved to privilege the IRGC not only financially, but also politically. While Rouhani sought to lessen IRGC influence following his election, removing many of the IRGC veterans from minister portfolios, for example, the IRGC continued to insist on its right and duty to involve itself actively in politics.



Senior Revolutionary Guardsmen attend Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's speech.
Source: Leader.ir, http://www.leader.ir/media/album/news/43882_959.jpg

It appears that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei agrees with them. In the speech excerpted here, he addresses senior IRGC leaders and discusses their purpose. He lays out the need for perpetual revolution led by the guards, as well as an IRGC role in indoctrination. Elsewhere in his speech he describes the Guards' importance in training a new cadre of bureaucrats and officials to take the reins of society and governance. To encourage perpetual revolution might mean to foment continuous crisis. This, in turn, suggests greater regional instability and IRGC provocations toward US forces and others.

Khamenei's endorsement of an expansive and perhaps even growing IRGC role confirms the group's position as the chief obstacle to any political and economic reform in the Islamic Republic, and also suggests that the IRGC may win disproportionate advantage from any unfrozen assets or foreign direct investment entering the Iranian economy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“You are...informing people of the threats that face Revolution.”

Source: “Nafuz-e Farhangi va Siyasi Khatarnaktar az Nafuz-e Eqtesadi va Amniyati Ast” (Political and Cultural Influence is More Dangerous than Economic and Security Influence), *Leader.ir*, 16 September 2015. <http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=contentShow&id=13606>

Political and Cultural Influence is More Dangerous than Economic and Security Influence

“Corps”, “Guards”, “Revolution” and “Islamic”. These are four words that form your name and your positions. As for “Corps”, you are a corps... Being a corps means insisting on order, discipline, management and productivity of each piece of work.... Apart from the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, we have no organization in the country that has defined an organizational responsibility for itself with the purpose of guarding the dearest historical and contemporary event of the country....

Today, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps influences public opinion and the development of youth and people. The many elements that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps exports to different organizations influence such organizations. In recent years, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps has exported many such elements to different organizations with the purpose of managing them. Therefore, educating individuals and cultivating talented elements is another characteristic of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps....

As for the word “Guards” - “Guards corps” - you are guardians... When you say that you are the Revolution's guards, one of the meanings and implications of guarding is that the Revolution is under threat. If there are no threats, then no guarding is necessary. One guards when there are some threats. So, you are both confirming - with your name - the existence of the Revolution, and informing people of the threats that face the Revolution. If we are the Revolution's guards, we should know these threats.

Yemen's Southern Powerbroker

28 September 2015

“...he used his political and military position to arm and prepare his movement...”

OE Watch Commentary: Aydarous (Aidroos) al-Zubaydi (al-Zabidi) is emerging as a key, though relatively unknown, player in Yemen's current war. Also known as Aydarous Qassim, he fought for the losing side's military (South Yemen) in the country's 1994 Civil War. Following the war he was sentenced to death *in absentia* by the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, but was pardoned in 2000 and entered political life in al-Dalea (al-Dali'), helping to turn the province into an opposition bastion. After the emergence of the "Southern Movement" in the wake of the 2006 elections, he created an armed opposition group linked to the nascent movement, known by its acronym "HaTaM," which in Arabic stands for "Movement to Decide [the Southern] Fate." As the first article explains, he has been preparing for a fight against Saleh and his allies for several years by using his political and military status to secretly arm supporters. His fighters targeted government positions throughout Yemen's "Arab Spring" in 2011. In May 2015 they wrested control of the 33d Brigade from Saleh loyalists, making al-Dalea the first major center from which pro-Saleh/Huthi forces were expelled during the ongoing war. As the second article explains, one of his key endeavors immediately thereafter was training new fighters.



Yemen governorate map with al-Dalea highlighted.

Source: "Yemen-Ad Dali". Licensed under CC BY 2.5 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yemen-Ad_Dali.png#/media/File:Yemen-Ad_Dali.png

In early September Aydarous was put in charge of security in Aden, the purported capital of the pro-Saudi government-in-exile of Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Saleh/Huthi forces had been expelled from the city in mid-July, but the absence of security forces in the aftermath threatened to plunge the city into chaos. In mid-September Governor of Aden Province Nayef al-Bakri was reassigned to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and a week later the Riyadh-based Hadi made his grand entry into Aden, even though the province remained without a governor. On 28 September the Qatari newspaper *al-Araby al-Jadid* broke a story, excerpted here, claiming that Hadi had offered Aden's governorship to Aydarous. According to the article, Aydarous boarded a plane to Riyadh to discuss the matter with the leaders of the Saudi-led coalition. The article suggests some level of hesitation by Aydarous, with some of his supporters suggesting he reject the offer for fear that he will get "burned."

Ever since the Saudi intervention began in March 2015, the kingdom's alliance with southern nationalists has been a loose one, based largely on shared animosity toward the Saleh/Huthi alliance. As in Syria, Saudi proxies in Yemen are alone too weak to win the war on the ground, and, barring a radical alliance with Sunni jihadists, Gulf countries may seek to deepen ties with southern nationalists. The emerging relationship between Aydarous Qassim al-Zubaydi and the Saudi regime will not only help define relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council and the southerners, but also is likely to impact the future of Yemen as a whole.

End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)

Source: اليد الأمينة لحفظ أمن الجنوب ... عيدروس الزبيدي
"The Hand Maintaining Security in the South... Aydarous al-Zubaydi," *Aden al-Ghad*, 3 September 2015. <http://adenghad.net/news/168617>

All the critiques directed at Aydarous al-Zubaydi during the peaceful uprising have not detracted from his determination or kept him away from the path he chose, as he realized the truth of the animosity the Northern occupation forces held against the south and its people... Aydarous worked to found and serve the movement, arming its members through deals with arms smugglers in the north; once his activities and the development of his group was discovered, they were targeted and many of its prominent leaders were killed... One year after the Southern Movement was launched he used his political and military position to arm and prepare his movement, transferring weapons to his fighters by passing through checkpoints dressed in military uniform...

Source: عيدروس لـ"الوطن": لا حوار مع الحوثيين إلا بالميدان والقصف
"Aydarous to al-Watan: the Only Dialogue with the Huthis Is through Shelling and on the Battlefield," *al-Watan*, 22 June 2015. http://alwatan.com.sa/Politics/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=227393

Aydarous and his followers were able to enter the 33d brigade's base, which had fallen in rebel hands... Aydarous's efforts are currently on training fighters that immediately join the various fronts...

Q: You recently graduated the eighth group from the training camp; how many groups have graduated in total thus far?

A: The eighth group is different in that it is larger, consisting of 550 people. The seventh group had around 355 fighters, and those before were smaller. The interest in these trainings continues to increase, but logistic and material conditions prevent us from expanding them...

Source: اليمن: عيدروس الزبيدي يوافق على تولي منصب محافظ عدن
"Yemen: Aydarous al-Zubaydi Agrees to Become Governor of Aden," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 28 September 2015. <http://goo.gl/3ehepU>

Al-Araby al-Jadid learned that the leader of the Southern Resistance in Aden, al-Dalea, Abyan and Lahj, BRIG GEN Aydarous Qassim al-Zubaydi, left Aden on a private plane heading to the Saudi capital Riyadh on Monday afternoon, days after meeting Yemeni President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi... According to sources, Hadi and his deputy Khalid Bahah offered the position of governor of Aden to Aydarous Qassim al-Zubaydi. According to information, he accepted the position, after some hesitation... the sources indicate that "al-Zubaydi is visiting Riyadh to meet leaders of the Arab coalition to discuss whether he will accept the position. The offering of the governorship to al-Zubaydi created disagreements, particularly among his supporters, with some suggesting he turn it down as he will get burned in this position, while others supported his accepting the offer.

Egyptian Army Experiments with Flooding Gaza's Tunnels

13 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: In mid-September the Egyptian Army began pumping limited quantities of water into a recently dug trench along the approximately 12 kilometers of shared border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Construction crews had previously installed pipes in the trench, which links to a pumping station on the Mediterranean coast. Despite a media blackout on the Egyptian side, camera crews from the Gaza side broadcast footage of the trench being dug and water seeping across the border. As the first two accompanying articles note, Egyptian authorities have yet to flood the trench, and it is unclear whether the intent is to fill it with seawater or also with groundwater held in nearby cisterns.

Officials and faction leaders in Gaza quickly condemned the plan in unison, assuming a worst case scenario of full flooding with seawater. As the third excerpt illustrates, they argue that doing so would be devastating for local aquifers and agriculture. Flooding with brackish or groundwater would certainly imperil many structures in Rafah, adding to displacement pressures toward the Gaza Strip's already overcrowded center. The new arrivals would be jobless and angry.

Egyptian authorities are hoping that plugging Gaza's tunnels will help them bring the bloody and intractable war with Islamic-State-affiliated insurgents in the area under control. The Egyptian government has claimed, with a straight face, that the border canal is part of a development scheme based around a fish farm. The Egyptian Army's tunnel interdiction campaign is now one year old. The army claims to have interdicted movement across 2000 cross-border tunnels, and, according to the Egyptian plan, those remaining will be flooded or cave in from the water pressure above. Tunnel owners are meanwhile scrambling to waterproof their tunnels, whether by installing metal or concrete reinforcement, as the fourth accompanying excerpt notes, or by simply digging deeper. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source: «إغراق الحدود... رعب انهيار المنازل يلاحق الغزيين
"Flooding the Border... Fear of Homes Collapsing Chases after Gazans," *al-Akhbar*, 22 September 2015. www.al-akhbar.com/node/242579

Subhi Radwan, head of the Rafah Municipality, said that pumping water along the border will threaten homes near the border with collapse... He also noted that work on the water canal has not yet begun officially, clarifying that what occurred last Friday was a trial run and "cannot be compared with the disasters that will occur once the actual pumping begins in full force."

Source: مصر: الجيش يضخ المياه في القناة بين سيناء وغزة
"Egypt: Army Pumps Water into Canal between Sinai and Gaza," *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 18 September 2015. <http://goo.gl/NKL2g1>

... [al-Muni'ai] added that "the army also dug several wells to extract groundwater in the buffer zone it created after displacing people in the Sinai, in order to pump water from there into the new canal" ... According to the sources, water is pumped into the canal "from large cisterns, even though there are pipes from which seawater can be pumped" ... Media sources nonetheless claim that "the army has pumped large amounts of seawater into the trench via large pipes." The digging of the trench and pumping of water is shrouded in mystery and extreme secrecy due to the obstacles in reporting news from the Sinai.

"...the disasters that will occur once the actual pumping begins in full force ..."



Source: فصائل فلسطينية تدين ضخ مصر "مياه البحر" أسفل حدود غزة
"Palestinian Factions Condemn Egypt's Pumping of 'Seawater' below the Border with Gaza," *Dotmsr*, 20 September 2015. <http://goo.gl/SFYudc>

In a joint statement carried by the Turkish Anatolia News Agency, the Islamic Jihad, the Popular and Democratic Fronts, the al-Ahrar Movement, the Mujahideen Movement, and the Popular Resistance Committees said that "pumping large amounts of seawater below the Egypt-Palestine border is a shocking fact." The statement continued: "This step destroys a large amount of agricultural land and pollutes aquifers, while also harming homeowners near the border and killing all forms of life on this land" In a statement issued on Sunday, Hamas said that it is conducting official communications with Egyptian authorities to halt the pumping of seawater below the border...

Source: "Gaza Tunnels, How Did It All Start?" *al-Monitor*, 13 October 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/10/egypt-gaza-rafah-tunnels-smuggling.html>

It seems that Rafah smugglers are repeating the first underground smuggling experiment and are extending concrete and metal pipes inside the tunnels. Al-Monitor visited the Egyptian-Palestinian borders and met with a tunnel restoration worker, who stated on condition of anonymity, "We [initially] padded the tunnels with wood panels to prevent the collapse of the soil. After the Egyptian army pumped seawater, we started reinforcing the tunnels with metal and concrete pipes of a [1.5-foot] diameter ... to prevent water from reaching the inside of the tunnel, which [would] lead to its collapse. Padding the tunnels with wood panels is no longer efficient."

Leveraging Weather for Tactical Advantage in Syria

23 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Early September was hot, dry and windy in the Jazira, the desert plain in northern Iraq and Syria mostly under Islamic State (IS) control. As can happen under such conditions, the wind lifted dust and sand from the parched landscape, forming a sandstorm. This particular one was especially large, sweeping across the Levant and reaching all the way to Egypt, Cypress, and Saudi Arabia. A storm of this size is rare in September. The first accompanying article, from the Qatari daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, seeks to explain the increased frequency of sandstorms in the Arabian Peninsula. The contraction of green areas due to drought and construction projects, it notes, is a likely culprit.

In Syria insurgent forces sought to harness the sandstorm for battlefield advantage. Two rebel offensives timed with the September sandstorm quickly fizzled out, the first an IS attack on the Dayr az Zawr Airbase, and the other a campaign launched by NATO-friendly rebels in southern Syria. Rebels also attacked positions in Hama Province, though, as the pro-Assad *al-Watan* reports in the second accompanying excerpt, those attacks were mostly repelled. Rebels did not emerge from the sandstorm empty-handed, though. The third accompanying article describes a Nusra-Front-led attack on the Abu Duhur Airbase in southeast Idlib Province. The day after the article was published the rebel coalition overran the base. In echoes of what occurred at the Wadi al-Daif encampment in December 2014, weather conditions neutralized Syrian airpower and allowed rebels to overpower the long-besieged Syrian Army defenses. Opposition media were quick to draw an analogy between the impact of the sandstorm and the establishment of a no-fly zone in Syria, as illustrated by the fourth accompanying article, from the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*. The article treats Abu Duhur as a typical case, arguing that a no-fly zone would be enough to ensure a rebel military victory in the war. Unlike most Syrian Army positions, though, Abu Duhur had been isolated and besieged for months, and airpower was essential to its defense and resupply. Although hardly unique, the case of Abu Duhur was far from typical.

Sandstorms and other climate events can shift the tactical balance in favor of weaker parties, but the ability of insurgent fighting groups to harness weather anomalies to their advantage should not be exaggerated. In the case of Abu Duhur, the rebel assault was two weeks old when the sandstorm hit. The storm may have helped hasten the rebel takeover of Abu Duhur, but its effects would likely have been as negligible as they were to other rebel offensives absent rebel advances in the two weeks prior. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

“...the ‘situation is unstable’ due to climactic conditions, which ‘make it harder to monitor the enemy’s movements’...”

Source: عواصف السعودية.. 3 أسباب وراء موجات الغبار الخليجية المتلاحقة
“Saudi Storms... 3 Reasons behind Continuous Sandstorms in the Gulf,”
al-Araby al-Jadid, 23 September 2015. <http://goo.gl/c2H97C>

... *Al-Salih explained that sandstorms are a natural occurrence, but they have recently increased in frequency due to a confluence of factors. “Land in the Arabian Peninsula as well as Jordan, Syria and Iraq, is becoming barren as green spaces decrease. In Saudi Arabia, the density of construction, digging, and razing of mountains has also contributed to increased dust. With the lack of rain it takes less wind to form broad sandstorms. For these reasons, and particularly construction projects, sandstorms will without a doubt continue. We should remember that the Arabian Peninsula is a desert, surrounded by sand in all directions.”*



NASA image of the September sandstorm
Source: <https://earthdata.nasa.gov/dust-storm-in-the-middle-east>

Source: لليوم الثالث على التوالي.. العاصفة الرملية تحد من العمليات العسكرية في سهل الغاب..
وحمية مطار أبو الضهور تخلي مواقعها

“For the Third Day in a Row, Sandstorms Curtail Military Operations in Sahel al-Ghab...” *al-Wasat*, 10 Sep-tember 2015. <http://alwatan.sy/archives/19459>

... *nothing notable was reported yesterday, other than Syrian Arab Army and National Defense Forces (NDF) repelling attacks by gunmen seeking to exploit bad weather to attack military positions... army units repelled an attack at the al-Buaidha and al-Masasna checkpoint in northwest Hama Province... army and NDF units targeted gunmen in the town of Aqrab in rural Masyaf... al-Nusra gunmen attacked the Agricultural Research Center in al-Salamiyah, Hama Province, taking advantage of the bad weather...*

(continued)

Continued: Leveraging Weather for Tactical Advantage in Syria



Insurgent forces after taking over Abu Duhur Airbase
Source: <https://twitter.com/sakirkhader/status/641374796635348993>

Source:

العاصفة تهدّد مطار أبو الظهور

“The Storm Threatens Abu Duhur Airbase,” *al-Akhbar*, 8 September 2015. <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/241651>

The gunmen launched their attack, which was preceded by intense fire lasting several hours, by targeting the airbase and its surroundings with more than 1,000 rockets and mortars. After this, several “suicide fighters” (inghimasiin) wearing explosive belts moved forward toward the main gate, west of the airbase, an area that had been under al-Nusra’s control for 10 days... A source from within the airbase guards noted that the “situation is unstable” due to climactic conditions, which “make it harder to monitor the enemy’s movements.” He added that this has halted aircraft, which had been conducting limited strikes around the airbase. The source noted that all available strength is being summoned for a rearguard defense when the sandstorm ends...



SyAA forces retreating from Abu Duhur Airbase (left and right photos)
Source: <https://twitter.com/IvanSidorenko1/status/641646777968398336>

Source:

العاصفة الرملية تمثل أول اختبار لانعكاسات الحظر الجوي في سوريا على تقدم المعارضة

“The Sandstorm Is a Trial Run Showing How a No-Fly Zone Allows the Opposition to Advance,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 11 September 2015. <http://goo.gl/9nYmeM>

The sandstorm hitting Syria over the past few days represents a trial run of what would result from a no-fly zone in Syria, as weather conditions kept the regime’s air force off the battlefield, allowing opposition forces to take control of the Abu Duhur Airbase in eastern Idlib Province... [opposition figure] al-Nasir noted “Western allies of the Syrian people, particularly the United States, are above all blocking the establishment of a no-fly zone... [the fall of Abu Duhur] represents the best example of the effectiveness of a no-fly zone, which would lead to the fall of the regime...”

“The Russian Model”: Syrian Army’s 4th Assault Corps in Place of National Defense Forces

11 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: In early October, shortly after Russian jets began bombing Syrian rebel positions, Chief of Staff of the Syrian Arab Army (SyAA) General Ali Ayoub made a brief televised statement declaring the launch of a broad ground offensive that would be coordinated with Russia’s aerial bombing campaign. The attack, according to him, would be led by newly formed ground units, including one he identified as the “4th Assault Corps.”

Pro-Assad media were quick to hail this new fighting unit, although few details are known. The first accompanying article, from the pro-Hizbullah *al-Hadath News*, notes that the new corps “is proof of a new tactical military model” that includes Russian Sukhois and increased reliance on artillery batteries. The second article, from a pro-Assad Syrian news website, explains that the new formation will be “a continuation of the National Defense Forces (NDF) experiment grafted onto the SyAA, which is a traditional army.” The target size of the new formation, it claims, is between 60,000 and 100,000 fighters.

The third accompanying article, from the Saudi daily *al-Hayat*, argues that a plan is underway to gradually dissolve NDF forces and fold them into the conventional army through the 4th Corps. The process is to occur in stages on a region-by-region basis. Although the NDF are believed to have been key in keeping the regime afloat, tensions between NDF fighters and military personnel have been a constant concern for the government and its supporters. In what may or may not be a symbolic development, Iranian Brigadier General Hossein Hamadani, the alleged master-mind of Syria’s NDF, was killed near Aleppo in early October.

The fourth accompanying article was published in the Lebanese daily *al-Safir* in mid-September, as the Russian military buildup in Syria was underway. It explains that as Moscow’s involvement grows, pro-Assad fighting forces will rely more on the Russian model and less on the Iranian one. The former, the author argues, relies on local militias recruited on a sectarian basis, while the latter focuses on reinvigorating and modernizing conventional forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Syrian Armed Forces Emblem.

Source: “Syrian armed forces symbol” by Jakednb - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Syrian_armed_forces_symbol.jpg#/media/File:Syrian_armed_forces_symbol.jpg

“... Russia provides a different model based on the principle of reviving conventional Syrian forces...”

Source: «الفيلق الرابع» يرسم خطوط كسر «جيش الفتح»
“The 4th Corps Draws Plans for Destroying Jaysh al-Fatih,” *al-Hadath News*. 9 October 2015. <http://www.alhadathnews.net/archives/165918>

The “corps” includes several Syrian Army formations intermixed with elite forces led by COL Suhail Hassan, units from the Syrian infantry and others from the National Defense Forces. The forward forces are supported by mortar cover and artillery regiments behind the support lines, as well as aerial cover from the Russian Sukhois ... The Syrian Army surge is proof of a new tactical military model, spiced with Russian flavors and led by the Sukhois from above, and which also includes greater use of artillery batteries....



GEN Ali Ayoub declaring the launch of a broad SyAA offensive including the 4th Assault Corps.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5ZxuZE4ioojpg>

Source: ماهو الفيلق الرابع ” اقتحام ” الذي بدأ عملياته في ادلب و ماهي مهامه؟
“What Is the 4th Assault Corps Operating in Idlib and What Is Its Mission?” *Sham Times Network*, 8 October 2015. <http://www.shaatimes.net/news-detailz.php?id=40047>

Mohammed Salih al-Fatih, a researcher at the Future Studies Institutes, explained to the Breakingnews.sy News Network that the Syrian Arab Army has three corps that were formed prior to the current crisis. He noted that the corps whose formation was declared today would succeed them and be a continuation of the National Defense Forces experiment grafted onto the SyAA, which is a traditional army. He added that it is called the “4th Corps” to denote the size which this formation will reach - from 60,000 to 100,000 soldiers. Naturally, the numbers are currently less than this, but he confirmed that efforts are currently underway to attain these numbers... On the same topic, military analyst Maad Mohammed explained that the 4th Corps’s main mission will be assaults and taking advantage of the impacts of the joint Russian-Syrian airpower to effectively conduct raids in all areas under Russian-Syrian aerial cover...

(continued)

Continued: "The Russian Model": Syrian Army's 4th Assault Corps to Replace National Defense Forces

Source: التّدخّل الروسي يجعل في تفكيك «قوات الدفاع» القريبة من إيران
Ibahim Hamidi. "Russian Intervention Hastens the Breakup of the Iran-friendly NDF," *al-Hayat*, 11 October 2015. <http://goo.gl/Yh2dEz>

An expert who is in contact with the Syrian military links the decision to gradually dissolve the National Defense Forces (NDF) location-by-location and the formation of the 4th Assault Corps to Russian military involvement in the Syrian conflict. Moscow is convinced of the need to strengthen conventional Syrian military forces and institutions and decrease the role of militias and the regime's dependence on Iran. A leader in the NDF, however, yesterday dismissed the "talk of dissolving the NDF as mere rumors..."



National Defence Forces logo.

Source: "National Defence Force Syria Logo" by Source. Licensed under Fair use via Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:National_Defence_Force_Syria_Logo.jpg#/media/File:National_Defence_Force_Syria_Logo.jpg

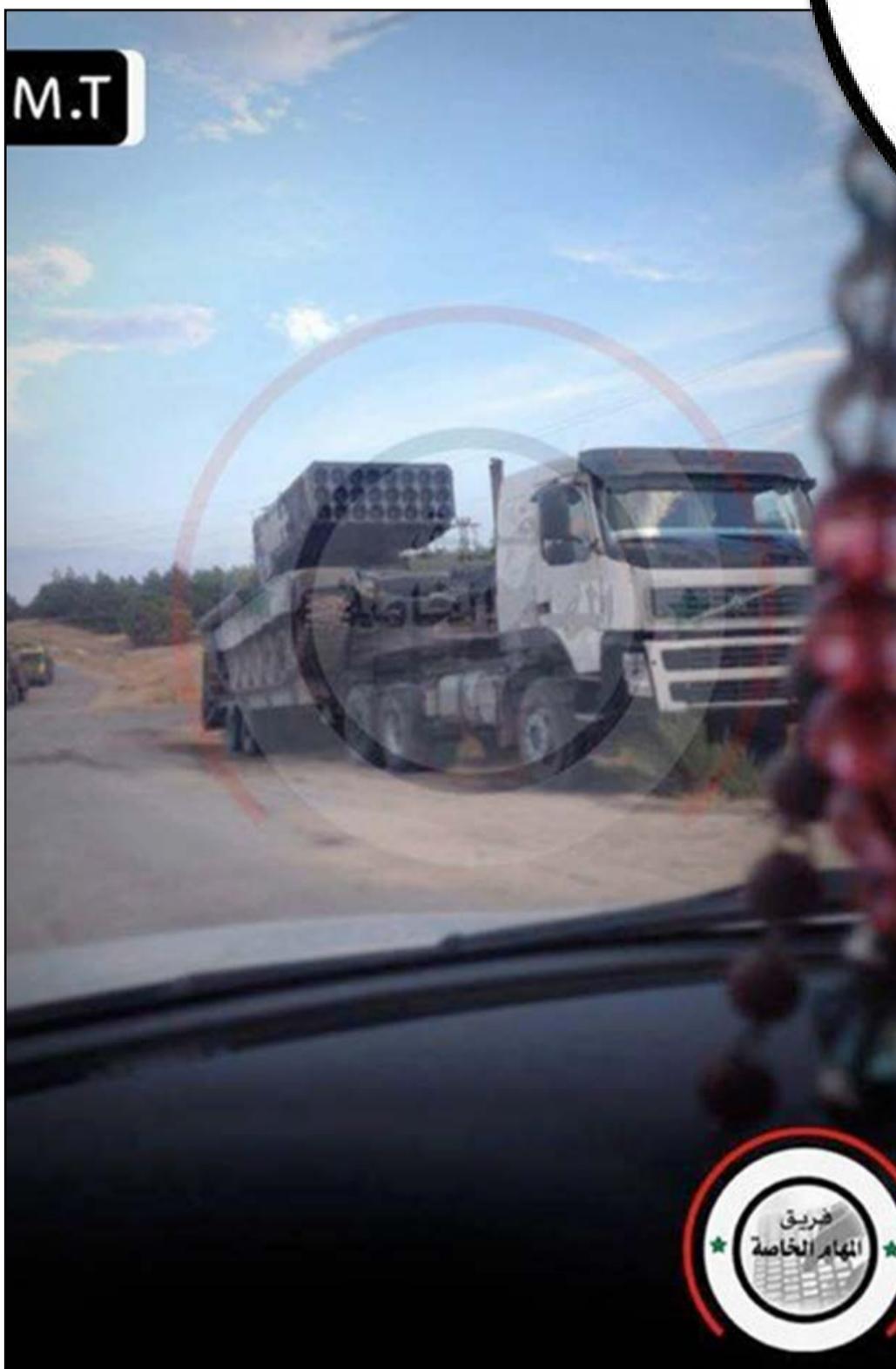


Photo of TOS-1A heavy flamethrower system, allegedly being used by Syrian forces in their new Russian-backed offensive.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/The.True.Tube/photos/pcb.923208274393580/923208031060271/?type=3&permPage=1>

Source: روسيا في اللاذقية.. أين إيران؟
Abdullah Zughuib. "Russia in Lattakia... Where is Iran?" *al-Safir*, 18 September 2015. <http://assafir.com/Article/445640/MostRead>

Russia dropped the vanguard of its army into Lattakia to fulfill the "nebulous Syrian mission." Iranians were there much earlier, but with a clear difference in thinking and implementation. The new way of managing the conflict is more exciting, and may include gradual coordination with Damascus's allies on the ground. Iranians continue their ongoing task of recruiting thousands of young men into Syria's "Popular Mobilization" and "Popular Defense" forces. These forces' military and doctrinal recruitment is based on radical notions of necessity and inevitability, given the imperative for minorities to self-protect. Its goals and reasons notwithstanding, the end results are inevitably sectarian and with a "minoritarian" flavor. Here Russia provides a different model based on the principle of reviving conventional Syrian forces, an approach that includes dissolving militias into a single organized military...

Uighurs and the Changing Demographics of Syria's Idlib Province

3 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: The violence in Syria is causing major population shifts, with hundreds of thousands of Syrians leaving the country for Turkey or further on to Europe. Yet, intentional changes of demographics for political purposes are rarely discussed. The excerpted article from *Reason.com* on 3 October 2015, however, summarized a report from Lebanon's *Al-Mayadeen* television channel about the changing demographics in Syria's northwestern Idlib Province. Although *Al-Mayadeen* is pro-Syrian government (and the report therefore is anti-Turkey), it does shed light, in particular, on how Uighurs from Xinjiang Province in China are settling in Idlib Province and may stay there long-term and establish communities rather than return to China.

According to the article, the Uighur families who are settling in Idlib are filling in the homes of Syrian Arabs who have either fled to Europe or taken refuge in Turkey's Hatay Province. Because Uighurs are a Turkic and Muslim group and, at least those who have made it to Turkey, are grateful to Turkey for its support to the Uighurs, the Uighurs in Idlib will likely form a pro-Turkish base of support. This would help extend Turkish influence into Idlib and contribute to Turkish geopolitical objectives of establishing pro-Turkish areas along the Turkish border in Syria and serving as a base for offensives against the Syrian government and repelling incursions into northwestern Syria from Kurdish militias.

While there are difficulties in corroborating the demographic changes in Idlib that this article discusses, in ISIL-controlled areas in Syria and Iraq the cleansing of populations, especially Christians and Kurds, has become commonplace. The demographic landscape in Syria and Iraq is changing and, as in previous wars in the 20th century, armies or militias could seek to change demographics as a way either to remove unfriendly populations or to welcome favorable ones. Thus, Idlib may be a microcosm of broader trends across the areas affected by the civil war in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Al Mayadeen reported that after a successful raid on Jisr Al-Shughur, a city of some 50,000 people near Aleppo, ‘this Syrian city looks more like China than Damascus.’”

Source: “Syria: Chinese Uyghurs Killing Russian Spies According to Turkey’s Plan”, *Reason.com*, 3 October 2015.

Syria: Chinese Uyghurs Killing Russian Spies According to Turkey’s Plan

So while enormous numbers of Syrian refugees are attempting to get out of the Middle East and into Europe, what is happening in the empty villages they have left behind? According to Al Mayadeen, at least some of the abandoned villages in northern Syria are filling up with the families of Muslim Chinese Uighurs. These Uighurs, claims the report, are entering the country along with their wives and children to fight alongside the Al-Nusra Front and ISIS against the Assad regime.

Al Mayadeen reported in September that after a successful raid on Jisr Al-Shughur, a city of some 50,000 people near Aleppo, “this Syrian city looks more like China than Damascus. Thousands of Chinese Turkestani families were resettled in the area. Especially in the village of Zanbaq.”

From Al Mayadeen’s perspective, the entry of Uighur fighters and their families into Syria is part of a Turkish plot to alter Syrian demographics. It proves that [Syria’s] demography is being targeted.



As shown in the adjacent image of an Uzbek-led cell in Syria, Uighurs and other Central Asians have figured prominently in the propaganda of both ISIL and Jabhat Al-Nusra.

Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/under-black-flag-central-asia-militants-allegiance/26666098.html>

Burundi: Missing Officers Reflect Fractures in Military

3 October 2015

“Maj Ndayikeza’s presumed desertion is yet another symptom of disagreements and frustration in some parts of Burundi’s national army over the fear associated with a purge of officers linked with, or perceived as sympathetic to the May coup.”

OE Watch Commentary:

Yet another high ranking Burundian officer is missing from his post. As the accompanying article reports, Major Emmanuel Ndayikeza, deputy commander of an elite military unit, failed to report to his duty assignment in early October, leading to speculation that he, like the colonel in charge of military transmissions and communications who went missing the previous week, might have deserted. The possible reason for these sudden absences: frustration associated with a purported purge of the military of those thought to be sympathetic to a foiled May coup attempt against President Pierre Nkurunziza.



The coup, which failed, is over, but the repercussions, including an increasingly divided military, continue.

Source: <http://www.spyghana.com/burundi-plunged-into-chaos-as-president-says-attempted-coup-failed/>

Source: “Burundi: Concern Over Divisions As Top Army Commander Goes Missing,” *The East African* 3 Oct 2015 <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Concern-over-divisions-as-top-army-commander-goes-missing/-/2558/2896720/-/gbbmvaz/-/index.html>

Major Emmanuel Ndayikeza, deputy commander of an elite military unit known as Camp Muha in Bujumbura, did not show up on duty the whole of last week, fuelling speculation that he may have defected.

Since the foiled coup in May, analysts say the Burundian army — which is a combination of the former national army and CNDD-FDD rebels — is undergoing a purge. Officers from the ex-FAB (Forces Armées Burundaises) say they have been the focus of a crackdown on dissent in the armed forces.

The ex-FAB soldiers are suspected of being behind attacks that have rocked the capital since May, and the rift between them and their ex-CNDD-FDD colleagues widened after the assassination of the president’s confidante, General Adolphe Nshirimana, by people said to have been in military gear.

Burundi has been the scene of frequent explosions and gun attacks by fringe but well-armed groups, which both the government and the opposition have denied having any links with.

Mr Henry said that in the post-coup period, it has become easy for authorities to “accuse anybody of being rebel sympathisers with the emergence of low-scale guerrilla fighting in some parts of the country.”

Some history not mentioned in the article is necessary to fully understand the situation. The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Accord, signed in 2000, which helped end the country’s civil war, included a provision to integrate former Hutu rebels into an army that was dominated by Tutsis. That accord has been described as the glue that holds Burundi together. However, in 2015 Nkurunziza, who had once been a Hutu rebel leader, announced he would run for a third term in an apparent violation of the accord, though some argue for certain legal reasons he is allowed to do so. As protests against this third presidential bid increased, and indeed Nkurunziza’s ambitions were a precipitating factor in the attempted coup against him, a faction of former Hutu rebels began harassing those who opposed the President.

Though the article implies that Ndayikeza may have deserted as a result of frustration and/or harassment, it should be noted there have been reports of assassinations of upper echelon Tutsi and Hutu officers, as the killing of one leads to a retaliatory killing of the other. Thus, it is unclear what the major’s actual status is. What is clear, however, is that fractures have emerged in the Burundian military, or, perhaps to be more precise, old fractures have reemerged and widened. Unfortunately, with the country in the midst of heightened ethnic and political tensions, this lack of unity in the military could not be happening at a worse possible time.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)

Drones in Africa: What's New, What's Next

20 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Historically, the mention of drones in Africa has elicited discomfort. Since the advent and proliferation of drones in mainstream consciousness approximately five years ago, African countries and populations alike have generally maintained a healthy skepticism of them, in no small part, since they were viewed as technology imported from “the outside” intended to be used to monitor African populations, typically for nefarious military purposes. However, times have changed, and African governments and citizens are increasingly embracing drone technology for their own purposes. While still in their nascent phases, Africa’s embrace of drones is clear, and likely has numerous implications for the US military. Following are several of the latest updates on Africa’s growing drone culture.

As the first article details, in South Africa a data-driven “aerial solutions” company was the first private firm to receive a license to operate in the country. South African mining firms are also using drones, and they are also being used to monitor wildlife. Thus, beginning on 1 July 2015 South Africa was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the first country to have its aviation branch regulate drone activities. Indeed, given South Africa’s reputation as being the technological leader across Sub-Saharan Africa, it is reasonable to expect that it will be at the forefront of developing and tailoring drones for various uses specially tailored to the continent.

As the second article relays, Rwanda is in the process of opening the continent’s first “drone airport,” with the help of a British firm. Ostensibly, it is to be used to facilitate transport of urgent medical supplies and electronic parts to remote parts of the region (while not specified, the “region” presumably includes the broader Great Lakes Region, which is chronically one of the most conflict-ridden spots in the world). Despite these proclamations, members of Rwandan civil society and global observers hold at least a degree of suspicion regarding Rwandan President Paul Kagame’s intentions for allowing the opening of the drone airport. Kagame, who is well known for his tight control of Rwandan society, has recently amended the Rwandan constitution to allow himself a third term. Thus, observers surmise that drones could be used for monitoring the activities of would-be threats within the country, but more likely would be used to conduct cross-border surveillance missions in DRC, with which Rwanda has been fighting to various degrees since the end of its 1994 civil war.

Finally, as was relayed in last month’s OEW, Nigeria has also begun its own drone monitoring of its historically conflict-ridden Niger Delta (see: Jason Warner, “Nigeria Using Drones to Combat Oil Theft,” OEW October 2015). The Niger Delta has long been a source of insecurity for Nigeria: local insurgent groups have long been accused of oil bunkering (tapping into multinational companies’ oil lines) to steal oil for resale on the black market. These thefts have led Nigeria to lose an estimated \$3 to \$4 billion per year. Thus, Nigeria’s new drone program is intended to help monitor the swampy Delta region, whose topography make drones a superior means of monitoring as compared to land or aquatic options.

In sum, Africa’s countries are embracing drones and their uses in sundry ways and for varying purposes. While drone technology will likely transform US culture, including and beyond the military realm, so too will the same occur in Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

“There is no doubt that drones are set to revolutionise the way in which many key industries in South Africa conduct their business”

Source: “SA Company First to Receive Commercial Drone License.” 2015. *My Broadband*. 20 October. <http://mybroadband.co.za/news/gadgets/142976-sa-company-first-to-receive-commercial-drone-licence.html>.

A company specialising in aerial data solutions on Tuesday claimed to be first to be approved as a commercial remote piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) operator by the SA Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA).

“In May 2015, South Africa took the lead in the aviation industry when SACAA director Poppy Khoza announced that the commercial use of RPAS would be regulated from July 1, 2015,” the company said in a statement.

“The need for regulation was prompted by a huge demand for the commercial use of drones in South Africa and subsequent safety concerns; the strict SACAA application process ensures that drone operators meet all standards for safety, security and privacy.”

“There is no doubt that drones are set to revolutionise the way in which many key industries in South Africa conduct their business” said RocketMine’s Chris Clark.



Source: Mwai, Collins. 2015. “Rwanda to Host World’s First ‘Drone Airport.’” 2015. *allAfrica.com*. October 8. <http://allafrica.com/view/group/main/main/id/00039178.html>.

The government has moved to set up a regulatory framework for remotely piloted aircraft, popularly referred to as ‘drones,’ following investor interest to establish the world’s first drone airport (drone port) in the country beginning next year.

Last month, Norman Foster, a renowned British architect, expressed interest by his firm, Foster + Partners, alongside business partners to build the world’s first drone port in the country to facilitate transport of urgent medical supplies and electronic parts to remote parts of the region using drones. In their proposal, the investors said, beginning next year, they intend to begin construction of three drone ports, which will take about four years to complete.

.... Foster’s firm is looking at a facility that will not only be used by Rwanda, but the region as well, with plans of expansion to the entire continent. In remarks that accompanied his proposal and project implementation plan, the architect said, like mobile phones-dispersed landlines, cargo drones can get past geographical barriers such as mountains, lakes and rivers without much need for physical infrastructure.

Kaduna Senator: Thirteen Factors that Have Led to Boko Haram

19 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: When discussing the root causes of Boko Haram, Nigerian analysts and observers typically forward the marginalization of the North by the Nigerian state or the manipulation of local population by various religious leaders as the causes underlying the insurgency. However, the attached article is a reprint of a list of factors that was recently forwarded by Senator Shehu Sani from Kaduna, offering a broad overview of phenomena from the perspective of a leader who has very much been in the thick of things.

Some of the factors included in Sani's list are the typical ones included in such analyses: manipulation of religion (#1); unemployment and underemployment (#6); the marginalization of the north by previous Nigerian administrations (#8). However, Sani adds unique factors that are worth bringing to light. For instance, he mentions extra-judicial killings as an important factor in the emergence of Boko Haram (#9). As he notes: "If you violate the fundamental rights of your citizens, all you are encouraging is act of lawlessness because lawlessness begets lawlessness. The root cause of this insurgency was triggered by the killing of a leader out of the confines of the law and since then, we never knew peace." He is referring to the killing of Muhammad Yusuf, who founded Boko Haram in 2002, and who was killed in 2009 by the Nigerian military. The date of Yusuf's death is frequently cited as marking the beginning of the insurgency's reign of terror. Thus, while the Nigerian military is often critiqued for extra-judicial killings, understanding how local populations clearly link them to the emergence and proliferation of Boko Haram is useful in comprehending the broader northern Nigerian operational environment.

Another under-discussed factor that Sani adds to the conversation is the poor state of public education in the north (#5). Particularly in Muslim northern Nigeria, it is imperative to remember that "schooling" is often a blend of formal education and religious teaching. Koranic schools are often children's primary source of education. Thus, where public education is inadequate, other forms of teaching - sometimes espousing extremist tendencies - can fill in the vacuum.

Finally, a third unique factor that Sani mentions is the persistence of capitalism (#13). While an overthrow of capitalism is unlikely, understanding how he views its impact on the prevalence of extremist ideology is revelatory. As he says: "Where we have an institutionalized master-servant relationship, where you have a system that is unjust, unfair and unconcerned about the state of the poor, then you have created a ground for people to take desperate measures to survive." In interpreting his comment further, it seems to be that it is social inequity and injustice - which combine to create conditions for criminality - that indeed serve to underwrite the entire enterprise of terrorism.

In short, while Sani's list is only revolutionary in some ways, its breadth of thinking is useful to understand a local perspective on the root causes of Boko Haram **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

"If you violate the fundamental rights of your citizens, all you are encouraging is act of lawlessness because lawlessness begets lawlessness. The root cause of this insurgency was triggered by the Killing of a leader out of the confines of the law and since then, we never knew peace..."

Source: Garba, Abdullahi. 2015. "Nigeria: Kaduna Senator, Shehu Sani, Identifies 13 Factors Fuelling Boko Haram Insurgency." 19 October. *Premium Times (Abuja)*. <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/191750-kaduna-senator-shehu-sani-identifies-13-factors-fuelling-boko-haram-insurgency.html>.

The senator representing Kaduna Central Senatorial District, Shehu Sani, on Sunday identified 13 factors responsible for the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency.:

... "I have been able to identify 13 factors that have seriously contributed to pervasive insecurity and the wave of violence and bloodshed ignited and sustained by insurgency in the North-eastern part of Nigeria.

...Enumerating the factors, Mr Sani identified manipulation of religion as first major factor. "The first and very strong factor has to do with manipulation of religion. There is no doubt those who took up the part of extremism sow its seed from manipulating and distorting religious teachings.

"The second is the disconnect between government and the governed. The growing gap between the leader and the led has created a vacuum, and has made it possible for violent extremists to take over that vacuum and propagate their murderous ideology.

"The third factor is the prevalence of social and economic injustices. What you refuse to invest in social security, you must spend on national security.

"The fourth factor is the global terror epidemic - terror contagion. Terrorism in Yemen, in Afghanistan, in Somalia, in Africa spreads its cancerous effect destroying lives and property.

"The fifth factor is the collapse of public education. Normal schools that should have provided meaningful education to our children have collapsed, and as such people who cannot find good place to learn, they will go and learn from bad places.

"Then we have the massive unemployment as the sixth factor. Many of our young people that ought to live decent and responsible life are roaming about in the street. People like these are vulnerable and represent one of the most potent threats to our collective existence, our unity, our peace and our democracy.

"As the seventh factor, we have the proliferation [sic] of arms and unguarded borders. It has become easy for

(continued)

Continued: Kaduna Senator: Thirteen Factors that Have Led to Boko Haram

arms to move around our country, so accessible that our borders are porous and as such extremists find it easier to pick up guns and ammunition to fight.

“The eighth factor is the under-development of the North by previous administrations. It is very clear that governments in the past have not used the opportunity of power to educate the region, to develop the region, to lift our people out of poverty...”

“[The ninth factor is] Human right abuses and extra-judicial killings. This is another very important factor. If you violate the fundamental rights of your citizens, all you are encouraging is act of lawlessness because lawlessness begets lawlessness. The root cause of this insurgency was triggered by the Killing of a leader out of the confines of the law and since then, we never knew peace....”

“Economic collapse of the North is the tenth. Most of our industries have closed down. Our economy is as arid as our weather. Most of our states depend on oil revenues to pay salaries and execute capital project. We have neglected agriculture, we refuse to explore solid minerals, we refuse to use our power, which is the wealth of people we have to advance our region.”

“[As eleventh factor] we can also say that capitalism breeds terrorism. Where we have an institutionalized master-servant relationship, where you have a system that is unjust, unfair and unconcerned about the state of the poor, then you have created a ground for people to take desperate measures to survive.”

Mr. Sani identified lack of unity and ethnic crisis in the North as the twelfth factor.” *“Disunity in the North occasioned by intra-fighting between ethnic groups and believes have created a vacuum. So, for us to win a war that has threatened our collective existence, unity is inevitable.”*

As the thirteenth factor, the senator said: “And then I can say the distortion of religious realities and facts is the seed of terrorism. That is where the seed is. If you are a preacher and you distort the teachings of religion and bring something that is not supposed to be there, you are creating a monster.”



The extra-judicial killing of Boko Haram founder, Mohammed Yusuf, is one of the thirteen causes that Kaduna senator Shehu Sani has noted has led to the emergence and continuation of Boko Haram.

Source: <http://www.nairaland.com/1941724/mohammed-yusuf-late-bh-leader>

Turkey and Africa: A Rising Military Partnership?

By Karen Kaya and Jason Warner

Like many other aspirant emerging countries such as China, Brazil, and India, since 2002, Turkey has unleashed a charm offensive in Africa, deepening bilateral ties with African states in the realms of economics, politics, and more notably, defense and security affairs.

This paper considers the implications from this ever-growing relationship between Turkey and Africa for the US.. Where do Turkey's interests in Africa converge with those of the US. and where do they diverge?

Given that Turkey's military and security interests and goals in Africa largely parallel those of the United States, the US. stands to benefit from the unique chance to partner with a Muslim ally whose presence in parts of Africa appears to be more welcome than those of other Western countries due to its shared religion, cultural ties and lack of imperial history.



<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Turkey-Africa.pdf>

African Standby Force (ASF) vs. African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC): No Need to Choose Sides

12 October 2015

“Rwanda is one of the 13 nations that have volunteered to form the ACIRC.”

OE Watch Commentary: The need for a rapid-deployment capability (RDC) in Africa has been a long-standing goal since independence. While the African Standby Force (ASF) was created by the African Union (AU) to fulfill that role in 2003, it has yet to achieve that goal. Thus, some African states are currently and simultaneously in the process of creating a new, informal RDC, called the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC). This has caused some controversy. Some leaders have argued that ACIRC is simply a duplication of the ASF and should cease to exist; other argue that it is complementary to the ASF and should receive widespread support. Whether or not states should support the ASF or ACIRC has given rise to a new series of debates within international and political circles in Africa. Yet, Rwanda’s recent behavior in relation to the two forces highlights an entirely different approach to the organizations: helping to incubate both at once, and thus showing that there is in fact no need to “pick sides” in the current debate.

Before proceeding, a brief review of the ASF and ACIRC is in order. In short, the ASF is an AU-based rapid reaction force intended to help the organization stem conflicts in its member states. While the AU’s Peace and Security Council has primary mandating control of the ASF, the troops are drawn from each of five African regions: western, central, southern, eastern, and northern. While some regional ASF brigades are supervised at their regional level through a pre-established African international organization, in the case of east Africa and northern Africa entirely new structures, regional mechanisms, were created to help stand-up the regional brigades. All regions are experiencing differing degrees of commitment and stand-up capabilities: whereas southern and western Africa are at (theoretical) full deployment capability, the eastern ASF just announced its own full deployment capability in late 2014. The northern and central ASF brigades are far from full stand-up. In the hopes of having the entire ASF reach full operational capability by December 2015, the ASF is hosting the latest iteration of its Amani peace exercises in South Africa in late October. There, some 5400 African participants, including military, police, and civilians from around the continent, will convene to test the actual capacity of the force, especially its RDC.

However, few expect the ASF, and especially its RDC to be operational in the near future. Yet because of the glaring need for such a force, some states - led by South Africa - have decided to create a new voluntary RDC, ACRIC, which looks similar to, but differs in important ways from the ASF. Thus, whether states should support one force or the other is at the heart of many discussions.

Yet some countries, like Rwanda, have shown to be committed to BOTH the ASF and ACIRC. As the article below relays, Rwanda recently signed an MOU to become the thirteenth African country to join ACIRC, committing one motorized infantry battalion, one artillery battalion and one level-two hospital. Yet in late 2014 Rwanda also showed its profound commitment to getting the eastern ASF brigade, the East African Standby Force, towards full operational capability as well, pledging 850 troops and some 240 police. Thus, Rwanda shows that finding relevance in one of the two forces need not signal a reduction in support of the other. Moreover, other African countries have also been profoundly committed to both the ASF and ACRIC. These include Senegal and, most importantly, South Africa, the latter of which was the progenitor of ACIRC, but also one of the largest troop contributing countries to the ASF.

In short, Rwanda, along with South Africa and Senegal, is showing that choosing sides between the ASF and ACIRC is a false choice: developing both at once is indeed possible.

End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)

Source: Karuhanga, James. “Rwanda: Govt Commits Troops to New African Intervention Initiative.” *The New Times (Kigali)*. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201510120496.html>.

The government has signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Union committing troops to the African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) The ACIRC is an initiative for military intervention as and when the need arises and is made up of volunteering nations whose purpose is to rapidly respond to crisis situations on the continent.

Rwanda is one of the 13 nations that have volunteered to form the ACIRC. At the signing ceremony at AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the weekend, Rwanda committed one motorised infantry battalion, one artillery battalion and one level two hospital to the ACIRC, according to a statement from the Ministry of Defence...

ACIRC volunteering nations so far are Rwanda, Benin, Algeria, Angola, South Africa Tanzania, Chad, Senegal, Sudan, Niger, Uganda, Egypt and Burkina Faso...

In November last year, the leadership of the Eastern Africa Standby Force (EASF), one of the five components of the ASF, verified and approved Rwanda’s readiness to deploy pledged troops and police components when needed. In August 2014, Rwanda, the current chair of EASF, pledged a substantial force contribution that includes a motorised battalion of 850 troops and a police contingent of 140 officers under Formed Police Unit as well as 100 Individual Police Officers to the EASF, formerly Eastern Africa Standby Brigade (EASBRIG)....

With more than 5,000 military and police peacekeepers in different parts of the world, Rwanda is now the fifth largest troop-contributing nation to UN peacekeeping missions globally.

Can Buhari Meet the Three-Month Deadline to End the Insurgency?

3 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: In August 2015 Nigerian president Muhammed Buhari promised that the Boko Haram insurgency would be finished in three months— meaning by December 2015. However, as in the past, Boko Haram dispelled the optimism of the Nigerian government. On 2 October, one day after Nigeria’s Independence Day celebration, it carried out three suicide bombings in Abuja suburbs, which were claimed by the West Africa Province of the Islamic State (Boko Haram’s new name since its leader, Abu Shekau, pledged allegiance to ISIL leader Abubakar Al-Baghdadi in March 2015). Throughout October Boko Haram also carried out several female suicide bombings in northeastern Nigeria, killing dozens.

According to the excerpted article in Nigeria’s *Premium Times* on 3 October, Nigerian security forces believe the three bombings in Abuja may have been a decoy for Boko Haram to attack the Kuje prison outside of Abuja, where several of its prominent members are being held. An audio message from Abu Shekau one week before the attacks referenced a BBC documentary about a deradicalization program in Kuje prison. Shekau vowed the prisoners were not deradicalized and would be freed.

The article also said that the security forces had been successful in keeping Boko Haram out of Abuja since an attack at a motor park in June 2014 that killed more than 20 people. Thus, the renewed attacks in Abuja have broken a period of calm in the capital city. The attack in 2014 was masterminded by a Boko Haram member living in Sudan who had studied in the UK for several years. Previous suicide attacks in Abuja at the Federal Police Headquarters and UN Headquarters in 2011 were carried out by AQIM-trained militants. It may therefore be the case that this latest attack in Abuja on 2 October was also carried out by foreign-trained militants.

Buhari’s counterinsurgency strategy since he came into office in February 2015 has led to fewer attacks in Nigeria. However, these latest attacks in Abuja are a reminder that his three-month deadline to end the insurgency was likely over-optimistic. The transnational nature of the insurgency will require him to continue his counterstrategy not only within Nigeria, but also with outside partners.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)

“But despite the huge fortification of the capital territory against attacks – through extensive roadblocks and security patrols – the terrorists sneaked in, killing many”



Boko Haram attacked Abuja in June 2014 (adjacent image) and, after a lull in attacks in the capital, Boko Haram carried out three suicide-bombings there again in October 2015. Source: http://www.voanews.com/MediaAssets2/projects/boko-haram/index_en.html

Source: “Boko Haram Returns to Abuja, Bombs 15 to Death in Kuje, Nyanya Attacks”, *Premium Times*, 3 October 2015.

Boko Haram returns to Abuja, bombs 15 to death in Kuje, Nyanya attacks

Fifteen months after its last attack on the capital city, the extremist Boko Haram sect ferociously returned to Abuja, simultaneously bombing locations in two satellite towns and killing at least 15 people. The terrorist group had been effectively fenced away from the capital since it attacked a shopping plaza -Emab – in the Wuse 2 District of the city on June 24, 2014, killing at least 21 and injuring 17 others, according to police. But despite the huge fortification of the capital territory against attacks – through extensive roadblocks and security patrols – the terrorists sneaked in, killing many.

The explosions were the first in Abuja since President Muhammadu Buhari took office in May, with a pledge to defeat Boko Haram. The president gave the Nigerian military up to November to end the insurgency that has killed over 20,000 people since 2009.

Colombian Domestic Consumption of Heroin Up

19 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Colombian reporting that domestic heroin use is on the rise, especially in the city of Cali, given that city's proximity to a traditional geographic center of heroin cultivation, should be of some interest to counterdrug analysts and strategists. Two decades ago Colombia was said to have produced the major portion of heroin consumed in the United States. As early as one decade ago heroin from the Golden Triangle in South Asia pushed the world retail price of heroin down. Contemporaneously, government suppression of the heroin cultivation in Colombia became more effective. Amapola (heroin poppy) cultivation in Colombia fell dramatically and out of the news.

Now it is back on Colombian front pages in an ominous way. If it has become a fashionable drug in Cali, it is partly because the product is again flooding smuggling routes, including to the coastal port of Buenaventura and more surreptitious embarkation points along the nearby coast. If there is indeed a production resurgence, it is perhaps due to some combination of international consumer fashion, market price dynamics and, perhaps, slackened government repression. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“In spite of the decrease, the country continues to be the second seller of heroin in the United States.”

Source: El País Editors, “Así opera la ruta de la heroína en el centro de Cali” (How the Heroin Route Operates in the Center of Cali), *El País*, 18 Octubre de 2015, <http://www.elpais.com.co/elpais/judicial/noticias/calle-h-ruta-heroína-pleno-centro-cali>; Editor, “El consumo de drogas duras aumenta en las grandes ciudades” (Hard drug consumption is on the increase in the big cities), *Debate*, 19 October, 2015, <http://periodicodebate.com/index.php/nacion/politica/item/9863-el-consumo-de-drogas-duras-aumenta-en-las-grandes-ciudades>.

“Three men no more than 25 years old died in the street in Sucre barrio, in the center of Cali, from an overdose of heroin. The scene took place on a typical day toward the end of September, in a zone defined between 13th and 14th avenues and 18th Street that is known as the ‘H Street’.” An emerging market. According to the statistics of the last UN world drug report, in 1999 Colombia could produce about 90 tons of heroin annually, while for 2014 the number barely exceeded 10 tons. The major part of the drug is sold abroad, although in spite of the decrease, the country continues to be the second seller of heroin in the US, after Mexico. Well, to the extent that the production went down in the last ten years, consumption inside the country went up...Another of the indicators of the increase in consumption of that drug in the city is its current retail sales price. Some five years ago a gram of heroin cost \$15 thousand pesos (about \$7 dollars). Last year the price reached \$5 thousand pesos and now it can be gotten on the ‘H Street’ for as little as \$3 thousand.

Colombian Negotiations Curiouser and Curiouser

16 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: As OE Watch readers are aware, the Bolivarians have been conducting negotiations in Havana with representatives from the Colombian government. Their goal is evidently to maximize political concessions and opportunities for the leaders of the FARC, while minimizing any personal limitations that might be imposed on them in whatever deal is reached. It may be that the talks, which some might initially have thought of as a surrender process, are also ameliorating the loss of FARC military advantages that might accrue.

According to many regional observers, both sides of the negotiating table seem to consider the salability of the deal (to the Colombian population) to be a barrier to the success of the negotiations. Many of these same commenters wonder why, how and when acceptability to the Colombian population stopped being a government goal and instead became a bother. To a degree, according to many regional observers, the Colombian administration has been selling the deal to the Colombian public with the idea that the FARC cannot be beaten, that it (the FARC) will continue to punish Colombia if a deal is not reached, and that the Colombian government, especially the military, is as causally culpable for the war as are the insurgents. To these observers, the government of Colombia seems to have adopted and is voicing the arguments of the FARC.

Now a new argument is being floated -- that Colombia's economy will take off and do much better once an agreement is reached. Some commenters find that argument dubious. Also in the economics vein, the Colombian president is suggesting an outlay of substantial economic development funds for the “border regions,” which seems to imply strongly that tax money will be sent to those areas conceded politically to the FARC. Those same border regions greatly overlap smuggling zones key to the FARC's drug trafficking, an illicit industry which does not seem well addressed by the proposed accords.

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“The aggressions of the past weeks have...reinforced patriotic sentiment against Maduro's pretensions and against...the peace process.”

Source: Editors, ¿Cuál sería el futuro de la economía colombiana si se logra la paz? (What will be the future of Colombia's economy if peace is achieved?), *Dinero*, 14 October, 2015 <http://www.dinero.com/pais/articulo/pronosticos-economicos-crecimiento-colombia-logra-acuerdo-paz/214656>

“The United Nations Program for Colombian Development (PNUD), together with the Resource Center for the Analysis of Conflicts (CELAC), poses in a study that ‘the termination of the conflict, added to a significant reduction in violence and fear, will generate substantial economic benefits’.”

(continued)

Continued: Colombian Negotiations Curiouser and Curiouser

Tempering in a sense, but also exacerbating opposition to the accords, the public has still not seen them. A new and especially puzzling twist has arisen in that regard. Rather than submit the accords to the congress, as apparently would be normal constitutional procedure (although “normal” in these conditions might be an incongruous adjective), the administration has contrived what is being dubbed a “*congresito*” (little congress), a special, presidentially selected, smaller body of representation that would be empowered to approve the accord. Ominously, the administration seems to be proposing that members of the FARC be included in the *congresito*.

Furthermore, impunity versus jail-time for FARC leaders has been an issue since the outset, with the FARC leaders, of course, resisting the notion of their incarceration. The Bolivarians’ newest argumentative twist on that issue is a shift of the goal posts. They have floated, as a new equivalency, the idea that if they are to be jailed then so must ex-President Álvaro Uribe. The government might have dismissed the play as nonsense out-of-hand, but instead President Santos seems to have taken up that banner as well (likewise, he had earlier suggested that the FARC’s drug trafficking be considered a political crime, thus allowing indulgence under the accords).

Many observers are finding it more and more difficult to tell if there are in fact two sides at the negotiation table. It is hard to tell what the weight, depth, intensity or consequence of this perception of betrayal might actually be. However, December legislative elections are coming to neighboring Venezuela, with a strong possibility of a spike in violent public unrest. That unrest, should it happen, will reverberate into Colombia, pressuring dissatisfaction with FARC negotiations even further. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

Source: Eduardo Mackenzie, ¿Santos ha roto con la “revolución bolivariana”? (Has Santos really broken with the ‘bolivarian revolution’?) *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 16 September 2015, <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/santos-ha-roto-con-la-revolucion-bolivariana.html>.

“...What relationship can there be between the anti-Colombian gesticulations of Maduro [President of Venezuela] and the simultaneous activity of Rafael Correa [President of Ecuador] who for his part is fomenting disturbances on the border between Ecuador and Colombia? The relationship is clear. Those two agents of Castroist subversion believe that encircling Colombia, blockading border commerce, repressing coal [exports] in Guajira [Colombian Department bordering Venezuela], ruining commerce in Ipiales [Colombian city bordering Ecuador], allowing weapons and explosives for narcoterrorism pass through those borders, are going to undermine the resistance and unity of Colombia. They believe that chaos must be increased everywhere so that the FARC, in the face of a [public] opinion that has been knocked unconscious, can obtain a definitive victory at the table in Havana. What they have achieved is the opposite. The aggressions of the past weeks have alerted Colombia and reinforced patriotic sentiment against Maduro’s pretensions and against his most sinister plan for Colombia, the peace process.”

Source: Ricardo Puentes Melo, “Comenzaron las expropiaciones chavistas en Colombia” (The Chavist Expropriations have begun in Colombia), *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 15 Octubre 2015, <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/comenzaron-las-expropiaciones-chavistas-en-colombia.html>

“Businesses, farm land, buildings, medium size companies, and bank accounts were expropriated with the excuse that it was beneficial for Venezuela. A media campaign was begun to show the entrepreneurs as money-thirsty bloodsuckers, exploiters of the poor and pawns of the empire. And with a public opinion manipulated through hate and class warfare, the tyrant and his entourage went robbing the entrepreneurs by imposing exorbitant fines on them, breaking their industries. Juan Manuel Santos has already begun this in Colombia. He has already expropriated lands from agriculture businessmen on the accusation of paramilitarism, and the campaign of expropriations is to the point of completing a goal of 9 million hectares that the FARC claims in order to put in operation its criminal mini-republics, which they and the government are calling ‘campesino reservation zones’.”

Source: Luis José Semprum, “Si cae Maduro no habrá acuerdo con las FARC” (If Maduro falls there will be no agreement with the FARC), *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 28 September 2015, <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/cae-maduro-no-acuerdo-farc.html>

“...The arrangement between Santos and the FARC continues afoot, in spite of the opposition of a majority of Colombians, due to the support it gets from Maduro and Raúl Castro. It was therefore no surprise when terrorist Timoleón Jiménez, alias Timochenko, arrived in Cuba on a PDVSA [Venezuelan government oil corporation] airplane.” Maybe Colombians have not yet grasped that the weak point of the peace accord is not to be found in Bogota, nor discovered in Havana, but rather in Caracas. If the Maduro government happens to fall, the peace accord will also collapse, because the FARC would no longer count on a sanctuary in our country, and secondly, because all of the information regarding the Chávez-FARC-Santos conspiracy would come to light.

Source: Salud Hernández Mora, “Álvaro Uribe: ‘Santos es el único que debería estar en la cárcel’” (Álvaro Uribe: ‘Santos is the only one who should be in jail), *El Mundo*, 16 October 2015, <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2015/10/16/5621413a22601d9d5e8b45a3.html>

“Added this Thursday to the fight between Uribe and Santos over the Colombian peace process is ex-President Andrés Pastrana. The past executive has sent a letter to Juan Manuel Santos to notify him that he is withdrawing from the Advisory Commission for Peace that the current President had formed to listen to differing voices. The ex-executive has decided that he cannot align himself with the latest agreement announced by Santos and Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, alias ‘Timochenko’, maximum chief of the FARC.”

Venezuela in December

19 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: This may be the last OE Watch article on the situation in Venezuela before the country's legislative elections on 6 December. Judging from the strident and vitriolic tones of many opposition commentaries, change is afoot. However, the currently ruling Bolivarian government has a great deal of control over all aspects of the electoral experience, and, of course, substantial, if not complete control over the country's armed forces.

Watchers of potential international political crises may want to tune into what is going on in northern South America during those first two weeks in December. Venezuelan society is not known to be inherently violent, nor is the Venezuelan public well armed. So far this year, in spite of polling data that seem to show public support of the government to have completely caved, the government of Nicolas Maduro seems to have lost little of its grip, some of which seems to be provided by Cubans. The economy of the country has been tanking badly, the government has not managed the country's depressed oil income well, key infrastructure is falling apart, people who can emigrate are doing so, and evidence of government narcotraffic continues to surface. Many Venezuelan media representatives suggest this should all spell a sweeping landslide victory for the opposition, which would, in most democracies, mean that the leadership of the government would be replaced. Nevertheless, as they readily assert, Venezuela may have completely stopped being an electoral democracy some time ago, and so the results of the December electoral process might be disappointing to opposition political parties.

Disappointment, however, is probably not the operative term for what may follow. If the government retains control of the legislature by way of massive electoral fraud, we might see widespread violent unrest before the New Year. The opposition could, on the other hand, win control of the legislature, which might precipitate an immediate, complete dismissal and rejection by the Maduro regime of any legislative authority whatever. This, too, could provoke widespread violent unrest, although maybe delayed by a few weeks. Alternatively, a new opposition legislature might invest and remain to challenge the administration, to which the administration might react with violent repressive measures.

Another predictive option is that Maduro or perhaps a replacement chosen by the party or the Cubans (to the extent there is a distinction) decides to make broad liberalizing concessions and change the economic prospects of the country. This last option, judging from much regional analysis, is not likely. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...One has to live it in person to understand the magnitude of what is happening in the guts of Venezuela.”

Source: Oscar Arias [ex-President of Costa Rica]: “Venezuela es un país quebrado, los cubanos son los que están gobernando” (Venezuela is broken, it is the Cubans are who are governing), *Dólar Today*, 19 October 2015, <https://dolartoday.com/oscar-arias-venezuela-es-un-pais-quebrado-los-cubanos-son-los-que-estan-gobernando/>

“...That is to say, we can't satisfy ourselves with the idea that we have left authoritarian governance in the past...”

[Interviewer] To what countries are you referring?

Obviously the country that most has done this [become authoritarian] is Venezuela. To the point that it is a broken country, that the Cubans that are in Caracas are in good part those who are governing. It is a country with supply shortages like never before in the history of Latin America....”

Source: Editors, “¡El 6D A VOTAR Y COBRAR! MCM: La indignación y rebeldía que existen en Venezuela no son domesticables” (The 6th of December vote and make them pay! MSM [opposition celebrity María Corina Machado]: The indignation and rebellion that exists in Venezuela cannot be domesticated), *Dólar Today*, 19 October 2015, <https://dolartoday.com/se-les-acabo-el-tiempo-el-6d-votar-y-cobrar-mcm-la-indignacion-y-rebeldia-que-existen-en-venezuela-son-domesticables/>

“...the dictatorship has taken to silence and isolate its detractors and lift up those who serve it; they have the chore of presenting a resigned Venezuela. That is a lie! One has to live it in person to understand the magnitude of what is happening in the guts of Venezuela.”

Source: Fausto Masó, “‘Disfruten el espectáculo, asistan al final de la revolución’: El desmoronamiento” (Enjoy the spectacle, witness the end of the revolution: the collapse), *Dólar Today*, 10 October, 2015, <https://dolartoday.com/disfruten-el-espectaculo-asistan-al-final-de-la-revolucion-el-desmoronamiento-por-fausto-maso/>

“The sons of Chávez will not find anyone to guide them to the promised land, they are already too convinced that there does not exist a heaven on earth, so much that they have reduced their own idol to a simple poster, a television documentary. The chavistas don't believe in Chávez any more, the performance is left without an audience, whatever Maduro does. Rarely have we seen a myth go up in smoke and disappear so quickly.”

Police Seize Cocaine Diluted in Blackberry Pulp at the Port of Manzanillo, Colima

15 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Security analysts predicted that cocaine seizures in Mexico would decrease in 2015 because production levels in South America are down, as is demand for the drug in the United States. Instead, seizures reached a record 2797 kilograms during the first 8 months of the year and even surpassed reported seizures in 2012 and 2014 (2592 and 1263 kilograms respectively). This source discussed surprising seizure increases, but further highlighted the sophistication cartels are using to camouflage massive shipments in everyday exports. For example, in July 2015 Mexican authorities seized cocaine pulp that was diluted in a 24,000 kilogram shipment of frozen blackberry pulp at the Port of Manzanillo in Colima. This seizure represented the first of its kind, but is just one of many ingenious methods cartels have used in recent years to move massive shipments of drugs under the guise of legal exports.

Sinaloa Cartel Involvement?

Although no group has been identified as the responsible party for the above-mentioned seizure, authorities have hypothesized that the Sinaloa Cartel likely played a role, as it is known for moving cocaine shipments in unique and nearly undetectable methods. In August 2014 Peruvian authorities uncovered an example of when they dismantled two coal factories in El Trujillo, Peru, that were owned and operated by the Sinaloa Cartel. From these factories, the group allegedly exported 240 metric tons of cocaine concealed in charcoal bricks to Mexico, Belgium, and Spain. The Sinaloa Cartel also owns and operates an extensive chain of highly sophisticated subterranean tunnels along the US/Mexican border responsible for moving countless tons of illicit shipments on a yearly basis. For these reasons it is suspected that the Sinaloa Cartel may have played a role in the recent cocaine blackberry pulp seizure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: Source: “Hallan cocaína en pulpa de mora; provenia de Colombia (Police Seize Colombian Cocaine Shipment Diluted in Blackberry Pulp).” *Excelsior*. Accessed from <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2015/09/15/1036992>

Mexico's Tax Administration Service (SAT) reported a joint operation with the Mexican Navy (SEMAR) which resulted in the seizure of 24,000 kilograms of frozen blackberry pulp infused with cocaine pulp. The exact amount of cocaine seized during this operation was not reported, but came as a surprise to Mexican authorities who earlier in the year reported that cocaine seizures were expected to decrease in 2015. The shipment allegedly departed from Colombia and entered into Mexico via the Port of Manzanillo in Colima. Mexican authorities indicated that they were able to obtain samples and test for cocaine once the shipment began to melt. The importation company responsible for the pulp was identified as providing agricultural/horticultural services. After further investigation, authorities discovered that its alleged headquarters in Zamora, Michoacan was an abandoned building. At this point, ongoing investigations are being conducted to identify the parties responsible for coordinating the uniquely camouflaged shipment but authorities have hypothesized that the Sinaloa Cartel was likely involved.



Source: “Blackberries (3821343779)” by Dwight Sipler from Stow, MA, USA - Blackberries Uploaded by Jacopo Werther. Licensed under CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blackberries_\(3821343779\).jpg#/media/File:Blackberries_\(3821343779\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blackberries_(3821343779).jpg#/media/File:Blackberries_(3821343779).jpg)

Guyana Objects to Venezuelan Military Deployment, Beefs Up Security Along Common Border

29 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: President David Granger of Guyana reports the buildup of Venezuelan military forces along the country's western border. The two sources below indicate that this activity started at the beginning of September 2015 and has intensified in recent weeks with the deployment of tanks, surface-to-air missiles, and troops. Armed Venezuelan boat patrols have also been detected along the Cuyuni River in Guyanese territory. Guyana Defense Force (GDF) Chief of Staff Brigadier Mark Phillips characterized the river patrols as "an affront to Guyanese sovereignty" and emphasized the GDF's readiness to act on border incursion threats launched by Venezuela. In response to Guyanese concerns, Venezuelan Minister of Defense Vladimir Padrino Lopez claimed the military buildup was part of a training exercise and urged Venezuelans to remain calm as the country continues to prepare itself. Guyanese officials voiced discontent with this response and indicated that if Venezuela was truly conducting a military exercise, international practice is to inform neighboring countries of such exercises, especially those that enter into the sovereign territory of another nation.

Border Dispute History:

What is important to understand about this apparent buildup is that border controversy between the countries is nothing new. In fact, over the years the United Nations has attempted to resolve the controversy without much success. Moreover, border tensions intensified following Exxon Mobil's discovery of oil in the Essequibo Region earlier this year. Days after the discovery, Venezuelan President Nicholas Maduro called for a peaceful reclamation of the disputed land, which would effectively annex two-thirds of Guyanese territory and provide Venezuela greater access to the Atlantic. On 27 May Maduro also created the "Atlantic Maritime Integral Defense Zone," giving Venezuela the power to conduct military operations in that area. Guyana is currently looking for assistance from the UN and international courts to resolve this issue. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: "Guyana Objects to Venezuelan Military Deployment, Beefs Up Security Along Common Border." *Guyana Chronicle*. Accessed from <http://issuu.com/guyanachronicle-paper/docs/2015-9-23?e=10237530/30237411>

During the month of September, President Granger said there has been a gradual build-up of armed forces on Guyana's western frontier, including the deployment of tanks and missiles, "and the presence of armed patrol boats in the Cuyuni River, which of course is Guyana property." Granger further indicated that "the use of gunboats, the use of armed vehicles... the use of missiles is completely unknown in the relations between two states, so we don't know where it will lead, but as far as Guyana is concerned, we are interested in a peaceful and lawful resolution of the Venezuelan claim." Guyana Defense Force (GDF) Chief of Staff Brigadier Mark Phillips characterized the river patrols as "an affront to Guyanese sovereignty."

In an attempt to mitigate the perceived threat posed by Venezuela, Guyana has placed its soldiers on high alert with troops positioned at Eteringbang, Kaikan, and other observation posts along the Cuyuni River where they are continuing to monitor Venezuelan armed forces on Guyana's frontiers. Granger is also looking to bigger countries of the United Nations to ensure peace because as far as Guyana is concerned, the borders were decided by arbitration 116 years ago. His hope in doing this is to guarantee not only the security of Guyana but of other small states that may not have the financial resources or political clout to protect themselves.



Source: "Venezuela: UN Calls For Venezuela-Guyana Talks; Guyana Not Adding Troops to Border." *Guyana Chronicle*. Accessed from <http://guyanachronicle.com/category/top-story/>

Venezuela's Response to Guyana

On 22 September, Venezuelan Minister of Defence Vladimir Padrino Lopez said military officers of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) held "operational exercises" in East Venezuela. He did not elaborate on the specific area in East Venezuela nor the number of soldiers and equipment involved in the operation. The Venezuelan Minister of Defence was quoted as saying "at this time we are conducting exercises to the east of the country, an operational deployment." He urged Venezuelans to remain calm as the Venezuelan military prepares itself. A similar exercise is being conducted in the western side of Venezuela, Lopez stated.

Recent Car Bombs Implemented by Mara Salvatrucha in El Salvador Deemed as Terrorist Attacks

15 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Government officials allege that during a three-month period spanning from June 2015 to September 2015 the Mara Salvatrucha (MS) set off three car bombs in San Salvador, El Salvador (the specific gang faction was not indicated in the source), likely in response to policy changes regarding gang status and laws. Historically the Mara Salvatrucha has been responsible for violence and creating chaos in the city, but these car bombs are significant for at least two reasons.

First, they provided justification for government implementation of an antiterrorism law aimed at rooting out gang activity in the city. This law is controversial because it includes a militaristic approach to street crime and a relatively vague definition of terrorism as it applies to gang activity. It has also been deemed a politically expedient means for the government to justify harsher and more forceful anti-gang measures to the Salvadoran public.

The second reason alleged gang-initiated car bomb attacks in San Salvador are significant is that they represent a new level of violence and terror not previously common to MS factions. In looking at the attacks, the first in June involved an M-67 grenade that was programmed to detonate as soon as the car door was opened. This tactic has been utilized by MS-13 operators in the past and was not much of a surprise to authorities. However, the second and third attacks in August and September were different from past attacks in terms of explosives utilized and the placement. The August attack involved an IED made of C4, which represents an escalation of violence, as MS factions have not previously employed explosive devices of this caliber, thus raising the question as to whether other players could be involved. Another difference noted in both attacks is that they were set up in busy areas to maximize the terror factor.

In short, these new attacks may indicate an escalation of violence implemented by the MS in response to government crack-downs on the gang, or the attacks could have been perpetrated by other groups, such as drug-trafficking transport groups and social cleansing organizations, which could benefit from an intense government crackdown on gangs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “FGR aplicará ley de actos de terrorismo a pandilleros (FGR Will Apply Anti-Terrorism Law to Gangs).” *La prensa grafica*. Accessed on October 10, 2015 from <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2014/04/16/fgr-aplicara-ley-de-actos-de-terrorismo-a-pandilleros>

On August 24, 2015, El Salvador’s Supreme Court designated the country’s street gangs and those who finance them as “terrorist” groups. The court said the well-known Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13 gang and any other gang that attempts to claim powers that belong to the state would be considered “terrorists.” It defined terrorism as “the organized and systematic exercise of violence.

Earlier in the month El Salvador Attorney General Luis Martinez supported the anti-terrorism gang laws by stating that the groups have gone too far. He reiterated that “they (gangs) attack the police and prosecutors, intimidate the population, force people to leave their homes, and intend to destabilize the state. They are terrorists, not gangsters.”

The anti-terrorism law is significant in the sense that gang members can receive between eight and 12 years in prison while leaders can receive 10 to 15 years for any terrorism related charges. The law also lays out prison terms of 40 to 60 years for those convicted of carrying out “an act against the life, personal integrity, liberty, or security of a public official or employee” and allows for more militaristic approach in targeting gang members.



Source: “Mara Salvatrucha - MS13” by Walking the Tracks - Flickr: Mara Salvatrucha - MS13. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mara_Salvatrucha_-_MS13.jpg#/media/File:Mara_Salvatrucha_-_MS13.jpg

Source: Tres coches bomba en menos de tres meses en El Salvador (Three Car Bombs in Less than Three Months in El Salvador).” *La prensa grafica*. Accessed on October 10, 2015 from <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2015/09/11/tres-coches-bomba-en-menos-de-tres-meses-en-el-salvador>

Source: “The Mystery Behind El Salvador’s IEDs.” *Insight Crime*. Accessed on October 15, 2015 from <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/the-mystery-behind-el-salvador-ieds>

The MS-13 has been linked to rudimentary car bombs using grenades in the past which is why they were immediately linked to a failed attempt in mid-June. As reported by this source, the simple booby-traps commonly employed by this gang are set so the grenade safety pin is pulled as the victim opens a door or turns the vehicle’s wheels. Car bombs of this nature require little technical know-how and in the past appear to have targeted specific individuals, such as those who refuse to pay extortions. Later IED attacks carried out in August and September 2015 were different in the sense that one utilized C4 explosives and that both were positioned for maximum visibility and impact. For this reason Insight Crime analysts indicated that other players within El Salvador including drug trafficking organizations and social cleansing groups may have played a role in later attacks.

Indian Concern Over China's Hydropower Station on Brahmaputra

16 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary:

In October 2015 the Chinese press announced that the Zam Hydropower Station, Tibet's largest hydropower station, came online. The station's six power units were successfully incorporated into the power grid. Naturally, the Chinese press viewed this as positive, producing 2.5 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity per year. According to the first article, "It will alleviate the electricity shortage in central Tibet and empower the development of the electricity-strapped region." India, however, sees it much differently, as evidenced in the second and third articles.

According to the second article, India should be concerned because China, which is "the most dammed country in the world, is reportedly planning a few more" dams, and it could easily disrupt the water flow to India. The article explains that China had never signed any water agreement with any of its riparian neighbors and has had water disputes with most.

The third article goes on to describe the political side of the issue, claiming that Prime Minister Modi did not press the issue adequately, causing China to simply repeat "bland assurances that the dams being built over the Brahmaputra are 'run of the river' projects not designed to hold water and therefore there is no possibility that the flow of water will negatively impact India." There is no way India can go into Tibet and verify this.

Numerous articles describe concern over the growing issue of water scarcity in India. According to the World Bank, India is the second largest user of ground water in the world, after China. As China gains a further stranglehold on water, it could heighten tensions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

"...the news that Beijing has operationalised its \$1.5 billion Zam hydropower station on the Brahmaputra in Tibet, must surely set the alarm bells ringing in New Delhi."

Source: "Tibet's Largest Hydropower Station Starts Full Operation," *China Daily*, 13 October 2015, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-10/13/content_22173796.htm>.

Tibet's Largest Hydropower Station Starts Full Operation

Located in the Gyaca County, Shannan Prefecture, the Zam Hydropower Station harnesses the rich water resources of the Yarlung Zangbo River, a major river which flows through Tibet. It produces 2.5 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity a year.

"It will alleviate the electricity shortage in central Tibet and empower the development of the electricity-strapped region. It is also an important energy base in central Tibet," ...

Source: "China Poses a Water Problem," *The New Indian Express Online*, 16 October 2015, <<http://www.newindianexpress.com/editorials/China-Poses-a-Water-Problem/2015/10/16/article3082422.ece>>.

China Poses a Water Problem

The day may not be far when the criminal neglect of successive governments in increasing our water storage capacity may spell more trouble and, as strategic affairs experts warn, China might be able to switch off water taps in the North-East at will. We are not being unnecessarily alarmist. But, the news that Beijing has operationalised its \$1.5 billion Zam hydropower station on the Brahmaputra in Tibet, must surely set the alarm bells ringing in New Delhi. The dam, considered the world's highest-altitude hydropower station, will produce 2.5 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity a year. That, is not our concern. We should be worried since China, the most dammed country in the world, is reportedly planning a few more, which may disrupt water flows into India. Consider this: As per the UN, 718 billion cubic meters of surface water flows out of Chinese territory every year, of which 48.33 per cent comes into India; China has never inked any water agreement with any of its riparian neighbours and, has water disputes with most of them.

Source: "Chinese Dam Over Brahmaputra," *The Sentinel Online*, 16 October 2015, <<http://sentinelassam.com.bh-in-7.webhostbox.net/editorial.php?sec=3&subsec=0&ppr=1&dtP=2015-10-16>>.

Chinese Dam Over Brahmaputra

China is single-mindedly going ahead in harnessing the rivers on Tibet, chief among which is the Yarlung Tsangpo that flows down to Assam as its lifeline, the Brahmaputra.

There were earlier reports that China was building as many as seven dams on the main channel of the Brahmaputra, apart from Zangmu. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi now says that the move by China to operationalise the Zam hydro-power station will cause 'irreparable damage' to Assam.

Prime Minister Modi did speak candidly about China holding back in improving bilateral relations, and there were some complaints about the 48 billion dollars trade deficit favouring China. But the issue of harnessing the Brahmaputra while adequately addressing the concerns of riparian states was noticeably soft-pedalled by the Indian side. So the Chinese side repeated its bland assurances that the dams being built over the Brahmaputra are 'run-of-the-river' projects not designed to hold water, so there is no possibility of affecting downstream flows or suddenly releasing water to cause flood havoc in the lower reaches in India...

Thai Army Becomes More Entrenched as Five and Twenty-Year Plans Pave the Way

20 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Since the Royal Thai Army carried out a coup to oust the Shinawatra regime from government, the Thai government has been undergoing major reform, which could be viewed as strengthening the regime. The following article discusses some of the measures currently being taken.

According to the article, as part of a five-year roadmap, the Army is setting up a military unit to handle cyber security, which is said to be an increasing threat to the nation. The military also aims to strengthen its ties with the Armed Forces of the other nine ASEAN countries. Along with the 5-year roadmap, a 20-year roadmap, ordered by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, is said to already be underway, which is supposed to focus on upholding the nation and the monarchy.

In 2014 the Thai Army had staged a coup to oust the ruling party. Today, the Thai Army is considered the dominating force in the political space. It is not a force that fights wars or defends territorial integrity. Instead, because the country has no real external threats, the Army can be seen as an internal army. As it continues to grow in influence and strength, hope seems to be fading that a democratic-style government with free elections will run the country again any time soon. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“...the new roadmap would focus on upholding the nation and the monarchy, protecting the country’s interests by land, sea and air, developing the country and providing assistance for the Thai people.”

Source: Wassana Nanuam, “Army Sets Up Unit to Fight Cyber Threats,” *Bangkok Post*, 20 October 2015, <<http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/735524/army-sets-up-unit-to-fight-cyber-threats>>.

Army Sets Up Unit to Fight Cyber Threats

The armed forces will set up a military unit handling cyber security as part of its five-year roadmap, Supreme Commander Gen Sommai Kaodeera said.

...The new unit will serve as a military task force in preparation for the launch of the Asean Community later this year, he said.

...the new roadmap would focus on upholding the nation and the monarchy, protecting the country’s interests by land, sea and air, developing the country and providing assistance for the Thai people.

“The military will give full cooperation to the government...”



Source: “Royal Thai Army soldiers salute 080508-A-3376P-005” by Sgt. Pablo N. Piedra, USA - High resolution download from <http://www.defenseimagery.mil/imagery.html#guid=8b0d041b8bef9e33f65037ed3d9bd463d17c46a4>. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Royal_Thai_Army_soldiers_salute_080508-A-3376P-005.jpg#/media/File:Royal_Thai_Army_soldiers_salute_080508-A-3376P-005.jpg

Indonesia Introduces a Deradicalization Program to Separate Terror Convicts in Prison

22 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Officials in Indonesia plan to separate “cooperative” terrorist convicts from their more belligerent peers in a bid to boost the government’s planned deradicalization program. According to excerpts in the accompanying articles from the *Jakarta Globe* and *Tempo*, Saud Usman Nasution, the head of the National Counterterrorism Agency, said that selected terrorist inmates would be moved to the agency’s 48-room detention facility in Sentul, south of Jakarta. In the past the government’s long-running deradicalization campaign has frequently been criticized as ineffective and often counterproductive because it fails to separate hardened terrorists and radical ideologues from more impressionable new recruits and other “soft” targets, allowing prisons nationwide to serve as incubators for radicalization drives.

In the excerpt from the *Jakarta Globe*, Nasution explains how the planned deradicalization program will operate. “[The program] is to separate those who are being cooperative from those who are still radical. [Cooperative inmates] are improving, but can still be influenced by the radicals. [As a result, there is] the need for separation [to isolate cooperative members from active radicals].” He added that with extremist ideology, such as that espoused by the Islamic State, gaining ground in Indonesia, the country could not afford to let down its guard against radicalization efforts among the prison population.

In addition to the deradicalization program, Nasution said the National Counterterrorism Agency would develop a crisis management center to deal with terrorist threats, with the cooperative inmates expected to support its operations: “We hope to be able to build a fully operational center so that the president can monitor [terrorism issues in Indonesia] and take appropriate policies to counter terrorism.”

As the accompanying excerpt from *Tempo* points out, Nasution’s remarks are in accordance with Presidential Decree Number 46 Year 2010, Article 4, which states that the National Counterterrorism Agency should become a major institution in the Crisis Control Center to combat terrorism.

Indonesia’s deradicalization program is a step in the right direction to prevent prisons from continuing to incubate terrorists. If implemented effectively, Islamic State fighters will be unable to spread their ideology within domestic prisons, which should result in fewer homegrown Islamic militants. To accomplish this Indonesia needs to improve its past deradicalization experiences, which failed to achieve desired results. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: “‘Cooperative’ Terror Convicts to Be Sequestered in Deradicalization Drive,” *Jakarta Globe*, 21 September 2015, <http://jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/news/cooperative-terror-convicts-sequestered-deradicalization-drive/>

Officials in Indonesia plan to separate “cooperative” terror convicts from their more belligerent peers in a bid to boost the government’s planned deradicalization program.

Saud Usman Nasution, the head of the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), said on Monday that selected inmates would be moved to the agency’s detention facility in Sentul, south of Jakarta.

“This is to separate those who are being cooperative from those who are still radical,” ...

“They [cooperative inmates] are improving, but can still be influenced by the radicals, therefore the need for separation.”

Saud added that with extremist ideology such as that espoused by the Islamic State gaining ground in Indonesia, the country could not afford to let down its guard against radicalization efforts among the prison population.

He said the BNPT would develop a crisis management center to deal with terrorist threats, with the cooperative inmates expected to support the center’s operations.

“We hope to be able to build a fully operational center so that the president can monitor [terrorism issues in Indonesia] and take appropriate policies to counter terrorism,” Saud said.



The image is Kerobokan Prison in Denpasar Bali.
Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:KerobokanPrison.jpg>

Source: “‘Deradikalisasi Teroris, BNPT Bangun Rutan di Sentul,’” *Tempo*, 21 September 2015, <http://nasional.tempco.co/read/news/2015/09/22/063702672/deradikalisasi-teroris-bnpt-bangun-rutan-di-sentul>

National Counter Terrorism Agency will build 48 detention room in Sentul for deradicalization program terrorist.

This step, said Saud, also in accordance with the Presidential Decree Number 46 Year 2010 Article 4 that BNPT should become a major institution in the Crisis Control Center (Pusdalsis) to combat terrorism. ...

Will the Philippines Finally Succeed Against Abu Sayyaf?

23 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Military units under Joint Task Group Sulu recently began simultaneous focused military operations targeting senior and sub-leaders from Abu Sayyaf, a radical Islamic separatist group operating in the southern Philippines, as well as their foreign cohorts, while also targeting the rescue of ten hostages held by the group in the southern province of Sulu. Abu Sayyaf emerged in the early 1990s as an offshoot of a decades-long Muslim separatist insurgency in Mindanao and currently supports the Islamic State. Its members mainly thrive from kidnappings for ransom, extortion and other acts of banditry with an estimated 400 gunmen currently split into several factions. The foreigners with Abu Sayyaf, including Indonesian and Malaysian nationals, are believed to be providing bomb-making and other training in Sulu and the nearby island province of Basilan, where they were first monitored by military intelligence agents.

According to excerpts in the accompanying *Sun.Star* article, Joint Task Group Sulu Commander Brigadier General Alan Arrojado said the unit of 1000 Marines and Army troops already clashed with about 30 Abu Sayyaf gunmen at the start of the assault near the remote mountainous village of Bungkaong. He said the focused military operations are concentrated in the towns of Indanan, Parang, Patikul, and Talipao, where Abu Sayyaf bandits are based. The military operation primarily targets Radulan Sahiron, the oldest and most senior Abu Sayyaf leader.

Over the past three months Filipino authorities have been heading in the right direction against rebels in the south. In June the communist Moro Islamic Liberation Front began decommissioning former fighters. Then, in June and July the communist New People's Army lost two senior leaders when one was killed and another was arrested. Until Manila has similar successes against Abu Sayyaf, with continued banditry practices and support from the Islamic State, Abu Sayyaf will continue to be a thorn in Manila's side for the foreseeable future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: "1,000 Troops Launch Offensive vs Sayyafs in Sulu," *Mindanao Examiner*, 22 September 2015, <http://www.sunstar.com.ph/zamboanga/local-news/2015/09/22/1000-troops-launch-offensive-vs-sayyafs-sulu-431717>

Military units under the Joint Task Group Sulu (JTGS) have launched simultaneous "focused military operations" (FMO) effective Tuesday, targeting Abu Sayyaf bandit senior and sub-leaders, as well as their foreign cohorts in the province of Sulu.

JTGS commander Brigadier General Alan Arrojado said some of the about 1,000 Marines and Army troops clashed with about 30 Abu Sayyaf gunmen led by Guro Ibrahim Tuesday at the start of the assault near the remote village of Bungkaong in mountainous Patikul town in Sulu province.

Arrojado said the FMO under Oplan "Castigation 17-15" is concentrated in the towns of Indanan, Parang, Patikul, and Talipao where the Abu Sayyaf bandits are based.

The FMO primarily targets the oldest and most senior Abu Sayyaf leader, Radulan Sahiron, ...

Arrojado said the foreign cohorts of the Abu Sayyaf bandits include Indonesian and Malaysian nationals ...

The foreign bandits were believed to be providing bomb-making and other training to the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu and the nearby island province of Basilan, where they were first monitored by military intelligence agents, said Arrojado.

Abu Sayyaf emerged in the early 1990s as an offshoot of a decades-long Muslim separatist insurgency in Mindanao. ...

The Abu Sayyaf is estimated to have about 400 gunmen currently split into several factions. Its members mainly thrive from kidnappings for ransom, extortion and other acts of banditry. ...



The image shows Sulu Province and its proximity to neighboring Malaysia. ARMM is the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sulu#/media/File:Ph_locator_map_sulu.png

Source: "'CASTIGATION' | Offensive Launched vs Senior Abu Sayyaf Leaders, Foreign Terrorists in Sulu," *InterAksyon.com*, 21 September 2015, <http://www.interaksyon.com/article/117844/castigation--offensive-launched-vs-senior-abu-sayyaf-leaders-foreign-terrorists-in-sulu>

Government forces launched an offensive Tuesday against senior leaders of the Abu Sayyaf and foreigners operating with them in Sulu and to rescue at least 10 persons they are holding hostage.

Islamic State’s People Smuggling Network Mapped out by Indonesia’s Counter-Terrorism Agency

25 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Saud Usman Nasution, the head of Indonesia’s national counterterrorism agency, says that the Islamic State (ISIS) is working with people-smuggling networks to bring foreign fighters to Indonesia through Malaysia. In excerpts from the accompanying article in the *Star Online*, he says ISIS fighters are in Sumatra arriving from Malaysia and moving on to Poso in central Sulawesi, a suspected training ground for ISIS fighters. He added that there were many areas under close watch in Indonesia, including the increasingly popular holiday destination of Lombok.

According to the accompanying excerpts, Nasution said, “We see that some foreign terrorist fighters from overseas come to Indonesia. First they leave Malaysia and head for Pekanbaru (Sumatra) to Puncak (West Java) - it’s all facilitated by asylum seeker networks, then from Puncak they would leave to Makassar and Poso, with facilitation from ISIS network.”

Indonesians arriving from fighting for ISIS abroad present a significant problem for domestic terrorism. Similar to foreigners fighting in Afghanistan, they have received requisite training to conduct domestic terrorist activities when they return home. At least 300-500 Indonesians have been in Syria training for battle, and there has been at least one case of a mall bombing in Jakarta that has ISIS trademarks associated with it. Thus, the direct link is very clear that Islamic State’s presence in Indonesia is growing.

Nasution also discussed existing foreign terrorist fighters who are ready to move on from Malaysia. “So we need to stay vigilant, more so because there is information that in Malaysia, there are thousands, a lot of foreign terrorist fighters there who are about to be deployed - we don’t know where to - under the network.” He indicates that Indonesian counterterrorism officials are now in a better position to counter ISIS fighters from Malaysia. However, to improve its capacity to track foreign fighters throughout the archipelago, officials also need to coordinate with Malaysia among requisite ministries and with local Malaysian officials. With the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesian officials have more work to do to prevent domestic terrorism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

Source: “Islamic State militants heading to Indonesia from Malaysia,” *The Star Online*, 22 September 2015, <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2015/09/22/Islamic-State-militants-heading-to-Indonesia-from-Malaysia/>

The Islamic State (IS) is working with people smuggling networks to bring foreign fighters to Indonesia through Malaysia, ...

The head of Indonesia’s national counter-terrorism agency Saud Usman Nasution told the ABC that IS fighters arrived from Malaysia in Sumatra and were then taken to Poso in central Sulawesi, a suspected training ground for IS fighters.

“We see that some foreign terrorist fighters from overseas come to Indonesia.

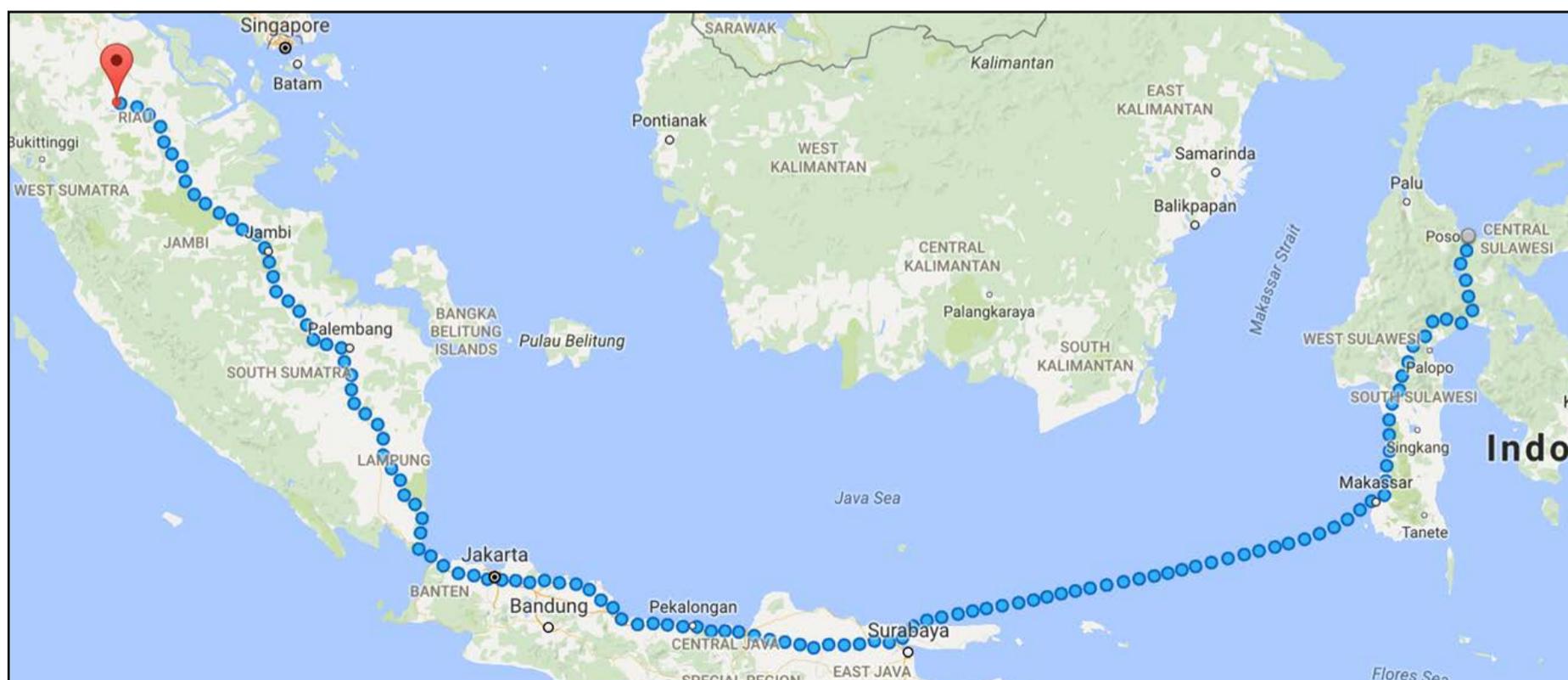
“First they leave Malaysia and head for Pekanbaru (Sumatra) to Puncak (west Java) - it’s all facilitated by asylum seeker networks, then from Puncak they would leave to Makassar and Poso, with facilitation from ISIS network.

“So we need to stay vigilant, more so because there is information that in Malaysia, there are thousands, a lot of foreign terrorist fighters there who are about to be deployed - we don’t know where to - under the network,” the report said citing Saud.

Saud described the IS threat against Indonesia as “significantly serious”.

Saud was quoted as saying that 76 Indonesians had returned from Syria, while 52 died there and four acted as suicide bombers.

He added that there were many areas under close watch in Indonesia, including the increasingly popular holiday destination of Lombok.



The map shows the overland and maritime route from Pekanbaru, Sumatra (with the red pin) to Poso, Sulawesi.

Chinese Commentary on Big Power Relations: The US and China

5 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: China's Central Military Commission newspaper recently published an article by Zhang Wenzong, who works at the Institute of American Studies at China's Institute of Contemporary International Relation. The purpose of the article appears to be to highlight progress being made in US-China relations, which enables the avoidance of a "Thucydides trap" (as one power [China] rises, an already established power [US] gets nervous and gears up for a potential war). The article is cast in the framework of China's rise and the US's "relative decline." China is presented as taking on the role of increasing trust and dispelling doubts, with Chairman Xi able to demonstrate determination, increased trust, the attainment of positive results, and improved relations, while President Obama is seen as one who works with China to help strike a balance between cooperation and competition. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

Source: Zhang Wenzong: "Promoting the Construction of the China-US New-Model Big Power Relations Onto a New Stage – Third Interpretation on the Results of Chairman Xi Jinping's Visit to the United States and Presence at the Series of Summits on the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the United Nations," *Jiefangjun Bao Online*, 5 October 2015, p. 4

The Chinese side defined Chairman Xi's visit as a trip to increase trust, dispel doubts, focus on cooperation, face the people, and create the future. With a cooperative posture, the sincerity for reconciliation, and a spirit of amity, we treat the US side with candor, expand cooperation, and manage and control differences. Not only is this in line with the general trend of the world but it also adheres to the main stream of China-US relations.

Compared with the concrete achievements attained in cooperation, the fact that the two sides had a consensus on how to see and handle differences in the right light seemed even more commendable. China and the United States differ in national conditions, histories, developmental stages, and cultural values. It is inevitable that we have different views about some issues. However, the two sides did not shy away from admitting the differences we have on issues, but instead demonstrated our resolve to manage and control differences effectively with a cooperative spirit. The two heads of state agreed to see each other's strategic intent in the right light, keep advancing strategic mutual trust, and avoid strategic misunderstanding and misjudgment.

What is even more important is that, through the visit, Chairman Xi demonstrated to the United States and the world China's resolute determination to further deepen reform and expand the scope of opening up; he clarified China's long-held position on being a participant, builder, contributor, and reformer in the current international system, and expressed China's strategic intent to never expand, never seek hegemony, and to adhere to peaceful development.

All sectors in the United States must understand that containing China will not work, counterbalancing China will not get them far, and the only proper way to go is to pursue mutual benefit and cooperation.

China hopes that the United States recognizes that China's peaceful rise and its "China Dream" to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation are not only inevitable in history but also in line with US interests and a blessing for the Asia Pacific and the world at large.

“Since the 2008 financial crisis, with China's rise and the relative decline of the United States, strategic interactions between the two nations have risen to a new stage. There have been deeper mutual strategic mistrust and intensified strategic competitions. The two nations have wrestled over the East China Sea and South China Sea issues, argued over cyberspace security, and sulked over the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the 'Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement.' All these appeared to attest to the 'Thucydides' trap' foreseen by theorists and historians.”

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>

SOE Reform: Private Funds for China's Public Purposes

20 October 2015

“Party organizations at all levels must take responsibility for the selection of all business leaders, managers, independent directors, supervisors, etc.”

OE Watch Commentary: If there was any more need for proof of China's influence on the global economy, the equity and bond market gyrations of the past few months seem to put the proof to that influence. In June China's stock market started a two-month 40% decline. In August the government regulator responsible for the country's currency, the Yuan, intervened to effectively depreciate the currency 3% relative to the US dollar. Starved of information on China's economic health common in market economies, global markets from New York to Jakarta fell. The global reaction was also driven by heavy-handed Chinese government intervention. Refuting its own goal of allowing market forces a “decisive role” in price setting, the government restricted trade in three quarters of China-listed stocks and executed a currency devaluation which could not but affect developed country prices of China's imports as well as put competitive pressure on other emerging market exporters competing with Chinese goods.

These stock market dynamics are important to strategic China-watchers because the country's financial markets are a growing source of capital for Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOE). China has about 150,000 SOEs, employing at least 30 million Chinese, with a valuation, according to China's government, of 100 trillion Yuan (\$15.7 trillion US dollars). Capital raised on the market (domestic as well as foreign money) reduces that needed from the Chinese government to finance operations, power research & development, and acquire overseas competitors and technology.

The first article is from the Shanghai Stock Exchange (SSE), valued as the world's fifth largest stock market. The press release concerns the growing strategic partnership between the SSE (itself an SOE) and China's principal military aviation SOE, AVIC. The two entities are cooperating to add firepower to AVIC's capital structure, with the goal of modernizing China's military industry. Through the listing of AVIC subsidiaries, the intent is to raise capital from the private sector to expand AVIC's operations and fund its capital-intensive research and development activities. The hoped-for twin results are to improve AVIC corporate efficiency through exposure to SSE market forces while deepening and improving SSE's status as a global financial marketplace on a par with the New York Stock Exchange.

Along the same lines as AVIC's robust expansion in China's capital markets, the second article speaks to the government's declaration of intent to reform SOE structures to improve their corporate efficiency. As China's overall growth rate falls, so does the economic burden of carrying SOEs, which perform relatively poorly compared to the Chinese private sector. However, as is clear from *Qiushi*, the official Party mouthpiece, reform shall only strengthen, not dilute Party influence over corporate strategy and, ultimately, behavior.

The third article highlights the growing relevance of Chinese defense SOEs not only for equipping the People's Liberation Army but also as arms exporters of growing global significance. Whether it is frigates to Algeria or drones to Africa, Chinese military hardware is going overseas because Chinese military SOEs have the capital available to fund their production of competitive arms and munitions.

To bring this analysis back from the tactical to the strategic level, an enormously important question is: Can the Party have its cake and eat it too? In other words, can economic efficiency among Chinese SOEs be boosted in practice when that practice remains tightly bound to the interests of the Party? **End OE Watch Commentary (Zandoli)**

Source: “SSE, AVIC Ink Strategic Cooperation Agreement,” *Shanghai Stock Exchange Press Release*, 24 April 2015. http://english.sse.com.cn/aboutsse/news/c/c_20150427_3915222.shtml.

The strategic cooperation propelled by the SSE and AVIC shows the Chinese capital market's innovation in supporting the modernization of the military industry. On the basis of building a multi-tiered capital market and increasing the direct financing proportion of enterprises in the military industry, the two sides will vigorously boost the military and civilian integration, build a mid-and-high-end industry structure and accelerate the transition of China from a manufacture giant to a manufacture power as mentioned in the “2025: Made in China.”

Source: “Why we must adhere to deepening SOE reform, strengthen and improve the party's leadership” *Qiushi*, 10 October 2015. http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/hqwg/2015-10/10/c_1116781265.htm?utm_source=The+Sinocism+China+Newsletter&utm_campaign=cf90a0f0fc-Sinocism10_14_1510_14_2015&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_171f237867-cf90a0f0fc-29637657&mc_cid=cf90a0f0fc&mc_eid=6a3735608e.

In the future deepening of SOE reform, the Party organizations at all levels must take responsibility for the selection of all business leaders, managers, independent directors, supervisors, etc., to carry out a political study, for their views, positions, and ideological errors.

Source: “Less expensive weapons could serve foreign buyers,” *China Daily*, 21 September 2015. <http://en.people.cn/n/2015/0921/c90000-8952532.html>.

Foreign arms purchasers can forget about getting their hands on Chinese-made ballistic and cruise missiles, such as those displayed in the Sept 3 Victory parade, because although they are extremely powerful and of great military use, a host of statutory obstacles prevent overseas sales, according to a military expert. Potential buyers need not feel frustrated, though, because business-savvy Chinese arms manufacturers have prepared a number of alternatives.

Chinese Perspectives on Russia's Air Strikes in Syria

14 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: In September 2015 Russia began carrying out air strikes in Syria purportedly against the Islamic State (ISIL), but mostly against a coalition of rebels, including Al-Qaeda's affiliate in northwestern Syria. Western countries consider these strikes unhelpful to securing peace and solving the political impasse in Syria. However, as the excerpted Chinese-language article for *Huanqiu Shibao* shows, such criticisms tend to be much less pronounced in non-Western countries, such as China.

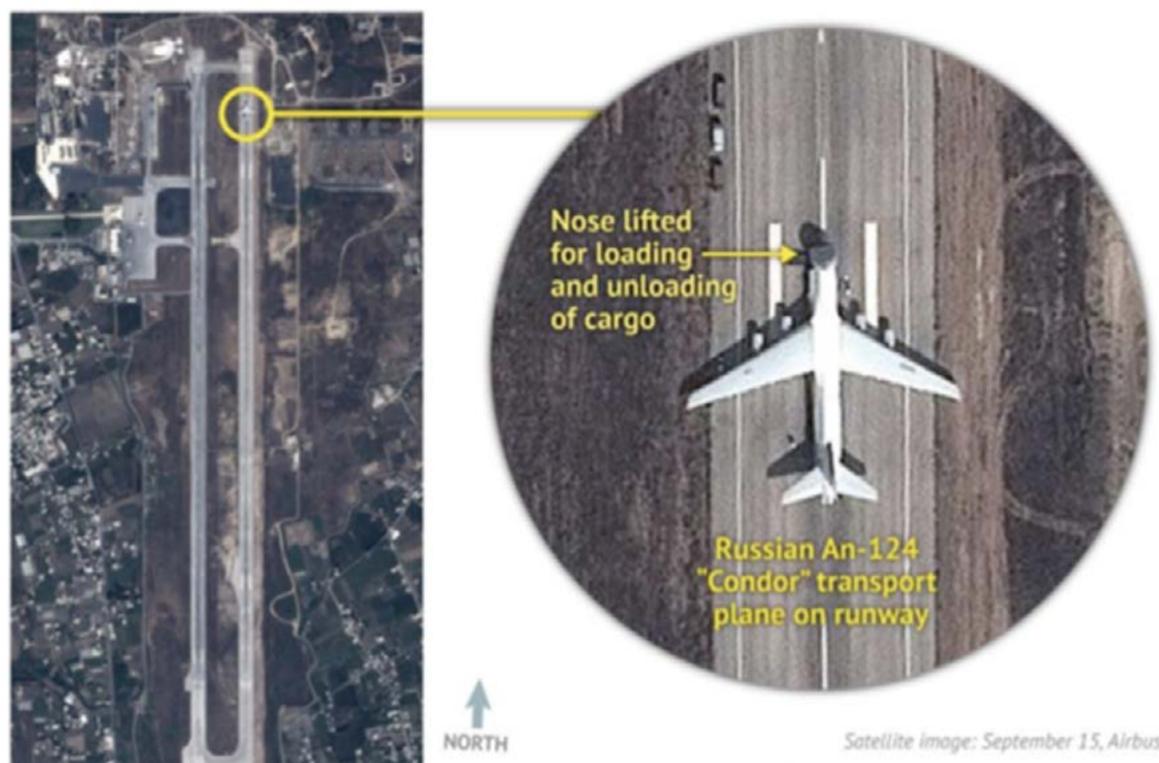
The article calls the Russian air strikes in northwestern Syria a success. It does not, however, discuss the fact that, although Russia claimed its strikes would target ISIL, the large majority of the air strikes are not targeting ISIL, but rather other rebels who are a more direct threat to taking key cities from the Syrian government. The contradiction in Russia's rhetoric and actions has, in contrast, been the focus of most Western reporting on Russia's air strikes in Syria.

The article discusses positive reactions to the Russian strikes from Egyptian media and at pro-Russian protests in front of the Russian embassy in Damascus. While there are no plans and little likelihood that China will involve itself militarily in Syria, this article shows that Chinese perceptions of the Russian intervention in Syria take on a much more positive tone than in the West. This is consistent with China's view that Syria will be more stable with the current Assad government. Moreover, China may believe that Russia's air strikes are more likely to eradicate the main anti-Chinese militant group in Syria, the Turkistan Islamic Party, a coalition in northwestern Syria that, although not part of ISIL, is under attack from Russia.

As such, the military forces of the West will unlikely be able to count on significant support from China, nor from some other mid-level powers like Egypt, in their efforts to build an international coalition to pressure the Syrian government both militarily and diplomatically. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“A large number of Syrian people gathered in front of the Russian embassy in Syria, and were holding Russian flags and portraits of Vladimir Putin thanking him for military action against the Islamic State organization (IS).”

RUSSIAN AN-124 "CONDOR" TRANSPORT PLANE



For several months, a Russian military build-up was seen in Syria, and now Russia is striking rebel positions while receiving support from some of its partners abroad, such as China and Egypt.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com/content/russia-eyeing-payoff-military-buildup-syria/2968799.html>

Source: “A Large Number of Syrian People Hold Rally, ‘Thanks to Russia, Thanks to Putin’,” *Huanqiu Shibao*, 14 October 2015.

A Large Number of Syrian People Hold Rally, ‘Thanks to Russia, Thanks for Putin’

The Syrian military said in a statement that with the air strikes in Russia, the Syrian government forces have achieved important results against the terrorist organizations on the ground in military operations in a number of areas in the northern province of Aleppo, Latakia province and central Hama province's 13 towns and villages. A large number of Syrian people gathered in front of the Russian embassy in Syria, and were holding Russian flags and portraits of Vladimir Putin thanking him for military action against The Islamic State organization (IS). However, opposition armed extremist organizations have become an eyesore. While Syrian people were at the rally, two shells hit the Russian embassy in Syria, but caused no casualties.

In fact, not only in Syria, in the entire Middle East, Russian action against IS has been widely welcomed by the people. An Egyptian television news show host did a broadcast on the 13th Russian Air Force division that attacked IS. Moussa pointed to the picture and said, “Look, this is Russia, which is the Russian army, which is Putin. The air assault images show the effectiveness of the Russian air raid against IS in Syria, which are so precise.” At the same time that he was full of praise for Putin, he also mentioned Obama: “Obama is too weak in the US, where for more than a year, we did not see one terrorist was who eliminated.”

Romania Rejects Russian Objections to NATO Missiles

15 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying article, NATO is slated to build military bases in Romania and Poland this year, to include anti-missile systems. Russia views this build-up of NATO capabilities as a threat to its national security and pressured Romania to reject the military base.

However, Romania is one of NATO's strongest regional supporters and Romanian officials stress the defensive nature of the newest missile systems. As quoted in the accompanying article, Romania's prime minister does not believe this military base violates the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. Russia disagrees and has threatened a response of some kind should NATO build the missile systems in Romania. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

“A Russian foreign ministry official warned Washington and Bucharest to drop the plan or face unspecified consequences.”

Source: Chiriac, Marian. “Romania Rejects Russian Objections to NATO Missiles.” *Balkan Insight*. 15 October 2015. <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/romania-stays-firm-on-nato-missile-defence-plans-10-14-2015>>

“Prime Minister Victor Ponta said on Wednesday that the anti-missile system which is to be installed at the Deveselu military base in southern Romania does not violate the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, as Russia has claimed.

Ponta argued that there was no violation of the treaty ‘because the anti-missile system is a defence system’.

...His comments came after a Russian foreign ministry official warned Washington and Bucharest to drop the plan or face unspecified consequences.

... Scheduled to become operational by the end of this year, the base will be staffed by 200 to 500 US military, civilian and contract employees. The work at Deveselu involves an estimated investment of \$400 million in the base, which ironically was originally built by the Soviet Union in 1952.”

Germany Declares Balkan “Safe Countries” Unable to Claim Asylum

15 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: As the migrant crisis in Europe continues, Balkan states are struggling to respond not only to the influx of foreign refugees through their borders, but also those emigrating from other Balkan states. As the article states, Germany expanded its list of safe (non-threatening) countries of origin, which disallows most emigrants from these Balkan states to apply for asylum in Germany. The list of “safe” countries of origin now includes Kosovo, Albania, and Montenegro, as well as all EU member states, Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia.

This legislation allows Germany to expel migrants from these countries more quickly, sending them back to the Balkans and placing additional pressure on Balkan countries to handle the flow of other migrants. In response, many Balkan states, including Hungary and Macedonia, are considering building walls along their borders to keep migrants out, and Hungary and Croatia both are taking matters further by preparing their military to uphold order by force. **End OE Watch Commentary (Jackson)**

“Asylum claims from nationals of these countries are likely to be rejected.”

Source: “Germany Tightens Asylum Rules to Cope With Refugee Flux.” *Spanish News*. 15 October 2015. <http://spanishnewstoday.com/germany-tightens-asylum-rules-to-cope-with-refugee-influx_33193-a.html>

“Germany expects a record influx of more than 800,000 migrants this year, by far the most in the European Union. With the new legislation, Berlin is aiming to better cope with the unprecedented numbers of new arrivals and to stem the influx.

The package includes widening the list of countries deemed ‘safe’, meaning their citizens generally have no chance of getting asylum, to include Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro. Among those already in that category are Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia.

The aim is to speed up asylum and extradition procedures for migrants from southeastern Europe, in order to focus on refugees from war-torn countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.”

Source: Tomovic, Dusica. “Germany Curbs Balkan Rights to Claim Asylum.” *Balkan Insight*. 08 September 2015. <<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/germany-tightens-up-on-balkan-migrants-09-08-2015>>

“Under the plan, asylum applicants from the Western Balkan countries are as a rule to be made to stay in preliminary reception centers, where the authorities will help set up winter-proof accommodation for 150,000 people.

The maximum length of stay for the refugees there is to be extended from three to six months. The refugees are to be obliged to remain in residence there for that period.

Applicants who have been rejected are to be deported to their home countries more quickly than they have been in the past

A Look at Corruption in Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Defense

14 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary:

Recent corruption charges against Kyrgyzstan's minister of defense and other high-level officials in the ministry have brought the issue of corruption in the country's defense and security structures into focus. According to the accompanying article, this particular case is characteristic of the overall problem. As the article reports, the case involved the minister of defense and his deputy, in addition to the head of the ministry's finances and the director of the ministry's construction department. The article, which lists no author, is critical of the corruption that has been taking place within the Ministry of Defense and lists some of the schemes and ways that officers and officials steal money or even property.

This kind of corruption has been previously discussed in various media in Kyrgyzstan (though this article goes into more detail on the schemes than usual), and this is not the first time that the head of a ministry or agency has been removed on corruption charges. Around two years ago the head of Kyrgyzstan's Border Guards was removed for submitting a fraudulent expense report. It is worth remembering that the minister of defense became a subordinate position to the chief of the general staff during a restructuring over a year ago. One of the reasons for the restructuring was to carry out some reforms within the defense and security services, and this case could be evidence of that; however, the article alludes to corruption cases in the military prosecutor's office that have not resulted in any convictions. How this most recent case plays out could be an important measurement of ongoing reforms. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“A corruption scandal has shocked the Defense Ministry of Kyrgyzstan. At the center of the scandal is none other than the Minister of Defense Abibilla Kudayberdiev, his deputy, the head of the ministry's financial department and the director of “Asker Kurulush.””

Source: “Военная тайна генералов” (The military secret of generals), *K News*, 14 October 2015. http://www.knews.kg/analitika/70607_voennaya_tayna_generalov/

The Military Secret of Generals

...A corruption scandal has shocked the Defense Ministry of Kyrgyzstan. At the center of the scandal is none other than the Minister of Defense Abibilla Kudayberdiev, his deputy, the head of the ministry's financial department and the director of “Asker Kurulush.” These official are charged with the embezzlement of 12 million Som (\$175,000). The Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of Kyrgyzstan Almazbek Atambayev signed a decree on the dismissal of Kudayberdiev...

The damage is done through pushing their own firms to construction work without a government tender. More than 50 percent of this work was carried out at a higher price...the scheme of distribution is as such: the minister of defense gets 15 percent, deputy minister gets 10, and other government interests get the remainder...

...the director of “Asker Kurulush” Kubanychbek Kalkozhoyev was arrested in September while bribing an official...It is possible to assume that the corruption investigation against Kalkozhoyev led to the minister and other high-level officials...According to retired officers, the main corruption schemes taking place are in the construction of military facilities, within the admission for alternative service, the distribution of apartments for service members, as well as write-offs and theft of military property...The battle with corruption has yet to unravel all of the “military secrets” of generals and senior officers, which are gathering dust in the folders of the archive of the military prosecutor's office.



Kyrgyzstan's former Minister of Defense is facing corruption charges along with several of his associates. **Source:** <http://www.rferl.org/content/kyrgyzstan-defense-minister-corruption-investigation/27301469.html>

Kazakhstan and Turkey Conduct Joint SF Exercise: the First of Many?

2 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Special forces units of Kazakhstan have almost exclusively conducted joint exercises with Russia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), or the Commonwealth of Independent States' Antiterrorist Center (CIS ATC), but, as the accompanying article reports, one of these units appears to be branching out to work with other partners. In the past Kazakhstan and Turkey have conducted joint exercises that focused on peacekeeping with conventional units. Kazakhstan has been actively involved with the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, and as a NATO member Turkey has sent participants or observers to several of the annual "Steppe Eagle" peacekeeping exercises. This is in addition to a peacekeeping command post exercise last year in Istanbul with multiple NATO partners and several officers from Kazakhstan's Peacekeeping Brigade.

Kazakh forces may have taken away some operational lessons from this exercise, at least from what the officer said, but there could be a long-term benefit for Kazakhstan. The article does not mention if Turkish forces participated in this exercise through the PfP program or if this is a bilateral effort with Kazakhstan, though there is another exercise set to take place next year in Turkey. One key difference between this exercise with Turkey and any exercises with the CSTO or the CIS ATC is that there is a framework within the two organizations to share intelligence and, in certain circumstances, conduct a joint operation. The PfP program with Kazakhstan's involvement works mostly on developing Kazakh forces for interoperability with NATO in a potential peacekeeping mission. There is a counterterrorism component within Kazakhstan's PfP program, specifically in the Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism, but this exercise is most likely a bilateral effort outside of NATO involvement. If this is the case, a Kazakhstan-Turkey partnership in this capacity would be something to keep an eye on. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“A special forces exercise, “The path of the cheetah,” of units from Kazakhstan and Turkey took place for the first time at the training range of the Ground Forces Institute of Kazakhstan.”

Source: Plyaskina, Nadezhda. “Спецназ: на учениях как в бою” (Special forces: train as you fight), *Vremya* (Time), 2 October 2015. <http://www.time.kz/articles/territory/2015/10/02/specnaz-na-uchenijah-kak-v-boju>

Special Forces: Train as You Fight

A special forces exercise, “The path of the cheetah,” of units from Kazakhstan and Turkey took place for the first time at the training range of the Ground Forces Institute of Kazakhstan. “Our Turkish colleagues have gained a huge amount of combat experience since 1952,” – said Col Zhurabaev... “When the Turkish forces saw our thermal imaging cameras and other modern equipment, they were surprised, though we took away a lot from this exercise. For example, for each operation they very carefully developed at least three options with clear criteria for the failure of the operation, down to the smallest details of a rescue plan and evacuation of the special forces...”

The ten day exercise was carried out during the day and at night. The soldiers made a night jump from an altitude of 3000-4000 meters and delayed opening by 40 seconds...after landing, the two groups marched 50 km and shot at targets...The exercise also involved the Air Defense Forces of Kazakhstan and about 170 soldiers, a dozen armored vehicles and army aviation units...Next year the exercise will be in Turkey...



Sources: “Flag of Kazakhstan”. Licensed under Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Kazakhstan.png#/media/File:Flag_of_Kazakhstan.png; “Turkey Flag 2 per 3” by Ciantic - Own work. Licensed under CC0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Turkey_Flag_2_per_3.svg#/media/File:Turkey_Flag_2_per_3.svg

The Impact of the September Operation in Tajikistan

21 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: The government of Tajikistan recently announced that the operation to eliminate former Deputy Defense Minister General Abduhalim Nazarzoda and his supporters was successful, but there are still a number of unclear things about the shootings in Dushanbe and Vahdat on 4 September that led to the operation. The accompanying article provides some information about the ordeal worth noting. It mentions how the government blamed Nazarzoda for the shootings and claimed that his overall goal was to overthrow the government. It also points out the conflicting information on how Nazarzoda was reported as being a member of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, but how this would not have been allowed, since a serving officer cannot legally be a member of a political party. There were a few dozen alleged Nazarzoda supporters arrested in the days after 4 September and killed in the operation, but there is no mention of how many of them were actively serving in the military.

The death of the “Alpha” unit commander while going after Nazarzoda marks another significant loss during an operation over the past several years: a colonel from the Interior Ministry special purpose unit (OMON) was killed during an operation in 2008 and one third of the “Alpha” unit was killed in a helicopter crash while conducting an operation in 2010. Perhaps more importantly, it happened within months of the commander of the Interior Ministry’s OMON unit leaving Tajikistan to join the Islamic State, not to mention the removal of someone as high ranking as Nazarzoda, the Deputy Defense Minister. The details of what happened in September may not be known for some time, but the losses this year of senior officers in the military and security services may have an immediate impact. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“During the clashes the commander of the GKNB antiterrorist “Alpha” unit, Colonel Rustam Amakiev and three members of OMON and “Alpha” ...”



Former Deputy Minister of Defense Abduhalim Nazarzoda was involved with the United Tajik Opposition during the Tajik Civil War (1992-97)

Source: <http://www.silkroadreporters.com/2015/09/18/anti-terrorism-prompts-political-repression-in-tajikistan/>

Source: “Мятежный генерал ликвидирован” (The rebellious general has been eliminated), *Asia-Plus*, 21 September 2015. <http://news.tj/ru/newspaper/article/myatezhnyi-general-likvidirovan>

The rebellious general has been eliminated

...the Interior Ministry and State Committee of National Security of Tajikistan (GKNB) announced on September 16 the completion of the antiterrorist operation to eliminate General Nazarzoda...the operation involved elite units of the Interior Ministry, GKNB, helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles...the members of Nazarzoda’s group were blocked around the town of Gushev, Ramit Gorge, 110 km from Vahdat...During the clashes the commander of the GKNB antiterrorist “Alpha” unit, Colonel Rustam Amakiev and three members of OMON and “Alpha”...

...on September 4 in Tajikistan there were attacks on police, which resulted in nine policemen killed and more than ten injured. Authorities blamed the attacks on the armed group led by Nazarzoda...According to authorities, the general seized a large amount of weapons and ammunition and took them from Dushanbe in three KAMAZ trucks...

Immediately after the charges were filed against Nazarzoda came a report that he is a member of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), though officers of security agencies cannot legally be members of a political party. This was followed by charges, which were already voiced in government reports, that Nazarzoda had connections with IRPT leader Kabiri and that the rebel general attempted to overthrow the government...the report also stated that Nazarzoda fought for the Islamic opposition during the Civil War (1992-1997)...

Pay in the Russian Military

23 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has a complex system for paying its officers and now contract NCOs, which requires some description. The biggest difference between the US and Russian systems of military pay is the concept of base salary and entitlements. In the US monetary entitlements (including housing allowances) are almost always a percentage of the base salary, in Russia the base salary is merely the starting point for calculating entitlements. A few entitlements are allotted by a fixed ruble amount, but the majority are calculated by indexing the base salary by a given percentage. The sum of these additional entitlements is always many times greater than the soldier's base salary.

The two most important criteria for pay are the soldier's rank and position held (serviceman receive both salaries). Rank-based salaries are based on equivalent responsibility/skill levels of federal government employees, while the position salary is based upon the soldier's current duty assignment, which must be on a valid organization and equipment document. Positional salaries are typically higher than rank-based salaries, and are set by the Russian Ministry of Defense; for example, in this system, a lieutenant colonel serving as a battalion commander is paid more than a lieutenant colonel serving on a brigade staff. Both rank and positional salary tables are pinned to the Russian Federation civilian pay scales and receive equivalent indexes for inflation.

Interestingly, officers are legally considered a type of contract serviceman. Their pay and benefits are governed by the same laws, rules, and regulations as their enlisted subordinates who also serve under contract (not conscripts.) Officers and enlisted soldiers serving on contract sign similar contracts for set periods. Although Russian officers and contract soldiers are in the same legal category, there is a sharp distinction between enlisted soldiers serving on contract and officers in the Russian Army: Russian officers are never referred to as "contract officers."

In addition to the base salary officers receive several additional special pays, which are covered under Article 13 of the Federal Law "On the Status of Serviceman." Most special pays are based on the soldier's base salary (rank or position). The income a soldier receives from special pays is often many times greater than his base salary. Article 13 stipulates officers receive monthly allowances for the following: length of service, location, hardship and special circumstances duty, exemplary service bonus, physical fitness, and supplemental subsistence allowance. In addition, there are several one-time, lump-sum payments, and meal and clothing allowances.

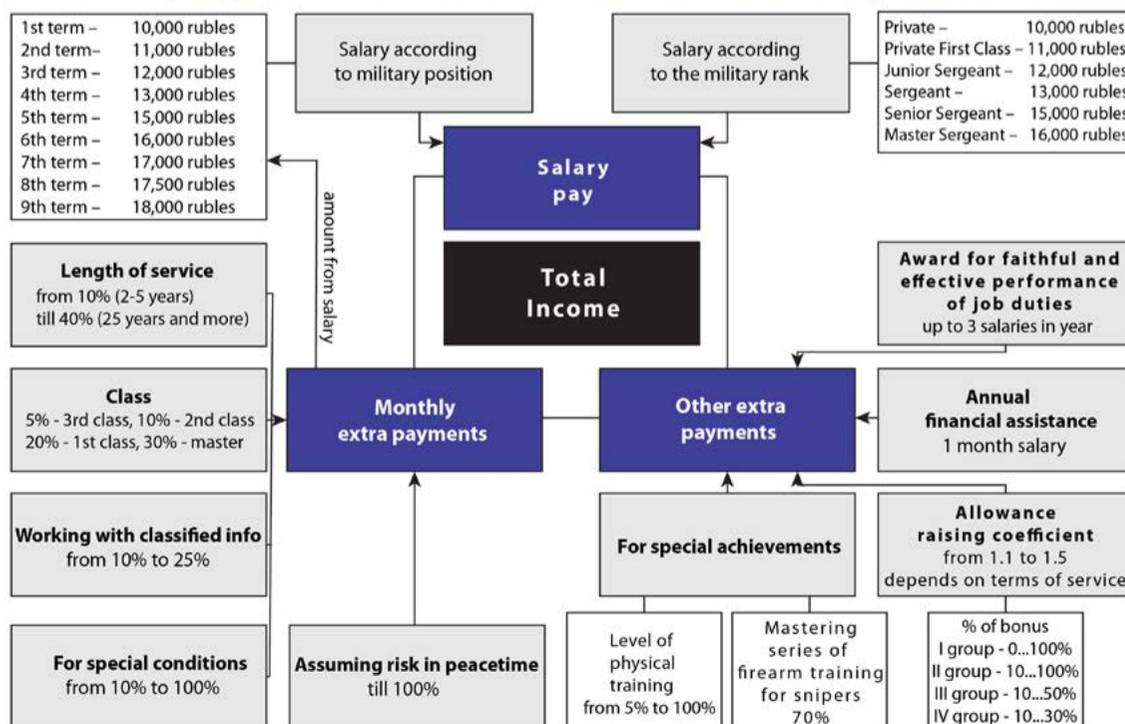
The most contentious issue regarding pay in the Russian military has been housing. In Soviet times military benefits included higher salaries and greater access to fringe benefits such as free vacation resorts, premium medical facilities, and more educational opportunities for children, but the greatest benefit was access to housing. Housing in the Soviet era was state controlled and difficult to obtain. Military service guaranteed access to state-provided housing while serving, and during retirement. In today's Russia this arrangement is still maintained, and it has stymied some military reform efforts (such as downsizing) due to the legal requirement that officers must be provided housing (usually in the form of an apartment) before retirement. In the past housing has been in such short supply that some officers have been kept on active duty years past their planned retirement dates before housing could be provided. The Russian Federation has made great efforts to "right" the military housing issue, including the development of a military subsidized home mortgage program. This issue has been largely resolved, but occasionally embarrassing incidents still come to light.

In general, Russia's economic situation has greatly improved since the early years of the Russian Federation, and stories of destitute Russian soldiers have long passed. Russian military salaries, to include the intelligence and security services, are now dependable and somewhat competitive with the civilian sector. The accompanying article and graphic discuss some of the details of the Russian military pay system. Although the graphic is intended to display information just for enlisted MoD soldier's serving on contract, many of the pays and allowances are equally applicable to officers and other military personnel serving in other branches of government (MVD-VV, FSB, Border Troops, etc.). **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: "Military Financial Literacy," *Voyenno-Promyshlenny Kuryer Online*, 23 September 2015, <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27161>>, accessed 14 October 2015.

Military pay consists of a month's salary in accordance with the rank, post assigned, and other additional entitlements. (Article 3 of the Federal Law of November 7, 2011 № 306-FZ "On Military Pay And Providing Specific Benefits"). When entering contract military service, servicemen paid allowance, which is the primary means of providing them with supplies and encouraging military service (Article 2 of the Federal Law of November 7, 2011 № 306-FZ "On Military Pay and Individual Payments"). The minimum amount of money allowances in an enlistment contract is 17 thousand rubles (\$270.00). This amount is further increased by taking into account the position assigned, military rank, longevity of service, tasks performed, and conditions of service...(Article 25 of the Federal Law of November 7, 2011 № 306-FZ "About Military Pay And Providing Specific Benefits")...

Military Pay Structure for Privates and Sergeants Serving on Contract



<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27161>

Russia Fields New Linux-Based Secure Operating Systems for the Military, Intelligence, and Security Services

24 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Russia has long been a firm believer in the concept of “net-centric warfare.” This theory prescribes that success in an armed struggle is dependent on not only numerical strength and firepower, but also information dominance. Russia has had varying degrees of success developing a suitable C2 system for this purpose.

The key components to any C2 system are the individual computers and, more importantly, their operating systems that form the network. The accompanying articles discuss Russia’s fielding of a new generation of computer operating systems known as “Zarya.” Russia has long been suspicious of foreign, especially American-produced operating systems for use in handling classified information for its military, intelligence, and security services. Since at least 2002 Russia has fielded its own operating systems for such purposes, but apparently their capabilities were limited. Russia’s new “Zarya” operating system is Linux-based, POSIX-compliant, and based upon a 64-bit architecture. Interestingly, “Zarya” appears to be a family of operating systems for desktop/laptops, servers, and mobile devices with many capabilities, as discussed in the accompanying

graphic. It has also been designed to work in conjunction with the new Russian military identity cards, which have a chip for encryption purposes, and for storing personal and medical data. Although not mentioned in the accompanying articles, it is likely that the “Zarya” operating system was designed to be compatible with other Russian C2 systems, such as the *Andromeda-D* and *Strelets*, which are also likely based on the Linux kernel. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: New Secure Operating System Ready to Begin Series Production, TASS Online, 24 September 2015, <<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/2286904>>, access 14 October 2015.

Moscow, 24 September: The United Instrument-Building Corporation (OPK, part of Rostec) is ready to start supplying Russian security agencies with the updated operating System Zarya, which makes it possible to safely process classified information, the corporation’s press service announced today. “The system has undergone all the necessary tests and received a series-production permit. The system of electronic ‘military service cards’, servicemen’s personal cards that are being introduced in the Russian army, will be operating on basis of Zarya,” OPK said.

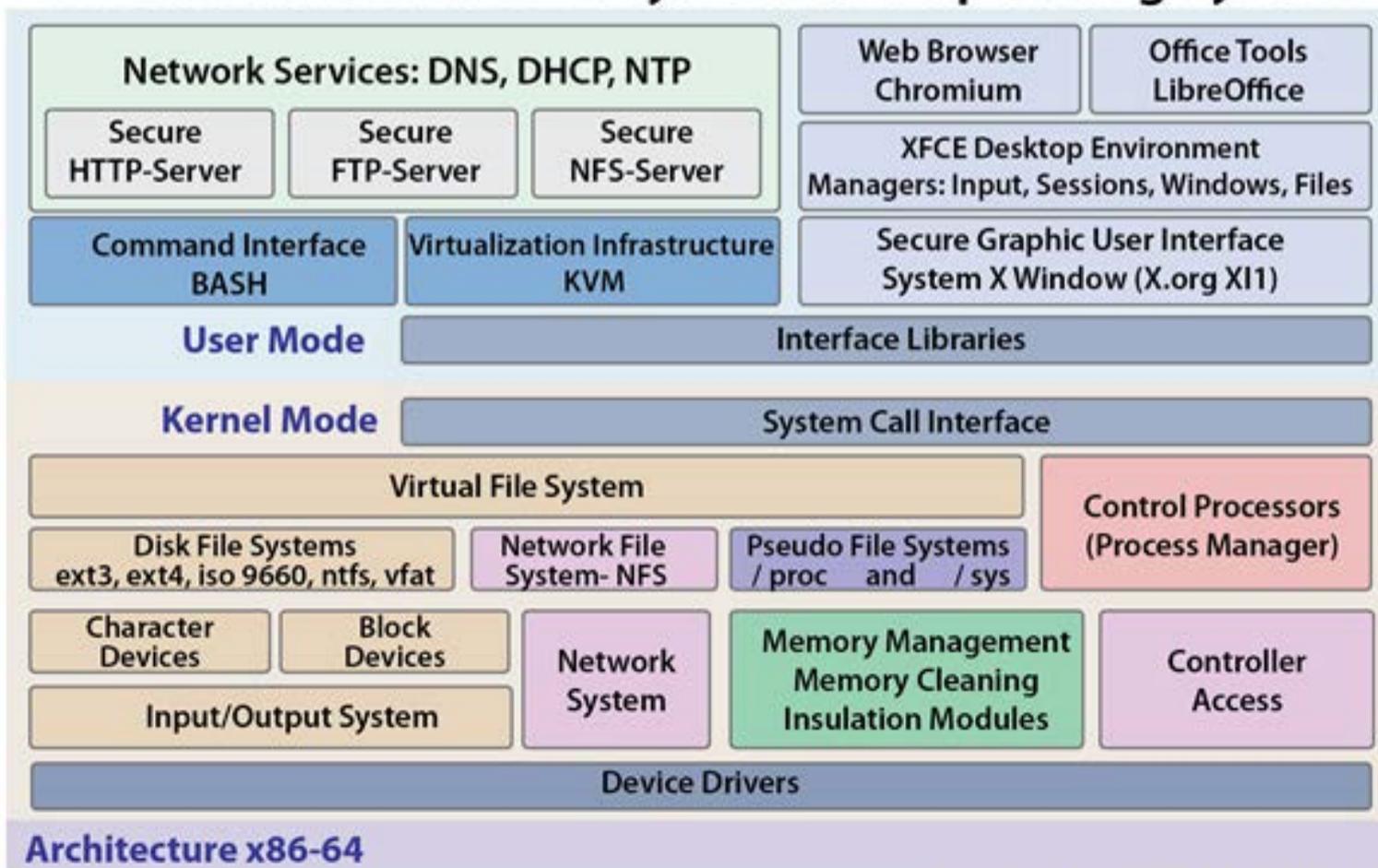
Zarya is being developed by the Central Research Institute of Economics, Informatics and Management Systems, commissioned by the Russian Defense Ministry. The OS has successfully passed state tests this year. According to the corporation, it meets the requirements of class three protection against unauthorized access and level two control of the absence of undocumented features.

These operating systems can be used both to organize full-fledged workplaces with familiar services and office program, and as a basis for automated control systems, as well as to create data processing centers. Zarya-based equipment makes it possible to work with information classified as “top secret”, as confirmed by certification in the Defense Ministry system, OPK emphasized.

Zarya is a family of operating systems, which includes, in particular, a desktop version and the server one, Zarya-TsOD. The project’s potential customers are the military and other security services, the military-industrial complex, and other commercial structures working with state secrets, commercial and personal data, the corporation believes.

(continued)

The Structure of the “Zarya” Secure Operating System



<http://www.cniieisu.ru/>

Continued: Russia Fields New Linux-Based Secure Operating Systems for the Military, Intelligence, and Security Services

Source: Defense Industry Complex Ready To Begin Serial Deliveries of Spy-Protected Zarya Operating System to Security Agencies,” Unified Instrument Manufacturing Corporation, 24 September 2015, <<http://opkrt.ru/index.php/news/321-opk-gotova-nachat-serijnye-postavki-zashchishchennoj-ot-shpionov-os-zarya-dlya-silovikov>>, accessed 14 October 2015.

The Unified Instrument Manufacturing Corporation is ready to start deliveries of the updated Zarya operating system which makes it possible to work safely with secret information and personal data. The system passed all the necessary tests and received a permit for mass production. In particular, a system of electronic “military cards” [somewhat like the Common Access Cards] - personal cards for military personnel which have been introduced into the Russian Army - will operate based on the Zarya...

The Zarya is a family of operating systems, which together could totally replace the foreign operating systems being used now in security agencies, the state sector, and the country’s defense enterprises. The Zarya desktop operating system has the eponymous operating system, which is compatible with most traditional office applications and programs. The Zarya-TsOD Server operating system facilitates the organization of an applications server or database server...

“It is hard to find such a combination of features and capabilities on the market of certified secure operating systems today,” Konstantin Solodukhin, first deputy general director of the Economics, Information Technology, and Control Systems Central Research Institute, said. “The Zarya takes into account the experience of using the previous generation of protected operating systems...”

Potential users of Zarya include security agencies, the defense complex, and commercial structures working with state secrets and commercial and personal data. The Zarya will be used in particular by data processing centers that serve the system of electronic “military cards” currently being created in Russia - personal cards that contains several dozen parameters on servicemen, all the records including their state of health. This project is implemented under the supervision of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces.



Source: <http://narodhz.ru/news/regionalnye/1228-prizyvnikam-samarskoj-oblasti-vydadut-personalnye-elektronnye-karty>

Russia’s Multipurpose and Airmobile “Zauralets” Artillery System: A Big Gun on a Little Chassis

6 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: For several reasons, the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) are a mechanized force, a marked contrast from Western airborne forces, which are typically described as “light infantry.” The Soviets believed in the concept of “deep battle,” which required high levels of mobility, leaving no place for any infantryman without vehicle transportation. Other reasons stem from the lethality of the modern battlefield and NBC protection, which the Soviets believed would be a factor in any conflict with NATO. Today Russia still believes in the importance of battlefield mobility and has all infantryman mounted on wheeled or tracked vehicles, including its special operations forces and airborne infantryman. In order to be “airmobile”
(continued)

Source: “The ‘Zauralets’ Self-Propelled Artillery System Has Completed Preliminary State Trials,” *Lenta Online*, 5 October 2015, <<http://lenta.ru/news/2015/10/05/zauralets/>>, accessed 13 October 2015.

The 120-mm self-propelled artillery system “Zauralets” has completed preliminary tests for acceptance by the Russian Airborne Troops (VDV). As reported by RIA Novosti’s interview with Dmitry Semizorov, general director of the company-developer of the Central Research Institute of Precision Engineering.

“We have now completed preliminary tests on the tracked, self-propelled 120-mm self-propelled Zauralets artillery system and have confirmed all requirements that have been met as specified by the customer. The customer [VDV] has decided to apply decided to pair this artillery system with a new chassis [BMD-4] and a new fire control system. “- said Semizorov.

In December 2014, Semizorov reported that in 2016 it is planned to put a few Zauralets” into service, with major deliveries occurring from 2017 to 2024. The system can be fielded in one of two calibers - 120 and 152 millimeters. Compared to existing systems, the “Zauralets” will have a more powerful projectile, with greater range.

The fact that Russia began developing a new self-propelled artillery piece under the code name “Zauralets” first became known in the fall of 2012, with state trials beginning in the summer of 2014. The Zauralets is a universal self-propelled firing system, and can function as a field gun, howitzer, or mortar. The Zauralets is intended to replace full-time 120-millimeter SAO amphibious forces - 2S9 “Nona-S”.

Continued: Russia's Multipurpose and Airmobile "Zauralets" Artillery System: A Big Gun on a Little Chassis

and mechanized, the VDV has had to utilize substantially lighter vehicles. Its newest 13.5-ton infantry fighting vehicle (BMD-4M) and 13-ton armored personnel carrier (BTR-MD) weigh several tons less than their cousins in the Ground Forces. Armor is so valued that the Russian VDV have recently decided to add a regular tank battalion (not airmobile) to each maneuver brigade and division. (For more information see: "Russian Airborne Adding Heavy Tanks to the Ranks," OEW June 2015.) In order to maintain an airmobile tank capability, the VDV have fielded light tanks capable of being transported and air-dropped with crew by the IL-76 transport aircraft. The amphibious 2S25 Sprut-SD is a 125mm tank turret mounted on a BMD chassis. Reportedly, new versions of the Sprut will be placed on a BMD-4M chassis and be equipped with new electronics, targeting, and fire control capabilities that will give it roughly the equivalent firepower of a T-90 tank.

The accompanying article discusses another Russian innovation in terms of a "big gun on a little chassis," the "Zauralets" artillery system. The Zauralets will replace the 2S9 Nona-S and is reportedly capable of functioning as a field gun, howitzer, and mortar. The Zauralets will come in 120mm and 152mm versions. If specifications are similar to that of the Sprut, the Zauralets will also be amphibious and air-droppable. Although not mentioned in the articles, it is likely that Zauralets will also be mounted on a heavily modified BMD-4M chassis with seven road wheels (as opposed to five). It will likely weigh slightly less than the Sprut (18 tons), or about half the weight of a Ground Forces 2S19 Msta-S self-propelled howitzer.

In general, airmobile operations require vehicles of lighter weight. The VDV have faced this reality, as the Sprut-SD and Zauralets exemplify, by sacrificing lots of armored protection, but very little lethality. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: "Zauralets self-propelled artillery weapons to enter service in Russian Airborne Troops in 2019," *Interfax*, 6 October 2014.

The Zauralets self-propelled artillery weapons and Zavet-D artillery control vehicles are expected to be introduced in the Airborne Troops in 2019, Airborne Troops artillery chief Col. Alexei Kostritsa said.

"I can definitely say that it will take the Zauralets self-propelled artillery weapon over a year to pass state tests. It was decided that the created combat module will be on a new base chassis unified with a BMD-4M Airborne Combat Vehicle, which require another two or three years. The Airborne Troops' artillery units will be armed with this weapon by 2019," Kostritsa said at the Innovation Day exhibition organized by the Russian Defense Ministry.

Another weapon currently being developed for the Airborne Troops is the Kornet anti-tank missile complex, while Zavet-D artillery control vehicle is at the experimental development stage and due to enter service around 2019, Kostritsa said.

In addition, modernization continues of the Nona self-propelled artillery weapon, the Reostate reconnaissance and artillery fire-control station and the 125-millimeter Sprut self-propelled anti-tank cannon. The latter's upgrade should be completed in 2016.

The Airborne Troops' core requirements for new and upgraded weapons, apart from their base chassis unification, are their air transportability and ability for parachute landing, Kostritsa said.



The Sprut-SD (top) and the BMD-4M (bottom). Note the seven roadwheels on the Sprut-SD vs. the five roadwheels on the BMD-4M.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin

Unmanned Turrets to Increase ISR Capabilities, and Lethality

7 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: To decrease costs and increase lethality, the Russian Federation is currently developing and fielding a new generation of chassis (Armata, Kyrganets-25, Bumerang) capable of accepting the same large modular turrets. The accompanying article discusses a similar line of effort for smaller turrets, most likely to be placed on armored personnel carriers, armored cars, and support vehicles, and even used as secondary weapons on large weapon systems such as self-propelled artillery pieces.

Russia believes that the era of the manned turret has come to an end, and is now fielding unmanned turrets. These are viewed as beneficial not only for crew protection, but also from an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) perspective. These remote-controlled turret modules (DUBM) are equipped with a variety of sensors which far exceed the capabilities of the human eyes and ears of a manned turret. Other reports about these systems have touted their ability to engage low-flying and low-speed aircraft. This capability may be a result of the Russian belief that the battlefield of the future will involve increasingly more UAVs controlled by both state and nonstate actors.

A limited ability for air defense, such as these DUBMs, would be a great benefit in such an environment. Most DUBM configurations involve the use of a 12.7-mm 6P49 “Kord” machine gun, a rough equivalent to the US Browning .50 caliber machine gun. If DUBMs become commonplace in the Russian military, even Russian armored cars and support vehicles would be equipped with about the same firepower as most US Army Strykers, as Strykers are most often equipped with a .50 caliber machine gun as their main armament. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Remote controlled combat modules [turrets] are often installed specifically for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, not to engage the enemy”



The “6S21” Remote Controlled Turret Module
Source: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/27399>

Source: Dmitry Fedyushka, “Secrets of a Deserted Tower,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 7 October 2015, <<http://vpk-news.ru/articles/27399>>, accessed 14 October 2015.

Modern military operations have shown that one of the most vulnerable elements of infantry fighting vehicles (BMP/IFV) and armored personnel carriers (BTR/APC) is the turret, which houses the weaponry. In order to reduce losses of personnel and probably further reduce the number of crew members, Remote Controlled Turret Modules (DUBM) [дистанционно-управляемые башенные модули (ДУБМ)] have been developed. Despite the fact that Russian DUBM turrets are less common than in the West, Russian designers have proposed a number of solutions that can be called innovative.

For Gunnery and Reconnaissance

The need to increase the level of protection and opportunities for reconnaissance has led to the current trend of light turret units with a remote control for reconnaissance, patrol, and armored fighting vehicles. These modules are equipped with a variety of optoelectronic sighting systems and play an important role in ensuring the crew’s situational awareness...The results of the recent armed conflicts has once again confirmed the vital importance of intelligence and positioning purposes. Remote controlled combat modules [turrets] are often installed specifically for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering, not to engage the enemy...The use of modern materials and technology allows a complete recoil suppression for the 105 and 120-mm tank gun in the turret of combat vehicles who weigh 25 tons or more...Modern armor allows the ability to install not only the traditional manned turrets, but also unmanned turrets equipped with automatic cannons of 20-50 millimeters. The main advantage of a turret is its ability to fully protect the weaponry from precipitation and enemy fire. A manned turret should be equipped with the same level of protection as the operator-gunner. This substantially increases the total weight of the vehicle...

“Petrel”

Domestic developers of remote-controlled weapon turrets are not lagging behind their Western competitors, offering innovative designs that do not have direct analogues in Europe and the United States...The Russian Research Institute “Petrel” continues to modernize the 6S21 remote-controlled turret module...The module is offered in three versions, which differ in main armament, ammunition quantity, weight, and a number of other characteristics.

The system includes a block 6S21 weapons sighting system. The operator of the (continued)

Continued: Unmanned Turrets to Increase ISR Capabilities, and Lethality

turret within the combat vehicle has a control panel. The 6S21 can be used for gathering intelligence... The standard DUBM 6S21 (depending on the version) is equipped with one of two types of weapons – a 12.7-mm 6P49 “Kord” machine gun or a 7.62-mm Kalashnikov Tank Machine Gun (PKTM)...The weight of DUBM (depending on version) is not more than 230, 200 and 185 kilograms, respectively. The verticle range of motion for the turret is sufficient for its use in peacekeeping operations: they range from -5 (optional -15) to 75 degrees aiming at the angle of 360 degrees horizontally...

6S21 module can be used at the wide range of military equipment, including armored fighting vehicles. The module may be used with the Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected (MRAP) class, Typhoon-U” and “Typhoon-K”; the multi-purpose armored car “Tiger”; and the BTR-80 armored personnel carrier. There is currently a 6S21 DUBM modification under development for the equipping of naval vesels. The 6S21 module is installed on promising new Russian armored vehicles, including the armored personnel carriers on the “Kuragnets-25” and “Bumerang” platforms. In these cases, it uses a new version of the module, encased in an armored box. The main armament it is equipped with a 12.7 mm machine gun. The 6S21 unmanned turret can equip light and medium armored vehicles of all classes, as well as ships. It is possible that this model will be the main remote-controlled turret module of the Russian Armed Forces...

“Crossbow”

The Russian company “gunsmith” together with Kovrov Electromechanical Plant (KEMZ, is a holding company “High-precision systems”) has developed its own version of a promising DUBM, designated “Crossbow-DM”...

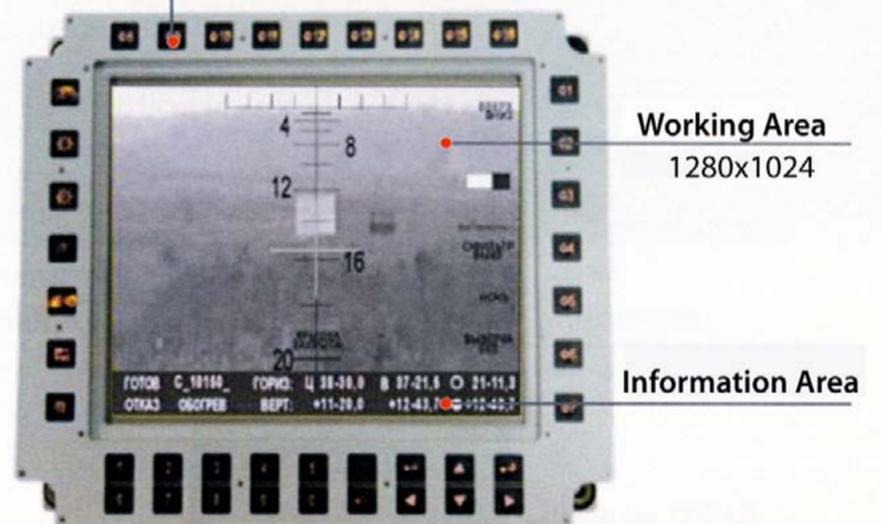
The weight of the DUBM does not exceed 250 kilograms. The standard system uses a 12.7 mm 6P49 “Kord” heavy machine gun. The module is equipped with an electromechanical stabilizer that increases accuracy. The maximum range of the system is 2000 meters during the day and 1500 meters at night. The module can destroy low-flying subsonic aircraft. The verticle range of motion of the machine gun range from -20 to +70 degrees. The 6P49 “Kord” has 450 rounds of ammunition. The DUBM is also equipped with four smoke grenades.

The “Crossbow-DM” is equipped with a sighting system, television cameras, and a thermal imager. The sighting camera allows target identification at a distance up to 2,500 meters, and the thermal imager-1500 meters. The built-in laser rangefinder provides a distance of an object up to 3000 meters. These sighting system modules are displayed on the 17-inch monitor with a resolution of 1280x1024 pixels...



The “Crossbow-DM” Remote Controlled Turret Module Source: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/27399>

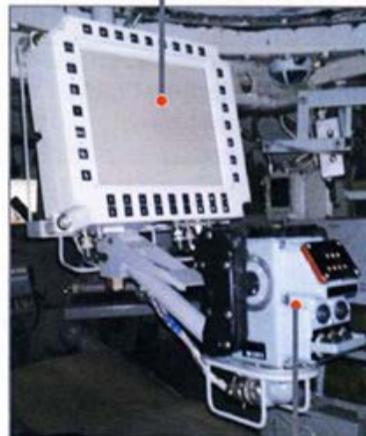
Function Keys



<http://nevskii-bastion.ru/6s21/>

Gunner’s Panel

Display and Video Information (digital, analog)
Targeting, Diagnostics



Fire Control
Safety

Remote Workstation

Gunner’s Control

<http://nevskii-bastion.ru/6s21/>

Electronic Warfare Considered a Key Capability for Disrupting Communications, ISR, and Precision Fires

30 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Electronic warfare (EW) capabilities have been fast tracked for development in the Russian Armed Forces. Russia believes these capabilities are important due to a belief that the US/West will have air superiority and is overly dependent on certain technologies, such as satellites, GPS, sophisticated command and control systems, cruise missiles, and UAVs for effective combat operations. In the last few years Russia has deployed the “Murmansk,” “Moskva-1,” “Gimalai,” “Krasukha-2,” “President-S,” and infamous “Khibiny” aircraft-mounted systems, the latter of which allegedly turned off the electronics onboard the USS Donald Cook in March 2014. (For more information on the Donald Cook incident, see “Russian EW Developments” OEW, February 2015.) The intent of fielding these systems is to disrupt hostile communications, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and precision fires, which Russia perceives to be key capabilities for any successful US combat operation. The accompanying articles well describe current Russian EW capabilities and the US systems they are intended to counter, and explains the differences between strategic and tactical Russian EW units. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm, “Electronic Warfare - Myths and Truths - Part 1: How Unique Are the Russian Army’s EW Assets?” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 30 September 2015, <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27272>>, accessed 14 October 2015.

Russian Electronic Warfare (EW) has recently acquired the aura of a superweapon capable, in the opinion of the man in the street, of causing panic in a potential enemy after only one use... on August 4, 2015 of this year, the defenseneews.com blog published the article “Electronic Warfare: What the US Army Can Learn From Ukraine”...which stated that the Russian Armed Forces made a significant breakthrough in the field, not only with the creation of EW systems but also their application, demonstrating, in the author’s opinion, a discernible gap on this issue on the part of the US military...

It must not be forgotten that one of the leading developers and manufacturers of Russian EW products, The Electronic Technologies Concern (KRET), is currently engaged in an aggressive PR campaign to promote its products... But how effective are Russian EW systems, what do they consist of, and approximately how is EW organized? Let us try to answer these questions.

The fact that Russia’s military-political leadership pays close attention to the development of EW systems is illustrated by the following fact: the 15th Separate EW Brigade (of the Supreme High Command) appeared in the Armed Forces in April 2009...In addition to the brigade of the Supreme High Command, since 2009 separate EW centers have been established in each military district. However, most of them currently have been reorganized into separate EW brigades. An exception is the newly formed EW center in Crimea, under the command of the Black Sea Fleet....

...EW brigades and centers include strategic battalions equipped with the above-mentioned Murmansk systems, as well as Infauna tactical systems based on armored personnel carriers, and R-330Zh Zhitel and R-934 jamming stations. In addition to two battalions, the brigades and centers also have separate companies - one equipped with so-called aircraft devices, that is, Krasukha-2 and Krasukha-4 systems, and a company with the above-mentioned Leyer-3 [UAV system].

The newly created Aerospace Forces are also getting modern EW equipment, particularly items such as the Khibiny systems installed on Su-34 frontline bombers which have become almost legendary, and also Mi-8 helicopters equipped with Rychag stations. In addition, the Russian Air Force fleet has been recently supplemented with the Il-22 Porubshchik, a kind of jammer based on the Il-18.

...KRET officially unveiled the 1L269 Krasukha-2 system designed for jamming aircraft with long-range radar (primarily the American E-3 AWACS) at a static display at the Moscow aerospace show held this year. It is noteworthy that, according to the management of the concern, this station can suppress the AWACS at ranges of several hundred kilometers...

...the 1RL257 Krasukha-4, which is being actively supplied at the present time to separate EW brigades and battalions and is designed to suppress airborne radar stations, including those fitted not only to fighters and fighter-bombers, but also to E-8 and U-2 spy planes. However, there are doubts about the the Krasukha’s effectiveness against the ASARS-2 radar mounted on high-altitude U-2 aircraft because, based on available data, its signal is not only complex but also noise-like...

(continued)

“Thanks to the capabilities of our Krasukha-2 and Krasukha-4 systems, the radar equipment used by tactical aviation and AWACS type aircraft is rendered useless. Enemy aircraft lose the ability to apply weapons with precision, use navigation equipment, and take accurate targeting readings...” — EW Company Commander, Senior Lieutenant Sergey Naymushin



The Electronic Technologies Concern (KRET), Russia’s primary Electronic Warfare Manufacturer
Source: <http://kret.com/>

Continued: Electronic Warfare Considered a Key Capability for Disrupting Communications, ISR, and Precision Fires

The Avtobaza system, also thanks primarily to Russian media, along with the Khibiny became a kind of superweapon in the eyes of the man in the street, capable of taking out any drone through suppression. In particular, this system is credited with victory over the American RQ-170 UAV...[The] Avtobaza was somewhat indirectly linked to the landing of an American UAV in Iran...

Aside from the struggle against enemy aviation assets, Russian EW developers pay much attention to the suppression of enemy radio traffic as well as to the jamming of GPS signals. The best known satellite navigation jammer is the R-330Zh Zhitel, developed and produced by the Sozvezdiye concern...

The GPS system involves the notion of “reference frequency.”...the work of modern jamming devices is aimed at blocking it, which given the narrowness of the reference frequency and with powerful enough noise interference it is not particularly difficult to drown it...



Moskva-1 Source: <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27272>

Source: Pavel Zavelokin, “On the Electronic Front Line,” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 18 September 2015, <<http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/25764-na-linii-elektronnogo-fronta>>, accessed 14 October 2015.

Diverse systems for detection, tracking, targeting, and data exchange are designed to provide the capability to “bomb” the enemy back to the Stone Age without close combat contact. The same high technologies used in electronic warfare are the only way to counter this. “Over 95 percent of our equipment is new. There is nothing produced before 2012,” Captain 2nd Class Konstantin Zhuk, chief of staff of the Black Sea Fleet Separate EW Center, stated...

For example, the “Murmansk” system is a real “strategic bomber” in EW with a range of up to 5,000 kilometers and the ability to simultaneously suppress more than two dozen frequencies...

Unlike a strategic battalion, one of the main tasks of which is to handle tasks in the maritime zone, the tactical battalion of the Black Sea Fleet EW Center is equipped with everything necessary for action in support of formations and units of the ground forces grouping deployed in the Crimean Federal District. The latest devices are in use: the Infauna system on an armored personnel carrier chassis and the R-330Zh Zhitel and R-934BMV jamming stations....

...Such general wording hides the stations’ ability to knock a high-precision missile off course by feeding it a false target, close down the electronics in the warhead of a controlled projectile or mine and turn it into a harmless blank, embed itself in the control system of an EW aircraft and feed it false information, and much more...



Krasukha-2 Source: <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27272>

“We can make a modern combat aircraft so it is forced to fly like during the Second World War, with a paper map on the pilot’s knee and using landmarks,” Senior Lieutenant Sergey Naymushin, acting commander of a separate EW company with aircraft devices, stated. “Thanks to the capabilities of our Krasukha-2 and Krasukha-4 systems, the radar equipment used by tactical aviation and AWACS type aircraft is rendered useless. Enemy aircraft lose the ability to apply weapons with precision, use navigation equipment, and take accurate targeting readings. The only thing they can do is try to use weapons ‘by eye,’ operating at low altitudes where the aircraft will be easy prey for anti-aircraft fire.”

Context for Averted Terrorist Plot in Moscow

11 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: On 11 October 2015 several brief reports came out in the Russian press about an averted domestic terrorist plot to detonate an explosive device, whose force would have been equivalent to 5 kilograms (approximately 11 lbs) of TNT. The device was set to be detonated with a mobile phone. Reports indicated that ten individuals were arrested on the grounds of involvement in this, the majority being from Central Asia. Some reports highlighted that this incident happened on the eve of a deadly suicide attack in Ankara—the most deadly attack in Turkey’s modern history, leaving almost 100 dead and many dozens wounded. The accompanying excerpts provide examples from the Russian press about reporting on the averted attack in Moscow. The first is from *RBC.ru*, a news outlet that, in the age of the Kremlin’s crackdown on free press, generally provides as balanced a view as possible in these circumstances. The second is from the liberal-leaning and business-oriented *Kommersant (Businessman)*.

News of the averted plot came eleven days after Russia’s intervention in Syria, as a result of which radical elements in the Syrian insurgency strengthened because fewer saw options to a peaceful solution. Some rebels announced they will work more closely with the al-Nusra Front, an al-Qaeda affiliate, while in a joint statement 41 rebel groups urged the creation of a regional coalition to fight Assad and his allies (a reference to Russia and Iran). In addition, the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood called on Syrians to take up arms against Russia’s occupation. The Russian Orthodox Church, which the Kremlin uses as a soft-power extension of its policies, had approved Russia’s intervention. In response, the Muslim Brotherhood said that Moscow began a “holy war” and all Muslims now have a religious obligation to fight Russia.

Russia has already been fighting a battle with radical Islam, and concerns about domestic terrorist incidents have been growing in Russia among the liberal elites not only because of the increased chance of a terrorist attack in Russia after the Syria intervention, but also from memories of a series of apartment bombings in Moscow, Volgograd, and Buynaksk in September 1999, shortly after Boris Yelstin named Vladimir Putin his successor and just before the approaching presidential election in March 2000. Many details about these tragic events, including who is ultimately responsible for the bombings, remain disputed or unknown, as Moscow had halted the investigation of these events. The apartment bombings resulted in deaths and injuries of hundreds, and led Putin to begin to take a tougher line at home, cracking down on civil liberties in the name of security.

End OE Watch Commentary
(Borshchevskaya)

Source: Artem Filipenok, “Теракт в Москве планировали устроить при помощи мобильного телефона” (Terrorist Act in Moscow Was Planned with Use of Mobile Phone), *RBC.ru*, 11 October 11 2015. <http://www.rbc.ru/society/11/10/2015/561ac9b99a79477cb41c3acd>

An explosive equivalent in force to approximately 5 kg of TNT, found in a Moscow apartment, was planned to be activated using a mobile phone, according to the Interfax news agency.

[According to Interfax] security forces found in an apartment near the metro station “Ulitsa 1905” an explosive device similar to those used to commit a terrorist attack in Ankara on Saturday. The difference is that in the Turkish capital it was suicide bombers who operated, and in this case the bomb capacity of 5 kg of TNT was planned to be detonated remotely via mobile phone...

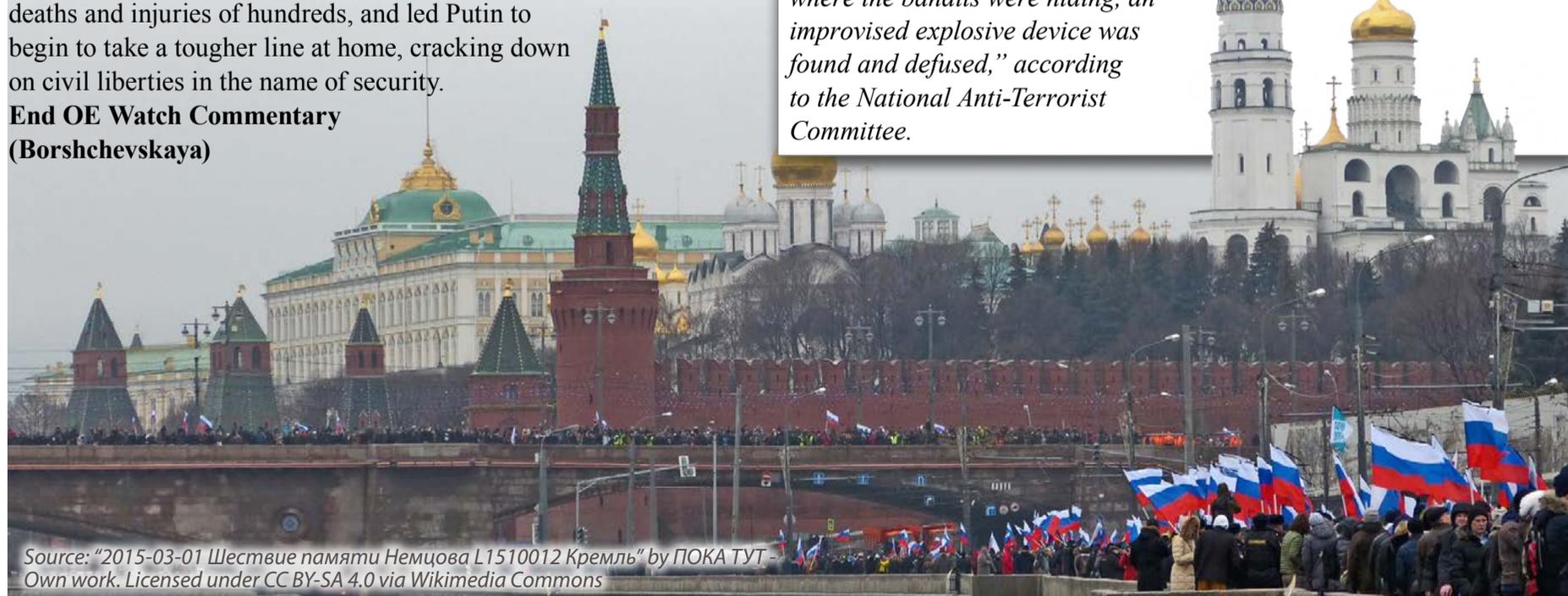
Interfax news agency clarified that 10 individuals who were involved in the preparation of terrorist act, most of them nationals of Central Asian countries, have been arrested.

Source: “В Москве у возможных террористов изъята бомба, эквивалентная 5 кг тротила” (In Moscow, A bomb equivalent to 5 kg of TNT Seized from Potential Terrorists), *Kommersant*, October 11, 2015 <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2830512>

...Interfax has no official confirmation of this information [that the bomb equivalent to 5 kg of TNT was found in a Moscow apartment was planned to be detonated by a mobile phone]. According to the source, a total of 10 people were detained, most of them - citizens of the countries of Central Asia ..

Как писал «Ъ», в Москве в одном из жилых домов в Стрельбищенском переулке органы безопасности задержали группу лиц, причастных к подготовке террористического акта в столице. «В квартире, где скрывались бандиты, обнаружено и обезврежено самодельное взрывное устройство»,— сообщили в Национальном антитеррористическом комитете.

As [Kommersant] wrote, security forces detained in Moscow, in one of the houses in the Strelbishchenskiy alley, a group of persons involved in preparation for a terrorist attack in the capital. “In the apartment where the bandits were hiding, an improvised explosive device was found and defused,” according to the National Anti-Terrorist Committee.



Source: “2015-03-01 Шествие памяти Немцова L1510012 Кремль” by ПОКА ТУТ - Own work. Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Putin's Interview about Syria Intervention

11 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: On 11 October 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a long interview to the state-run TV channel, *Rossiya-1*. Excerpts from the interview transcript, posted on the Kremlin's newspaper of record, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta (Russian Newspaper)*, follow this commentary.

Putin did not surprise in his remarks. He touched on familiar themes, such as Russia is protecting what the Kremlin always describes as the legitimate government of Bashar Assad, and fighting terrorism in what he described as the Kremlin's deliberate and planned strategy. He added that Russia is a peace-loving nation.

Tellingly, Putin also said, "We have no desire to recreate an empire, the Soviet Union, but we need to protect our independence and sovereignty, which we have done and will do." Though it may be difficult to see the connection between Russia's sovereignty (as Putin describes it) and the intervention in Syria, this comment reveals one among major reasons for the Kremlin's intervention. It has become a common Kremlin line that the West is behind all "colored" revolutions and protests in the post-Soviet space, in the Middle East, and in Russia itself. In Syria, protests against Bashar al-Assad broke out in March 2011. They began peacefully, much like the colored revolutions, and demanded a democratic government, only turning violent in the absence of support for these aspirations when radical elements filled the vacuum. In Putin's view, however, these protests were no different than the colored revolutions—they were organized by the West and, therefore, presented a similar threat. It is revealing then that once again Putin (indirectly) links his current actions in Syria with "protecting [Russia's] independence and sovereignty."

End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)

Source: Kira Latukhina, "Чужое - не нужно Владимир Путин объяснил политику России по Сирии" (What's Not Ours- We don't Need. Vladimir Putin explained Russia's policy on Syria), *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 11 October 11 2015. <http://www.rg.ru/2015/10/11/imperiya-site.html>

Russia –is a peace-loving country, not planning to participate in the arms race or recreate an empire, but it will defend its sovereignty. The president announced this in an interview with Vladimir Solovyov on TV channel Rossiya 1 [Russia 1]

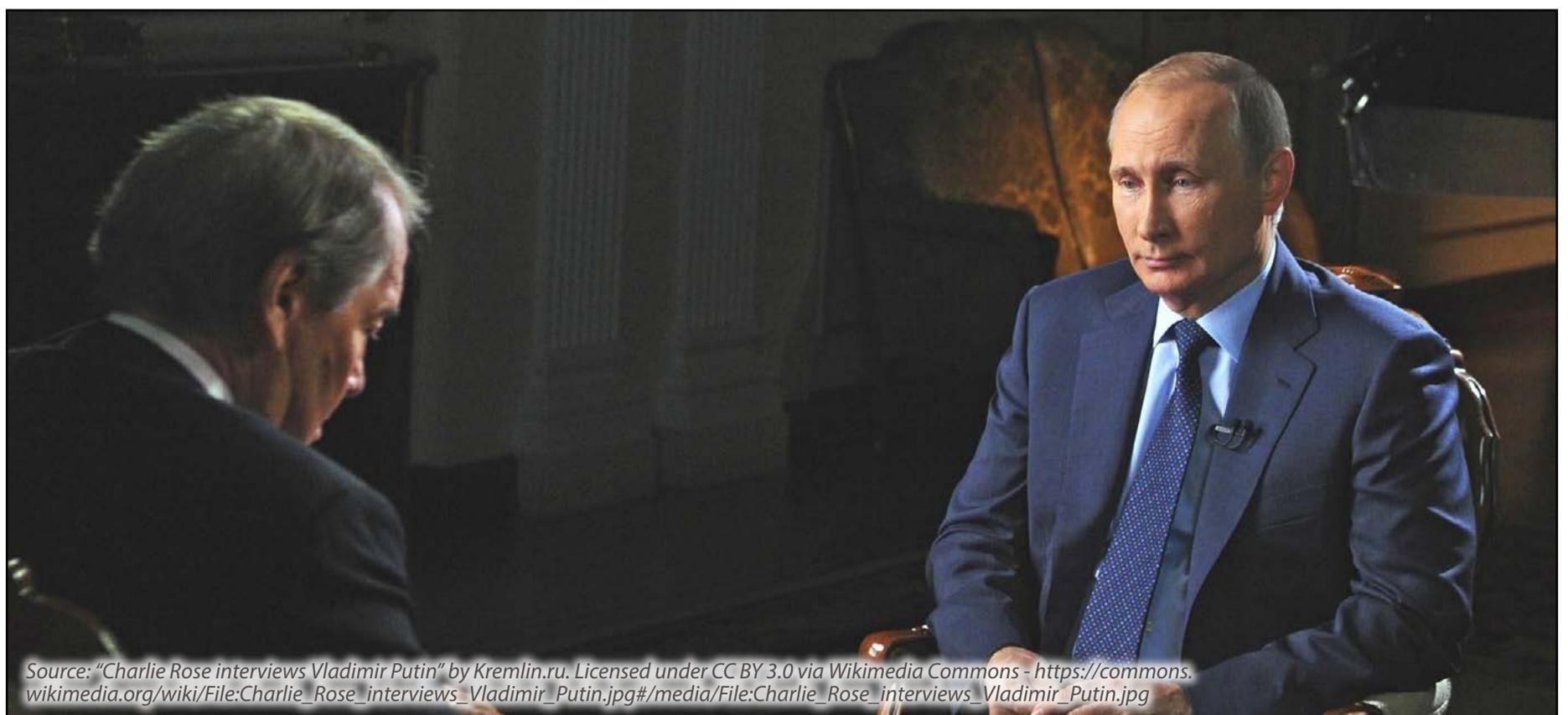
The task of Russia in Syria is to stabilize the legitimate government and to create conditions for a political compromise. "With military means, of course," said Vladimir Putin, "When a division of international ISIS terrorists rises near the capital, then probably the desire to negotiate with the Syrian authorities, who probably feel themselves almost under siege in their own capital, probably does not arise. "

The Head of State explained that "the active phase of our work in Syria will be limited to the time period of the Syrian army's offensive." If this army will show viability in the fight against terrorism, it will increase the possibility of a political compromise. The president reiterated that Russia will not use its army in a ground operation.

"Everything that happens in the sky and on the ground – these are not spontaneous actions, but execution of plans previously calculated," said Putin...

Putin also said that Russia does not participate in a religious confrontation, "This is a false premise, a false thesis. We overall do not make a distinction between Shiites and Sunnis"...

"We have no desire to recreate an empire, the Soviet Union, but we need to protect our independence and sovereignty, which we have done and will do," Putin said. The country's foreign policy— is peaceful, without any exaggeration. "Russia does not need any foreign territory or other people's natural wealth - we have enough of everything ourselves, we are a self-sufficient country ... There is no need to fight or conflict with anyone," remarked the President...



Source: "Charlie Rose interviews Vladimir Putin" by Kremlin.ru. Licensed under CC BY 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons - https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Charlie_Rose_interviews_Vladimir_Putin.jpg#/media/File:Charlie_Rose_interviews_Vladimir_Putin.jpg

Russia's Muslims' Attitudes towards the Kremlin's Syria Intervention

9 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Moscow's intervention in Syria, which began on 30 September 2015, resonated quickly with Russia's sizable Muslim population. The accompanying excerpts are from a long article in *Kavkazskiy Uzel (Caucasian Knot)*, published on 9 October 2015. Although no official polling data exists about Muslim attitudes towards the intervention (indeed, such a poll would be especially difficult, as Russia's official census statistics break down groups only by ethnicity, not religion), anecdotal evidence, such as the accompanying article, suggests that concern, rather than support, prevails.

Dagestan's residents are worried about the situation of Syria's Sunni majority, those in Ingushetia draw analogies with the introduction of troops into Afghanistan, and Circassians especially are concerned about the situation of Syrian Circassians. Reports that Russian air strikes hit three villages of the Caucasian diaspora - Dagestani Deir Foale, and Circassian Aseleh and Abu Hamam—which resulted in civilian casualties, increase these anxieties. For Circassians in particular, any Russian military action against Muslims brings back historical memories of ethnic cleansing, when Russian Tsar Alexander II expelled the majority (approximately 600,000) of the Circassians from their homeland, Circassia, in the North Caucasus, after a Russo-Circassian war in the late 19th century. Indeed, the site of Russia's Winter 2014 Olympic Games—Sochi and its surrounding areas—was the location of this horrific ethnic cleansing, a history which Russian President Vladimir Putin was well aware of when he chose Sochi as the location for the games. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

Source: “Противники авиаударов по Сирии из числа жителей Кавказа опасаются жертв среди мирного населения” (Opponents of Airstrikes in Syria Among Residents of the Caucasus are Afraid of Civilian Casualties), *Kavkazskiy Uzel (Caucasian Knot)*, 9 October 2015. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/270315/>

Most of Russia's residents justify military involvement in the Syrian conflict with the threat of the Islamic state, found Levada Center. Among residents of the North Caucasus there are supporters and opponents of the Kremlin's adopted solution. The later draw analogies with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and fear the inevitable death of innocent people, insist those polled by the Caucasian Knot experts.

...According to the Russian authorities, the strikes are against the positions of the Islamic State (IS previously ISIS), recognized in Russia, the United States and several other countries as a terrorist organization. However, information comes from Syria that during Russian air strikes three villages of the Caucasian diaspora had suffered - Dagestani Deir Foale and Circassian Aseleh and Abu Hamam. The result of the airstrike were civilian casualties, noted sources....

Dagestan's Residents are worried about the situation of Syria's Sunni majority

The arguments of those who consider Russia's participation in a military operation in Syria unacceptable comes down to the economic problems in the country and the growth of terrorist threat in Russia, believes vice-president of the Avar national-cultural autonomy Marco Shakhbanov.

“It's hard for me to say, no one conducted polls here, so it is difficult to speak with certainty. There are both views [for/against airstrikes], but which one predominates—I will not attempt. The argumentation is very different. The ones who support [airstrikes] share people with an active pro-state position. Those against people are motivated by the economic crisis, additional costs, possible growth of terrorist activity and other threats, which are due to Russia's involvement in the conflict in Syria,” told Caucasian Knot “Marco Shakhbanov ...

Residents of Ingushetia draw analogies with the introduction of troops in Afghanistan ...

Adygs are concerned about the situation of Syrian Circassians in connection with Russia's military operations

No general picture formed of the relationship of the North Caucasus' Adygeyan and Circassian population and the diaspora to the Russian military action in Syria, said the head of “Adyghe Khasa,” Republic of Adygea Adam Bogus [Adyg means Circassian]

Social networks diverged in assessment of Russia's actions in Syria

According to a survey conducted by a Caucasian Knot corresponding on his Facebook page, some users argue that the ban to support air strikes on Syrian territory is in Sharia stipulations, which prohibits from participating in a war against Muslims.

“Support killings of Muslims by non-Muslims - is kufr. Therefore, Muslims can have no disagreements over this,” says user Mansour Abdulvahid user.

“I oppose the intervention of Russia and any other country in the conflict in Syria. Bashar must go, and the people of Syria to decide on their own how and with what it would govern the country. To date, the Syrian majority wants to live and be guided by the system of Islam, and I as a believer, sincerely support them in this,” wrote blogger Ali Charinsky ...

Manufacturing “Truth”

13 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past eighteen months, the conflict in SE Ukraine has highlighted many significant aspects of a more assertive Russian foreign policy. Alongside the reformed, better trained, better equipped, and surreptitiously deployed Russian military forces has been an incessant, well-coordinated, and thorough information campaign. The Kremlin-sponsored media holdings have played a key role in portraying and reinforcing the prominent narrative, whereby pro-Russian separatists in the Donbass region have been defending their region from aggressive, pro-Western, “quasi-fascist” Ukrainian forces. With their ever-expanding media reach, Russian information outlets have broadcast this unremitting message 24/7 to both a domestic and foreign audience.

The shoot-down of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 in July 2014 and the subsequent Russian media barrage have revealed the strength and scope of the Kremlin’s information arsenal. Perhaps no other incident from this conflict has illustrated the formidable power and influence of the Kremlin’s media weapon. The results of this media onslaught have been impressive—at least domestically. Where many in the West blame the pro-Russian separatists for this crime, the situation is far different within Russia. As the first excerpt points out, poll data reveal that the overwhelming majority of Russians (82%) believe that the Ukrainians were responsible for this offense.

The second accompanying excerpt illustrates one of the key devices used by the Kremlin to create its version of the events. The article describes recent experiments conducted by the Russian manufacturer of the missile (Almaz Antey), which allegedly destroyed MH17. Conveniently, the test results were released on the same day on which Dutch air safety officials published their findings surrounding the cause of this crash. The Almaz Antey tests, which entailed reconstructing and exploding a static display mimicking the explosion which brought down flight MH17, “completely disproved the conclusions of the Dutch commission on the type of the missile and its launch site.” According to this “proof,” Russia and the pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine could not have been responsible for this disaster.

The Kremlin has proven to be untiring in constructing a series of competing explanations to evade responsibility. The tests conducted by Almaz Antey are just the latest examples of befuddling distractions to cast doubt regarding responsibility for this wrongdoing. Since this tragic incident occurred, the Kremlin leadership, aided by defense companies like Almaz-Antey, has colluded with an equally pliant Russian media to confuse the average Russian over accountability for this crime. The Kremlin has demonstrated an extraordinary ability to manipulate and broadcast a narrative which supports its strategic goals. These capabilities constitute a weapon to be reckoned with.
End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)

“Russian air defense systems manufacturer Almaz-Antey has conducted two experiments on the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, which have ‘completely disproved the conclusions of the Dutch commission on the type of the missile and its launch site’...”

Source: “катастрофа Боинга под Донецком” Levada Center Poll, 30 July 2014. <http://www.levada.ru/30-07-2014/katastrofa-boinga-pod-donetskom>

Brought down by a surface-air missile belonging to the Ukrainian Army	46
Brought down by a Ukrainian military aircraft	36
Brought down by Donbass militia	3
Brought down by terrorist explosion on-board aircraft	2
Brought down as a result of mechanical failure	1
Brought down as a result of pilot error	1
Brought down by Russian military	1
Other	6
Difficult to answer	4

Source: “Russian Defense Firm Says ‘Completely Disproved’ MH17 Probe Conclusions,” *RIA Novosti*, 13 October 2015

Russian air defense systems manufacturer Almaz-Antey has conducted two experiments on the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, which have “completely disproved the conclusions of the Dutch commission on the type of the missile and its launch site”, the manufacturer’s director-general Yan Novikov told journalists in Moscow on 13 October, as quoted by RIA Novosti (part of the state-owned International News Agency Rossiya Segodnya) on the same day.

The first experiment was conducted on 31 July, he said. After the Dutch investigation had refused to accept its results, the company conducted the second experiment on 7 October. The conclusions of the two experiments were identical, he said. “It became absolutely clear that if the Boeing was downed by a surface-to-air Buk missile system, this could have been only a 9M38 missile,” Novikov said. “The math modelling by our group of companies was absolutely correct.”

At the same time, RIA Novosti released a separate report quoting Mikhail Malyshevskiy, an adviser to Almaz Antey’s chief designer. Referring to the results of the modelling, he said the aircraft had been downed from the side of the population center of Zaroshchenske, which, in his words, had been controlled by Ukrainian forces. “Today we can clearly say that if the Boeing was downed by a surface-to-air Buk missile system, then it was downed with its 9M38 missile from the side of the population center of Zaroshchenske,” Malyshevskiy said.

Russia's Defense Industry-Fighting Back

18 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Since Putin's return to the Russian presidency in May 2012, rebuilding and modernizing the country's armed forces have become one of the Kremlin's highest priorities. According to the Kremlin's narrative, modern and robust military forces will allow Russia to not only better defend its national interests, but also serve as a catalyst for the larger Russian economy. As a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, however, Western economic and trade sanctions have complicated the Kremlin's strategy for military modernization. Problems with import substitution and developing domestic industrial capability, particularly with regard to high-tech manufacturing, have delayed rearmament plans.

Despite these challenges, the leaders of Russia's military defense industry remain confident that military modernization remains on track. Hardly a week goes by without the Russian media reporting on another successful defense exhibition. As the brief accompanying excerpt points out, the recent Russian Arms Expo (RAE) held in Nizhniy Tagil in September reflected this confidence (<http://rae2015.ru/en/>). According to the article, the RAE event was very well attended, and despite attempts by Western countries to isolate Russia, the exhibition "was visited by 52 official foreign delegations" gathering nearly 50,000 attendees and "over 600 journalists to cover the event."

Both Prime Minister Medvedev and Vice Premier Rogozin spoke at the exhibition, stressing that modernizing Russia's defense industry would serve as a facilitator for the wider economy and would "stand as the vanguard of the consolidation of the country's might and industrial potential." While the issue of corruption within Russia's military industry was not directly addressed in the article, one of the main topics at the conference dealt with "the updated law on the state defense order." This law is designed to ensure that defense allocations are managed more efficiently and suggests that corruption remains a problem within the country's sprawling defense industry.

Alongside the conference, Russian defense manufacturers displayed a wide variety of military equipment at the public exhibition (for an example of some of RAE's effective PR, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgjwmTHs-38>). Based on the tone of this article, there is little indication that Western economic sanctions are negatively affecting developments within Russia's defense industry.

End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)

"Today our country is a key international player in the sphere of military-technical cooperation and ranks second in the world in terms of the volume of sales of military equipment and weaponry."

Source: Roman Smirnov, "Отечественный ОПК готов ударить по кризису из всех орудий, [Russia's Defense Industry Complex Ready to Fire Salvo at the Crisis], *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye Online*, 18 September 2015. http://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2015-09-18/1_opk.html

Once every two years Nizhniy Tagil hosts and Uralvagonzavod organizes the International Arms, Military Equipment, and Ammunitions Exhibit (RAE) [Russian Arms Expo], with this year's being the milestone 10th exhibit.

Nearly 200 enterprises took part in the exhibit. They displayed 2,700 items showing recent achievements in the defense industry complex, with 98 large-scale items on outdoor sites. The organizers announced that the exhibit was visited by 52 official foreign delegations of which 13 were represented by defense ministers, chief of general staff, ground forces commanders in chief, and arms purchase department leaders. In all in the four days it operated nearly 50,000 people came to view the demonstration program and items on display while over 600 journalists came to cover the event....

...On the second day of its operation the exhibit was visited by Russian Federation Prime Minister Dmitriy Medvedev, Vice Premier Dmitriy Rogozin, and Russian Federation Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov. The central events of RAE-2015 were the second Military-Industrial conference with the participation of a whole series of high-ranking representatives of the Russian authorities, and a roundtable with the participation of the heads of the State Duma and Federation Council defense and security departments....

... The central themes of the conferences, roundtables, and the exhibit as a whole were import replacement in the defense industry, competition on the world arms market, and the overcoming of the crisis phenomena in the economy.

Before the start of the demonstration program, Dmitriy Medvedev delivered a welcoming speech. The prime minister sees modernization and technical refurbishment as one of today's strategic tasks.... "Today our country is a key international player in the sphere of military-technical cooperation and ranks second in the world in terms of the volume of sales of military equipment and weaponry. Of course, we would very much like to retain those positions..."

Dmitriy Medvedev was outlining the situation as a whole, while a few hours earlier at the military-industrial conference Dmitriy Rogozin gave a more detailed description of the situation.... "The most important thing is to look into the details of how we will live in the next few years and how we will introduce order so as to make the most effective use of every ruble and every kopek invested in the state defense order, particularly now, at a difficult time, a time of economic pressure on our country... You and I understand that the main aim of import replacement is not to reproduce foreign output but to create items of improved design produced in this country on a modern manufacturing base.

"We have many tasks, but the main one is that, in resolving problems of reequipping the army and navy, we must withstand these hard times and pass through them in a worthy manner and grow stronger so that the trend toward the country's industrialization is never questioned or halted by anyone. The present times demand from the defense industry complex not only the solution of the internal tasks inherent to the industry, today we essentially stand as the vanguard of the consolidation of the country's might and industrial potential. The Russian Government has organized the annual monitoring of all consolidated state companies. Within the framework of this work there is an examination of the question of ensuring the transparency of corporate procedures...."

Strengthening Ukraine's Defense Industry

12 August 2015

“Our team has not just managed to stabilize the situation, we have moved farther. For instance, in the second half of 2014 we delivered to the troops more products than we did over the preceding 22 years!”

OE Watch Commentary: Prior to the conflict with pro-Russian separatists in the Donbass region, Ukraine was one of the top ten global defense exporters. The rationale for Ukrainian defense companies to sell military equipment abroad had less to do with strategy than with sheer economics. The government in Kiev was unwilling or unable to invest in its own military, forcing defense manufacturers to seek customers abroad. As the brief accompanying excerpt points out, the purchase of new military equipment by the Ukrainian government has “changed drastically with the onset of the events in Donbass.”

According to the article, “in the second half of 2014 we [the Ukrainian defense industry] delivered to the troops more products than we did over the preceding 22 years!” The list of equipment is impressive, ranging from armored vehicles to night-vision devices. The Ukrainian defense representative claims that “as early as this autumn our army will receive first drones assembled only from parts made domestically.” Despite Ukraine’s severe economic conditions over the past couple years, Ukrainian defense manufacturers were even able to post a profit from these domestic weapon sales in 2014.

The article also touches upon the manufacturing effects which the conflict in SE Ukraine has had upon the domestic defense industry. Besides suspending military trade with Russia, a dozen Ukrainian defense enterprises are located within the separatist regions, some of them involved with producing specific military components. According to the report, the Ukrainian government was able to promptly evacuate technical documentation from these enterprises and they have shifted the work to other plants. The Ukrainian defense industry has also made progress with weaning itself from being dependent upon imported Russian-made components, and today “over 30 per cent of the products our enterprises need they now produce themselves.”

The article touches upon measures recently adopted to help improve transparency and clean up corruption within the country’s defense industries. It also describes how the Ukrainian defense industry has worked to develop defense manufacturing partnerships with companies in the USA, Great Britain, Lithuania, Poland. Should these trends continue, Ukraine could soon have the industrial and intellectual capacity to modernize and equip the country’s Armed Forces on its own accord. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Serhiy Pinkas, “In the Past Year We Provided Army with some 4,000 New and Upgraded Types of Weapons and Military Hardware,” *Narodna Armiya*, 25 September 2015.

A few years back enterprises of the national defense sector worked mostly for export, but the situation changed drastically with the onset of the events in Donbass.

One of the most pressing problems facing our army that came to the forefront as the war in Ukraine’s east broke out was its technical equipment. The deputy director-general of state defense industry concern Ukroboronprom, Serhiy Pinkas, has spoken with our correspondent about the potential of the national defense sector, the latest models of weapons and military hardware, as well as deliveries of much needed weapons and hardware to our army.

[Correspondent] *How many defense sector factories remain now in the temporarily occupied territory?*

[Pinkas] *Twelve enterprises. These include some that specialize in manufacturing high-precision weapons, designing and making radio-technical systems and complexes, ballistic gunpowder for missiles, as well as repairing engines and reduction gearboxes for helicopters.*

It is important that we have managed to promptly evacuate technical documentation and many specialists. Today, the tasks of those factories are being performed by other specialized plants. Judging by the results of their work, they are coping fine. Meaning that our manufacturing potential continues to work for the benefit of Ukraine’s defense.

[Correspondent] *You have said that the national defense industry has been struggling to survive for years. What steps have been taken to improve the situation?*

[Pinkas] *Our team has not just managed to stabilize the situation, we have moved farther. For instance, in the second half of 2014 we delivered to the troops more products than we did over the preceding 22 years! In the first half of 2014 the concern’s losses amounted to 400m hryvnias [about 18.6m dollars], but we have finished the year with a profit of 150m hryvnias [approximately 7m dollars]. In other words, we have not just paid off the debts but have earned something for the state....*

[Correspondent] *Can you specify the quantity of the combat and special-purpose equipment supplied to the anti-terrorist operation area?*

[Pinkas] *Over the past year we have passed to the Armed Forces, National Guard and other military formations about 4,000 new and modernized types of weapons and military hardware. For purposes of comparison, I will tell you that this is almost 40 times more than in the same period last year. In particular, we have delivered to the army 105 armoured vehicles, about 3,000 missiles and munitions, more than 600 missile and artillery weapons, and over 1,440 armoured and special-purpose automobiles. We expect that by the end of this year the Armed Forces will be provided with 300 armoured vehicles, 30,000 missiles and munitions, 300 night-vision devices and 3,000 fire arms....*

[Correspondent] *Military personnel from the anti-terrorist operation area complain that they do not have drones. Can Ukroboronprom organize mass production of unmanned aircraft systems?*

[Pinkas] *For the time being, two enterprises of the concern are working on it. As early as this autumn our army will receive first drones assembled only from parts made domestically.*

(continued)

Continued: Strengthening Ukraine's Defense Industry

[Correspondent] Media have repeatedly reported facts of corruption in the defense sector enterprises, criminal cases launched against some of their managers...

[Pinkas] We are not hiding the shortcomings in the work of certain managers of the enterprises. The evidence of it is that, acting on our own initiative, we have carried out over 200 inspections of different kinds. Based on the findings, personnel decisions have been made, and approximately 15 officials were disciplined, some were fined and nine had their employment contracts terminated....

...[Correspondent] What are the countries that you have developed the most productive relations with in the area of weapons manufacturing?

[Pinkas] The biggest partners are the USA, Great Britain, Lithuania, Poland. Hopefully, this list of partner states will grow longer over time.

[Correspondent] To what extent does the national defense industry complex depend on that of Russia? And is Ukraine capable of producing modern hardware and weapons without cooperating with Russia?

[Pinkas] In my view, whose defense industry complex is more dependent on the other is still an open question. True, Ukroboronprom has not been cooperating with Russia already for more than a year. We have launched an import-substitution program - over 30 per cent of the products our enterprises need they now produce themselves.... In the past, nobody cared if such products could be made in Ukraine, we followed the path "let's do it the way it was done in the USSR" and continued to purchase them in the Russian Federation. Also, we have signed a memorandum with many regions in Ukraine regarding deeper cooperation between our enterprises and other enterprises, regardless of their form of ownership. Most importantly, they can help arm Ukrainian army. In this way we place orders on the national market rather than send money abroad. These are investments in regional development, plus it creates new jobs.

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

Improved Human Performance: A Russian View

23 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Despite the calmer military situation in SE Ukraine, the current Russian propaganda offensive against the US shows little sign of abatement. According to the Kremlin-supported message, Washington remains determined to use all means necessary to weaken and to ultimately subdue Russia. This is a multivector campaign, using every form of media to spread anti-American sentiments. The effectiveness of the Kremlin's campaign is beyond dispute; as the brief first excerpt points out, 74% of the Russian population now views the US in a negative light.

While every US topic remains subject to Kremlin manipulation, military developments are especially prone to distortion. Recent news that the US military was involved in research in the "field of neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, information technology and robotics for the purpose of in-depth study of how people think, react, act in critical situations" proved to be a choice target. As the second excerpt indicates, the US is now planning to harness "mind control technologies" to either transform soldiers into killing machines or to infect the minds of unsuspecting citizens. That such a tendentious article should appear in one of Russia's most prestigious military journals (VPK, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*) speaks volumes about not only the bias in the Russian media, but also how some in Russia's defense establishment view their American counterparts.

The format of this article is similar to much of the propaganda within the Russian media sphere. In this anti-US marketing formula, the author identifies a technological development within the American military, then, by means of select historical analogies and bogus experts, "proves" that this technological advance is designed for nefarious purposes and likely directed at Russia. In this case, the development purportedly deals with "exploitation of neuroscience-based robotics for military purposes, the application of interactive systems, aimed at the militarization of the human brain, in fact, an attempt to create a new weapon."

To "prove" that this initiative to improve soldier performance is diabolical, the author selects and manipulates government-sponsored experiments from the past, conflating US research with that of Nazi Germany. To reinforce this adverse message, the author also includes fringe conspiracy theories and their proponents who claim that the US has developed "thought-control" weapons in the past. The author concludes by suggesting that Russians must adhere to traditional values as the only antidote to counter these dangerous new "thought" weapons. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"At the basis is the US commitment for global control of the world and the desire of the Pentagon to control the human mind with the help of deadly technology... These were the same objectives pursued by the Nazis."

Source: Victor Vasiliev, "Russian Pollster: Kremlin Nurtures Rising Anti-Americanism," *VOA News*, 15 October 2015. <http://www.voanews.com/content/russian-pollster-lev-gudkov-on-kremlin-nurturing-anti-americanism/3009130.html>

Russians continue to characterize their country's relations with the United States negatively. The latest survey by Russia's biggest remaining independent polling organization, the Levada Center, found that a majority of the population believes U.S.-Russia relations are either "tense" (45%) or "hostile" (29%). [total: 74%]... The poll was conducted in early October 2015 among 1,600 people in 46 of Russia's 85 regions....

Anti-American sentiment in Russia has been rising steadily, according to the Levada Center....

Source: Tatiana Grachev, "Человек-ружье: Технологии контроля над сознанием превращают солдат в пешки" [Man-Weapon: Mind control technologies transform soldiers into pawns], *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 23 September 2015. <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/27155>

...In June this year the Pentagon in conjunction with the School of Engineering at Tufts University created the Center for Applied Brain and Cognitive Sciences, or Center for ABCs. It united the experts in the field of neuroscience, psychology, linguistics, information technology and robotics for the purpose of in-depth study of how people think, react, act in critical situations. Particular attention is paid researchers conduct of the military in difficult and dangerous conditions....

...The US leadership and the US military have for decades been obsessed with control and manipulation of human consciousness....

...The exploitation of neuroscience-based robotics for military purposes, the application of interactive systems, are aimed at the militarization of the human brain, in fact, an attempt to create a new weapon.... The goal is the creation of genetically modified trans-humanoid, capable of doing superhuman things....

...The Third Reich maintained that the "superman" was the ideal of the Aryan race. The Nazis believed that this higher human type could be created artificially, through breeding. The scientific aspects of this project were monitored by Reichsfuhrer SS Heinrich Himmler. The goal - the creation of a master race, completely devoted to the cause of the Reich....

In 1953 "MK-Ultra" appeared, which was a US project using top Nazi scientists.... The continuation of "MK-Ultra" was the project "Monarch". In these two programs, soldiers and civilians, including children were the objects of psychological programming experiments. The goal - the creation of a slave with a controlled mind, who would perform any action on the orders of the operator (owner)....

...Delta programming is designed to transform the person into a killer. At this stage, the person is deprived of fear and have trained their minds to systematically perform tasks. This type of program is designed to train special agents or members of the elite units (such as Delta Force) for operations during covert operations....

...What conclusions can we draw?

First of all, you must realize that this type of programming is possible only when religious, moral, cultural traditions have been destroyed, forgotten, or deliberately emasculated. Therefore, we must take care that they are always present in the mind and soul....

At the basis is the US commitment for global control of the world and the desire of the Pentagon to control the human mind with the help of deadly technology... These were the same objectives pursued by the Nazis.

Securing the Russian Air Force in Syria

7 October 2015

“120-mm mortar shells costing pennies could easily take out aircraft valued at 50 million euros”

OE Watch Commentary: Although air forces maintain their own base security forces, they lack heavy weapons when they are deployed into active combat zones. Inevitably, ground combat units are committed to beef-up organic airbase security. The size of the required secure area around the airbase grows and the commitment of ground forces grows. This was the way that US Army units were initially committed to South Vietnam.

The Russian Air Force is now flying combat missions in Syria. Mikhail Khodarenok, a Soviet Air Force veteran, has concerns about this commitment. Part of his article is excerpted here. Right now, Russian naval infantry are securing the Russian airbase, but the ground force requirement will grow if the Russian Air Force remains. The Russian Army Syrian Expeditionary Force may not be far behind.

The Russian Air Force is converting a civilian airfield into a military airbase. Converting civilian airfields into military airbases has its own problems. There are limited, if any hardened aircraft shelters, reinforced aircraft revetments, wing and squadron parking and administrative facilities, or hardened fuel and ammunition storage sites. Runways may not be long enough or rugged enough to withstand the increased traffic of heavy-duty transport aircraft. Almost all airfields have a nearby community that provides living accommodations, shopping and entertainment. Over time, these communities run up to the airfield fence line. Controlling the population contiguous to the airfield is a major challenge to the local police, the local national military force, the deployed ground force and deployed air force security personnel.

Airbase security involves defense against sabotage, terrorist attack, ground attack, shelling attack, electronic and cyberattack and air attack. Local police, local national forces, air force security personnel and the assigned ground force units play a role in mitigating each threat. Determining lead responsibilities, overall command and control and rules of engagement are immediate priorities. Air space control is a national responsibility that needs to be sorted out prior to deployment. Every nation has its own SOPs and customary ways of doing things, and usually relies on how it did things in the past as an indicator of how to proceed with present tasks. The last experience that Russians had with controlling an airfield located in a foreign country was Afghanistan 1979-1989. Khodarenok provides a schematic of the defense of Bagram airbase during the Soviet-Afghan War which illustrates the complexity of securing a piece of high-value flat land.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

Source: Mikhail Khodarenok, “Ground Hazards to Aerial Snipers; Aircraft at Syrian Airbase could be easily destroyed in a Single Raid,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, <http://vpk-news.ru>, 7 October 2015

According to available data, airfield security will be provided by Russian Naval infantry units. Pantsir ZRPK [antiaircraft missile and gun systems] and Tor ZRK [surface-to-air missile systems] will provide air defense.

Airfield protection and defense in Afghanistan is the only experience that really resembles the current situation. Initially there were piles of rubble. Only in 1981 did the protection of facilities and communications in Afghanistan began to take shape in a fairly coherent system.

At the insistence of the Soviet military-political leadership, the Afghan authorities created 15-kilometer restricted areas around important administrative centers, airfields, power stations, and tunnels to ensure security and public order and prevent and suppress hostile acts by opposition forces.

There were special procedures governing the life and activities of the population in these areas. All resident males aged 13 years and older had to register with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Afghanistan and obtain the relevant documents that everyone was obliged to carry always (previously the Afghan population had no such documents).

Events in the area that involved large numbers of people in one place (weddings, funerals, etc.), were possible only after coordination with the local Interior Ministry officials. Any movement of people inside the area after 2300 was forbidden. Arrivals and departures from the area were allowed only through checkpoints where goods and people were registered.

There were other restrictions aimed at preventing penetration by teams and opposition groups into the area. Internal protection of airfield was organized by the commanders of aviation units who appointed guards for on-the-spot protection and defense of barracks, warehouses, aircraft parking areas, etc. Barbed wire fences and trip-wire signal rockets were set up around airfield perimeters and facilities. Dangerous approaches were covered with live minefields.

Anti-aircraft machine guns (mostly ZSU-23-4, ZU-23, ZPU) provided protection from air attack but were also positioned to engage a ground enemy. This system of protection and defense was not fully reliable, and the airfields of Kandahar and Jalalabad were systematically shelled by the enemy. Cargo planes coming in to land at the airfields of Bagram, Shindad, and Faizabad were taken under fire.

In the first half of 1983, three Su-17 jets, nine Mi-24 gunship helicopters, four Mi-8 Soviet utility helicopters, and an Afghan helicopter were damaged on the ground when insurgents shelled the Jalalabad and Kandahar airfields. They also damaged flight control and support facilities and wounded personnel.

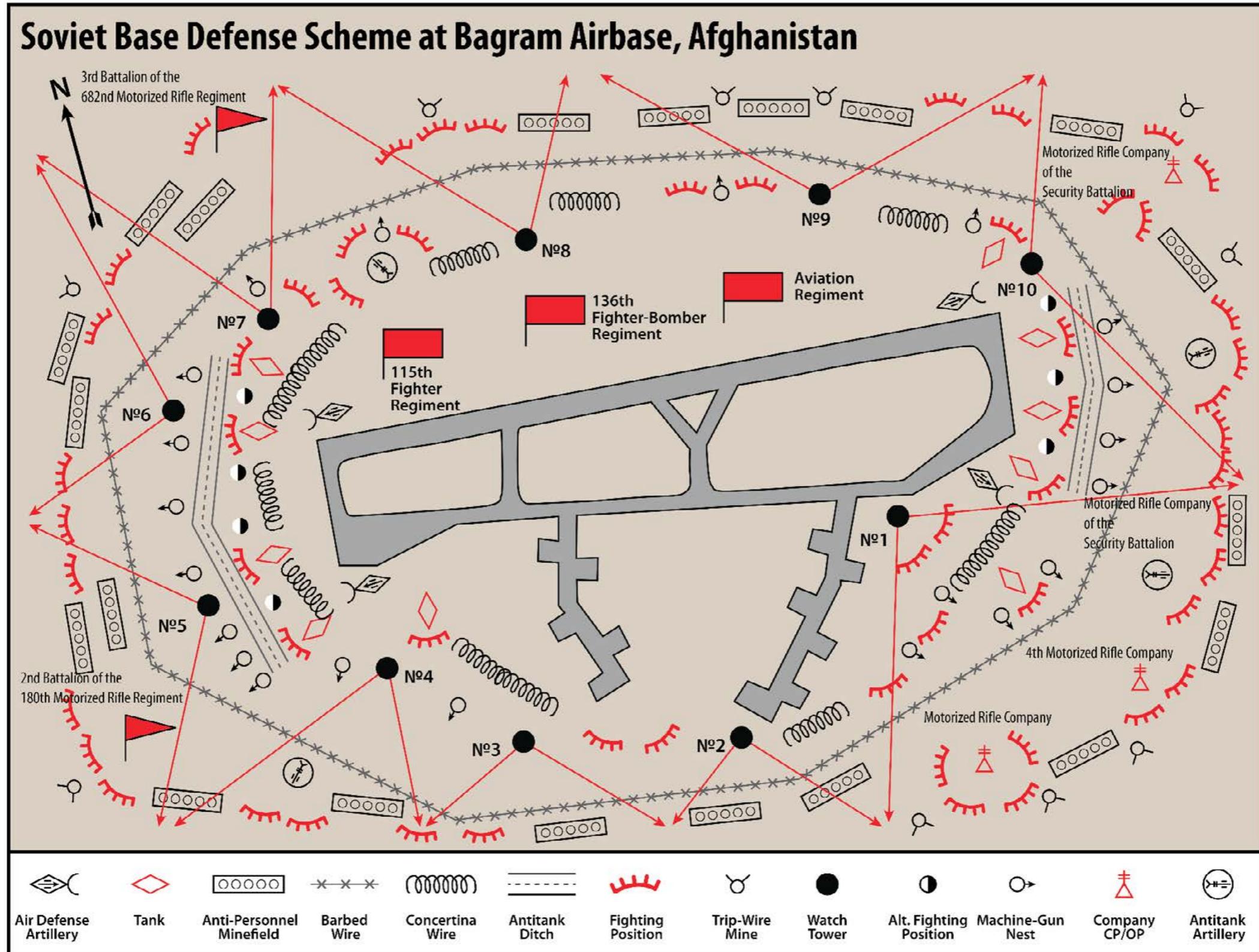
The enemy changed its method of attacking airfields [by using mortar-carrying vehicles for rapid deployment and exit]. However, 40th Army security units reacted poorly to these changes; they did not create mobile armored groups nor did they coordinate with the helicopters on combat duty at the airfields.

On 3 June 1984, enemy mortar fire was directed at the 108th Motorized Rifle Division headquarters and at the firing positions of the artillery battery defending the Bagram airfield. A security post with a tank was located 400 meters from the enemy mortar, but the post did not attempt to destroy it-it did not even notice it!

Even by 1985, when the system of airfield protection took final shape, it was not possible to completely rule out shelling attacks. These lasted until the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. This is explained not only by the periodic (1.5–2 year) rotation of security personnel but also by the inability to ensure that areas of responsibility were immune from rebel infiltration, since the difficult terrain and the presence of a large number of villages in the areas prevented this.

(continued)

Continued: Securing the Russian Air Force in Syria



Another Amphibious Landing for the “Arctic Brigade”

6 October 2015

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

The extended cruise provided an opportunity to perform at-sea vehicle maintenance and gain an appreciation for Arctic terrain, vehicle and equipment serviceability and communications in the Northern Regions. The logisticians certainly had a sharp learning curve. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Units from the Northern Fleet’s Separate Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade conducted a beach landing on 6 October from the large landing ships Georgiy Pobedonosets [Saint George the Victorious] and Kondopoga on the coast of Rogachev Bay in the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago.”

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, <http://www.mil.ru> , 6 October 2015.

Motorized Riflemen of the Northern Fleet’s Arctic Brigade Land on Novaya Zemlya

The soldiers then moved 20 kilometers to their basecamp location using TTM-4902PS-10 tracked articulated vehicles, MT-LBv multipurpose tractors, quad-wheeled bikes, and other wheeled all-terrain vehicles. There, the soldiers set up a tent camp and continue preparations for an upcoming antiterrorism exercise.

The Novaya Zemlya archipelago is the third location in the Russian Arctic zone where the personnel of the Separate Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade conducted a scheduled exercise while taking part in the voyage of the Northern Fleet squadron of warships and support vessels.

The Northern Fleet’s Arctic Brigade took part in September in an exercise to practice measures to protect the Russian islands and coastal area of the New Siberian Islands archipelago and an exercise to practice measures to protect an important industrial facility on the Taymyr Peninsula.

Beaters over the Barents Sea

5 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: The opening scene of the movie *Everest* trails a veteran Mi-8 flying through the rugged, beautiful Nepalese countryside toward Mount Everest. The Mi-8 is a proven high-altitude helicopter that handles the cold weather well. The initial Mi-8 upgrade to become an Arctic helicopter deals mostly with the addition of a fuel blivot capability, as well as two additional internal fuel tanks. Apparently the fuel blivots can be drained during flight. An upgrade in night and low-visibility flight instrumentation may also be in the works to help handle the months of polar night and Arctic storms. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: RIA Novosti, <http://www.ria.ru> , 5 October 2015.

Russian Armed Forces May Receive First Arctic Helicopters by End of 2015

“We expect to finish the state tests before the end of 2015 and to begin delivering the first pieces commissioned by the Ministry of Defense this year,” he said. The Mi-8AMTSh-VA is designed to perform missions as a part of the Arctic Task Force. Equipped with two additional fuel tanks on an external sling and two additional internal fuel tanks, it can fly for 1,500 kilometers without landing. The firm is studying the possibility of placing two more fuel tanks inside the helicopter..

Shibitov noted that “We are effectively offering the Ministry of Defense a ready product -- our vision of the Arctic version of the Mi-9AMTSH. The Ministry of Defense just needs to assess the effectiveness of our solutions.”

According to Shibitov, the new helicopter’s main advantages are “navigation in high latitudes and its ability to fly both in daytime and at night in adverse weather conditions.”

Over the past few years, Russia has been actively pursuing the economic development of its northern territories, including the extraction of hydrocarbons and the development of the Northern Sea Route, which is becoming a viable alternative to traditional routes from Europe to Asia. A whole range of measures to safeguard Russia’s interests in the Arctic have been put in place, including military ones, given the increasing attention to the region by NATO member countries.

“Andrei Shibitov, Deputy Director of the Russian Helicopters Holding Company (a Rostec subsidiary) stated that they expect to deliver the first Arctic Mi-8AMTSh-VA helicopters to the force before the end of this year.”

Getting the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade Settled In

23 September 2015

OE Watch Commentary: It's been a busy year for the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade. Founded in January of this year near Murmansk, it has undergone an intensive training schedule, culminating with a long-distance multi-month cruise involving three amphibious landings, land road marches and live-fire exercises. Meanwhile, the brigade's living and training facilities are being improved or developed.

The 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade has long been a feature on the Kola Peninsula near Murmansk and has carried the "Arctic" designation in previous reports. However, this article, in an authoritative Ministry of Defense newspaper, states that the 80th is the only "Arctic" Brigade. The 200th Brigade was the logical candidate for the amphibious landing in September, but the neophyte 80th Brigade made it instead. What is going on? Perhaps the 200th Brigade is a Motorized Rifle Coastal Defense Brigade with specific responsibilities to defend a vital piece of Russian Arctic real estate (Murmansk and its naval facilities), whereas the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade is a rapid response brigade, specially trained to deploy and fight in Arctic conditions.

Soon the 80th will have a large small-arms training range, a tank training area and a combat vehicle firing range. This will ease demand on the 200th Brigade's ranges, which it has shared with the 80th since January. Presumably, these two brigades and the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade will continue to share the special training area, where servicemen learn to load equipment onto mock amphibious craft, as well as the water-crossing training area.

While the brigade trains, the 315th Special Construction Unit has its work cut out for it. Moist-cured concrete normally takes a month to cure, and the temperature of the cement mix is supposed to stay above 50° Fahrenheit. It is best to cure it under water, where the mixture stays hydrated and produces heat from the chemical reaction. The construction work also requires a separate power plant to operate the heating cables for the mixture.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

“It is going to be 10 years this year since the Russian Federal Agency for Special Construction began active work in the Arctic. The first asset commissioned here was the frontier post on the Alexandra Land Island in the Franz Josef Land archipelago. Russian troops are now settling the entire Arctic belt -- from the Kola Peninsula to Chukotka.”

Source: Anna Potekhina, *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, <http://www.redstar.ru>, 23 September 2015

Firing Range, Armor Training Area, and Combat Vehicle Range Will Be First Components of New Arctic Training Range

A small arms firing range complex covering over two square kilometers, a tank training area, and a combat vehicle firing range will be built during the first phase of the project of building a training range for the 80th Arctic Brigade. Specialists from the 315th Special Construction Unit, assigned to the Northwest Main Directorate, have already surveyed the buildings earmarked for demolition on the existing site. The 315th and the command of the 80th Arctic Brigade have agreed on the basic configuration of the structures to be erected on the range. A geodetic survey of the tank training area, the combat vehicle range, the small arms firing range and access roads is complete. Buildings have been demolished in the parkland. Work is underway on the vertical layout and the installation of foundations for the new structures. The construction site has been fenced off and sand and rock aggregates for cement work have already been delivered for the first construction phase.

Maxim Golovkov, the Chief Engineer of the 315th Special Construction Unit stated that “Seeing the climatic conditions in Murmanskaya Oblast -- the early onset of cold weather, the polar night, and heavy snows -- a diesel power plant will be installed in the construction camp, from where we will lay cables to remote sites. This will allow the builders to carry out the electric curing of concrete and will make them independent from the local power supply. Like last year, the roads will be cleared by bulldozers and workers will be transported to the construction site on specially designated buses.”

A temporary living camp has been set up for builders in the village of Alakurtti. Three units equipped with living and sanitary facilities can accommodate up to 900 people at the same time. The camp has the necessary infrastructure to provide cold water, electricity, and waste-removal. There is also a heating system and hot water.

Building the garrison in the village of Alakurtti (Kandalakshskiy Rayon, Murmanskaya Oblast) is one of the major projects carried out by the Northwest Main Directorate. The combat brigade stationed near the Finnish border was created just a year ago and is the only one of its kind: it was formed with the specific purpose of serving in the harsh Arctic conditions and is equipped with unique military equipment. The buildings of a mothballed garrison, allocated to the 80th Brigade, was slowly disintegrating until last year when special-construction teams began radical reconstruction work on them.

Specialists from the Northwest Chief Directorates' branches have carried out a huge amount of work there in a short time. The 80th Brigade is now using four reconstructed barracks, where a constant temperature is maintained. There are rest rooms, tea rooms, laundry rooms, shower rooms, and a club with a stage and a cinema screen. A parade ground was overhauled, as well as the external engineering infrastructure, a food store, a health center, a staff building, a commandant's building, and a dining hall, which is now equipped with a modern serving system and professional cooking equipment. The walls of the buildings were insulated, the roofs, the engineering infrastructure, and the communications systems were replaced, and fire and burglar alarm systems and surveillance cameras were installed.

I Want One for My Chevy

5 October 2015

OE Watch Commentary: Nickel-cadmium batteries are used in aircraft and in certain military applications. They have excellent low-temperature, high-discharge properties. Lithium batteries are probably the best low-temperature performers, but most cannot be recharged, and are very costly and hard to dispose of. Acid-lead batteries are widely used for electric storage in military vehicles. They are relatively inexpensive and widely available in different sizes and configurations. However, their performance depends on temperature. Cold temperatures rapidly diminish the reserve capacity and cold-cranking amperage of an acid-lead battery. Batteries recharge much more slowly at low temperatures. Frozen electrolytes and damage from vibration at low temperatures can ruin a standard acid-lead battery. A new charged acid-lead battery may last a year in low temperature, but a frozen battery is not salvageable, since freezing warps the lead plates.

Experienced units have their drivers disconnect the batteries and move them into a warmer space when the vehicle is not in use. If an ultrasound emitter can reduce electrolyte freezing, one Arctic maintenance problem may be mitigated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Scientists of the V. F. Magelov Higher Airborne Command Academy at Ryazin introduced an ice-free lead battery designed to work in cold climates and to ensure that the engine will start in any military utility or armored vehicle. They introduced the battery at the International Exhibition “Russian Federation Defense Ministry Innovations Day 2015.”

Source: Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, <http://www.mil.ru>, 5 October 2015

Airborne Troops Scientists Develop Ice-Free Batteries to Be Used in Arctic Conditions

A special feature is a special ultrasonic emitter mounted in the battery, which reduces electrolyte viscosity during operation when the battery is in subzero temperatures and thereby increases its normal life.

The Airborne Troops scientists’ achievements are on display at the Patriot Park Congress and Exhibition Center located in Kubinka near Moscow.

Latvian Commentary on Malaysian Plane Shoot Down

OE Watch Commentary: In October, in response to the recently released Dutch international investigation report on the shoot down of Malaysian flight 17, Latvian journalist Uldis Smits laid out the multifaceted and contradictory Russian response to the tragedy. The investigation revealed that a land-to-air missile had caused the disaster. The article discussed how the Russian mass media continued to change their story regarding who or what caused the incident, with nearly all versions (not all of the mass media’s reports were covered by Smits) blaming Ukraine.

The following were cited: the plan was to shoot down an airplane in which President Putin was traveling, but another plane was shot down accidentally instead; the plane was shot down by the Ukrainian Air Force; and this was a CIA operation (Smits notes that it is hard to have an incident without a conspiracy of some sort). Maps, graphs, and falsified satellite images were used. The responsibility for unmasking new evidence was handed to troll farms and government officials. Smits notes that Russian President Vladimir Putin’s comment that this incident would not have happened if there had been peace in Eastern Ukraine is true, but it was Putin, Smits notes, who did not allow peace to break out there. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

“The job of the commission was to determine the technical reasons for the tragedy, so to speak, as well as to offer recommendation on how to avoid similar events. It was found that the airplane was shot down with a Russian-manufactured missile from the territory that was controlled by pro-Moscow groups”

Source: Anton Uldis Smits, “Believable Version,” *Latvijas Avize*, 19 October 2015. p. 3.

What is worth remembering here is the way in which the shooting down of the Malaysian airplane was presented in the Russian mass media. That would be worth a separate study by, perhaps, communications studies or information war specialists, as well as, perhaps, psychologists. “The tragedy would not have happened if there were peace in Eastern Ukraine,” Putin proclaimed. He himself did not allow peace to occur there, instead sending troops and weapons into Eastern Ukraine, including, perhaps, the missile that was used to shoot down the Malaysian plane. To be sure, nearly all of the versions that were disseminated blamed Ukraine, but the stories had to include some kind of conspiracy theory to reveal the true face of the junta in Kyiv. According to the immediate version of the junta, there was a catastrophic mistake. There was allegedly a plan to shoot down the airplane in which the Russian head of state was traveling, but another airplane was shot down accidentally. This was reported not just by the scandalous press, but also by the government-controlled Interfax news service, making reference to sources from Rossaviatsiya, or the federal air transport agency. Until the very last moment, the Russian Defense Ministry and the Russian investigations commission defended the view that the Malaysian airplane was shot down by destroyers from the Ukrainian air force. Komsomolskaya Pravda filed a “report” about a CIA operation, and all of Russia’s public space was filled with unmasking “new evidence” about Ukrainians or Western agents. This was handled by a broad spectrum of distributors, starting with government officials and ending with troll farms. Some versions were explained on television channels in a popularly scientific way, making use of maps, graphs and falsified satellite images. Blaming Ukraine was an important nationalist and patriotic job, because otherwise it would have been proven that the Kremlin supported the “people’s republics” of the Donbas not just with humanitarian convoys, but also in a military way.

Operations Department of the General Staff on Ground Operations in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Well-known Russian military journalist Viktor Baranets interviewed Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov, the head of the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate, about operations in Syria. Still figuratively known as the "brain" of the armed forces, this directorate is the locus of all military affairs happening in Russia and abroad, including "the planning and conduct of strategic operations as well as the operations of our Aerospace Forces" in Syria.

As a longtime ally of Syria, Russia has been constantly monitoring the situation there. Kartapolov has no respect for the US's use of its Air Force there. He states that the US considers "it humiliating to admit that without Russia they are unable to achieve their objective" and that in regard to US air operations, "we could see that everything the US-led coalition is doing is a sham... It is an imitation of strikes..." When asked why the US reacted sarcastically to the launch of Kalibr missiles from the Caspian Sea, he stated that US capabilities, "which they tout as boundless, are a children's tale." Kartapolov stated that the coalition has struck bridges, overpasses, electrical substations, heating systems, and water pressure and pump station, making people's lives unbearable and reducing the combat capabilities of the Syrian Armed Forces.

Russia assessed the situation and prepared proposals to achieve objectives, beginning with the immediate transfer of capabilities, equipment, and supplies. They conduct triple confirmation of accuracy before attacking a target, using space-based, aerial, radio and radio-technical reconnaissance along with drones. He believes the terrorists are abandoning their positions. He denied that Russian missiles had fallen in the wrong place, saying that all had hit their targets; and that there will be one Russian base in Syria that combines naval, air, and ground forces. However, in spite of his focus on ground forces, Kartapolov categorically states that "under no circumstances will our ground units take part in a ground operation." **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

"We realized that the operations of the so-called international coalition led by the United States, which only bombs sites from the air, would not destroy ISIL (terrorist organization banned in Russian). This can only be done by carrying out assignments on the ground. But there is no one to fight on the ground except the Army of the Syrian Arab Republic. That is why we started precisely with that. And in order to coordinate activities, we needed to combine the efforts of the countries and forces fighting ISIL on the ground."

Source: Viktor Baranets, Interview with Andrey Kartapolov, "Russian Military Base May Appear in Syria. It Will Have Naval, Air, and Ground Components," *Komsomolskaya Pravda Online*, 16 October 2015.

[Baranets] How would you assess the operational tactics of ISIL units and their armaments? Do the terrorists have man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS)?

[Kartapolov] We have information about the presence of MANPADS there, but we have not yet seen them being used in practice. Therefore, the appearance of such arms among the militants now could suggest that someone has adopted an unwise [Russian: *neblagorazumnyy*] approach to dealing with this issue....

[Baranets] Are you hinting at possible supplies of American Stinger-type MANPADS to the militants?

[Kartapolov] Possibly. Let us move on. As for the militants' tactics, ISIL has in its ranks quite a few former officers who served in the Saddam Husayn-era Iraqi Army. And they joined it [ISIL] only because the Americans, having defeated Iraq, occupied it, so they, being their country's patriots (it is possible to call them even this), decided to fight that. Of course, it was a mistake that they decided to fight by joining ISIL, but that is their choice. These officers have sufficiently high skills and expertise and are capable of both organizing and training people. That is why some units are fairly well trained. In addition, they have seized a large amount of weapons at Iraqi Army depots and, in fact, Syrian Army units as well. These are precisely the weapons our American partners actively supplied to Iraq. They include M1 Abrams tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery systems, and much more. That is why, when talking about ISIL, you should not think that these are ordinary thugs, the riffraff, armed with machine guns and long daggers, and that all they know is how to cut people's heads off. They know how to fight. They have perfected various tactical methods they developed while fighting the Iraqi Army and the Syrian Army. And they sometimes use these methods quite successfully.

[Baranets] How many gunmen are currently in ISIL's armed units?

[Kartapolov] According to various estimates, between 30,000 and 80,000. Since the truth, as usual, is somewhere in between, let us say 40,000-50,000.

[Baranets] The US-led coalition has been bombing ISIL positions for more than a year. However, ISIS-controlled Syrian territory has grown and almost reached 75 percent [of the country's total area]. What can you say about this?

[Kartapolov] The US-led coalition has been delivering air strikes against ISIL infrastructure facilities such as bridges, overpasses, electrical substations, heating (continued)

Continued: Operations Department of the General Staff on Ground Operations in Syria

systems, and water pressure and water pump stations. This makes people's lives unbearable. This does not make it difficult for ISIL to conduct operations as much as it makes it very difficult for the government troops of President Al-Asad to conduct its operations. Therefore, while declaring another thing, they were in fact reducing the combat capability of the Syrian Armed Forces. As a result of this, they ceded more and more positions because it was difficult to send supplies to them as there was no water, heat, or food. But ISIL does not need this because they were able to buy food in various neighboring countries. They were supplied with that (we know who did it, but let us not yet talk about these organizations and countries). Hence the result we have.

[Baranets] How is coordination taking place between our Aerospace Forces, our officers, and the Syrian Army? Are there our officers in the ranks of the Syrian Army, or are there not?

[Kartapolov] No, our group is operating on its own. And at our headquarters in Syria there is a small task force from the Syrian Armed Forces carrying out coordination with Syrian Air Force flights and giving us accurate data on the location of the forward line of government troops.

[Baranets] What is the current situation on the Syrian front? What are we doing, and what are the Syrians doing?

[Kartapolov] We are continuing to carry out our tasks. Since the start of the operation, our aircraft have made more than 600 sorties.

[Baranets] That is since 30 September?

[Kartapolov] Yes, since 30 September. We have delivered strikes against more than 380 ISIL sites. According to various data, the ISIL gangs have suffered very serious losses. We have recorded cases of panic. We have recorded cases of positions being abandoned. This also suggests something. Naturally, this encourages government troops, who have gone on the offensive. As one of the Syrian generals said, the operations of the Russian Air Force have brought smiles back to the faces of Syrian children.

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