

Foreign Military Studies Office

# OEWATCH



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FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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**ON THE COVER:** General Staff Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces

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# OEWATCH

## Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

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# NATO Member Turkey joins Islamic Military Alliance

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 15 December Saudi Arabia declared the establishment of a new Islamic military alliance against terrorism, made up of 34 Muslim countries, including Turkey, the only NATO member in the alliance. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss Turkish perspectives of the development, including those that welcome the development and those that call for Turkey to avoid such an initiative, questioning whether such an alliance would potentially provoke a Sunni-Shia conflict.

The first accompanying passage points out that Turkey is the only NATO member in the alliance and notes Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's comments on the alliance. He welcomes the development and says that for Islamic countries to have a joint voice against terrorism is the best response to those who try to equate Islam with terrorism. In contrast, the second passage notes the absence of Iraq, Iran and Syria, and claims that "the absence of Iraq and Syria- two Islamic countries who have suffered most from terror in recent years; and the absence of Iran- one of the strongest Islamic countries in the region ..., leads to the question, 'Is the alliance against terror, or against Shia [countries]?' The passage also points out that the alliance brings together Turkey and Egypt - two countries whose diplomatic relations had hit rock bottom after the collapse of the Morsi regime in Egypt in mid-2013.

The final passage, by respected Turkish foreign policy expert Murat Yetkin, raises some questions about the alliance. He asks how this Saudi-led Sunni front will fight ISIS without the approval of the Iraqi government, when ISIS controls a third of that country. He also raises the question of how the participation of Lebanon will contribute to the alliance, when the most effective power there is Hezbollah. He argues that the idea of a Sunni front will further highlight the Sunni-Shia divide, and also claims that Turkey would be better off staying away from such an initiative, which could provoke regional sectarian conflicts.

As Yetkin points out, this is not the first time that such an initiative has been launched. In late March Arab leaders meeting at the 26th Arab Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt had decided to establish a joint Arab military force against regional security threats. However, despite some steps to form the force, the process was postponed indefinitely in August.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

*“For Islamic countries to have a joint voice against terror, is the best response to those who are trying to equate terror with Islam.”*

**Source:** “Suudi Arabistan öncülüğünde teröre karşı İslam ittifakı,” *Hurriyet.com.tr*, 16 December 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/terore-karsi-islam-ittifaki-40027554>

*“Turkey is the only NATO ally in the coalition. Prime Minister Davutoğlu confirmed Turkey’s participation in the coalition. Davutoğlu...said, ‘When we received an invitation from Saudi Arabia regarding such a meeting, a comprehensive gathering, we told them we viewed that positively. For Islamic countries to have a joint voice against terror, is the best response to those who are trying to equate terror with Islam. This effort among Islamic countries is a step in the right direction.’ Davutoğlu did not give detailed information about the extent to which Turkey would participate in this alliance.”*

**Source:** “İttifak teröre mi karşı Şiilere mi? (Is the Alliance against terror or against Shiites?),” *Abcgazetesi.com*, 15 December 2015, <http://abcgazetesi.com/ittifak-terore-mi-siilere-mi-karsi-4165.html>

*“The alliance, which has 34 members, does not include Iran, Syria and Iraq. The absence of Iraq and Syria- two Islamic countries who have suffered most from terror in recent years; and the absence of Iran- one of the strongest Islamic countries in the region ..., leads to the question, ‘Is the alliance against terror, or against Shias?...’*

*On the other hand, Turkey and Egypt will come together within the 34-member coalition. Following the collapse of the Mohammed Morsi regime, the two countries had seen tension in relations and their diplomatic relations had hit rock-bottom, with each side withdrawing their ambassadors. Now the two countries will come together within a coalition that has an ‘anti-Shiite’ appearance. So Erdoğan, who doesn’t want to even shake Sisi’s hand, will fight together within the same coalition.”*

*“Turkey would be better off staying away from this initiative which may provoke regional sectarian conflicts.”*

**Source:** “Sünni cepheye katılmak kötü sonuçlar doğurabilir (Joining the Sunni front may cause bad outcomes,)” *Radikal.com.tr*, 16 December 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/murat-yetkin/sunni-cepheye-katilmak-kotu-sonuclar-dogurabilir-1493508>

*“The question of how this Saudi-led Sunni front will fight will Sunni ISIS, who controls a third of Iraq, without the approval of the Iraqi government, currently has no answer. Likewise, the question of how the participation of Lebanon, in which the most effective power is Shia and Iran-backed Hezbollah, will help the coalition, is also up in the air.”*

*Of course this idea of a Sunni front is not new. This year, in early March, King Salman of Saudi Arabia, had discussed the idea with leaders (including President Tayyip Erdoğan). This initiative came to life at the end of March and a 10-member Sunni force started operations in Yemen. The idea of a [Sunni front] was a bad idea then, and it’s a bad idea now. Because this idea will further highlight the Sunni-Shia divide, the sectarian tone in all the already complicated conflicts in the Middle East.*

*So, what is the government thinking when they include Turkey into such a Sunni structure; while saying that they are against and outside of sectarian divides? This is an erroneous idea and initiative. Turkey would be better off staying away from such an initiative which may provoke regional sectarian conflicts.”*



## Russia's Expanding Presence in the Mediterranean

### OE Watch Commentary:

The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss Russia's expanding presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, including its deployment of cruise missiles in the region. The passages express panic and point out that the Eastern Mediterranean now hosts warships from 12 countries, and that Russia's moves are creating a dangerous environment.

The first passage claims that the Middle East is inching closer to World War III, noting that Russia has turned the Mediterranean into an "ammunition depot." It notes that Russia has brought a submarine loaded with cruise missiles into the region, claiming that such missiles have hit ISIS from the Caspian Sea before. It also points out that Russia had previously sent S-400 missiles to the region.

The second passage also notes Russia's presence in the Mediterranean, mentioning that 12 countries now have ships there. It points out that Russia has been moving an important part of its naval fleets in the Black Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean, including its war missile cruiser RFS Moskva. The passage notes that Russia has 10 warships (3 corvettes, 2 frigates, 2 destroyers, 2 submarines and 1 intelligence ship), and 3 logistical support ships, for a total of 13 ships in its air base in Latakia and its naval base in Tartus. It points out that Russian ships, which are constantly rotating, are coming to the region from the Black Sea through the Turkish straits.

These moves by Russia come following Turkey's shoot-down of a Russian plane on 24 November. Following the downing of its plane, Russia deployed its missile cruiser Moskva off the coast of Latakia and announced that it was deploying the country's most advanced surface-to-air missile system, the S400 Triumf, to Syria. Before that, in late September, it had significantly increased its air power in its Khmeimim Air Base near Latakia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

*"Russia has turned the Mediterranean into an ammunition depot."*



"Military Forces in the Eastern Med". (On the left: number of frigates, warships, submarines, destroyers, intelligence ships, electronic warships and air defense ships by nation; on the right: Russian bases in Syria; in the middle: English base in Cyprus. Source: <http://www.gazetevatan.com/rusya-dan-korkutan-hamle-akdeniz-in-altina--892493-gundem/>)

**Source:** "Rusya'dan korkutan hamle Akdeniz'in altında...(Scary move by Russia under the Mediterranean)," *Gazetevatan.com*, 8 December 2015, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/rusya-dan-korkutan-hamle-akdeniz-in-altina--892493-gundem/>

*"Russia has deployed cruise missiles on the submarines it has deployed in the Eastern Med off the coast of Syria. With this latest crazy move by Putin, another step has been taken towards the end of the world. Russia had previously sent S-400 missiles."*

*The Middle East is inching closer and closer to World War III. Russia has turned the Mediterranean into an ammunition depot. This time, it has brought a submarine filled with cruise missiles into the region.... An unnamed source said that the submarine contains cruise missiles that were "same as those caliber type cruise missiles that were launched against ISIS from the Caspian Sea".*

...

*One of the most important countries with a military presence in the region is Russia. Russia has an air base in Syria's Latakia region, and a naval base in Tartus. Three corvettes, two frigates, one intelligence ship, two destroyers and two submarines are waiting off the coast of Syria."*

**Source:** "12 ülke Akdeniz'de güç gösterisi yapıyor (12 countries are posturing in the Mediterranean)," *Milliyet.com.tr*, 9 December 2015, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/12-ulke-akdeniz-de-guc-gosterisi-gundem-2160603/>

*"The Eastern Med is heating up following Russia's inclusion in the Syrian war, with 12 countries deploying strong warships there. The Turkish Navy has also increased its presence with its 14 combat and 14 logistical support ships."*

*Russia is heating up the Mediterranean, by sending an important part of its naval fleets in the Black Sea to the Eastern Med, including its war missile cruiser RFS Moskva. Russia has 10 warships (3 corvettes, 2 frigates, 2 destroyers, 2 submarines and 1 intelligence ship), and 3 logistical support ships, for a total of 13 ships in its air base in Latakia and its naval base in Tartus. Russian ships, which are constantly rotating, are coming to the region from the Black Sea through the Turkish straits."*

# The End of Compartmentalization in Turkey-Russia Relations?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Until recently Turkey described its relations with Russia as “compartmentalized,” meaning that, despite differences on issues such as Syria, Egypt, Ukraine and others, the two countries would still work together on issues that furthered their mutual interests, such as the gas trade. The accompanying passages from the Turkish press discuss Russian initiatives following Turkey’s downing of a Russian jet, which target Turkish-Russian relations in areas ranging from tourism to trade, pointing to the end of compartmentalization in relations.

The first passage discusses a decree that Putin recently signed involving sanctions and bans on six different areas, including Turkish goods, the lifting of the visa-free travel between the countries, cancellation of tours and charter flights to Turkey, suspension of Turkish employment in Russia, and tighter controls on Turkish vehicles carrying goods to Russia.

The second passage discusses the potential suspension of Russia’s plans to build Turkey’s first nuclear plant. It points out that this involves a \$20 billion investment, but that the plan is now up in the air. The third passage discusses similarly that the issue of the “Turkish Stream pipeline” - a pipeline that would carry Russian natural gas to Turkey via the Black Sea, and then further to Southern Europe - is also up in the air.

The final passage notes that 24 November marks the end of compartmentalization in Turkish-Russian relations. It points out that in the last 15 years, despite differences on Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, Russia still became one of the Turkey’s top economic partners. It notes that this is all expected to change with the trade and economic sanctions coming from Russia. The author notes that the first signs of this are visible in the Russian government’s call to Russian tourists to not travel to Turkey and in the discussions of a potential cancellation of Turkish Stream. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan meets with Vladimir Putin in Baku on 13 June 2015.  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Erdogan\\_Putin\\_meeting\\_1.jpeg#/media/File:Erdogan\\_Putin\\_meeting\\_1.jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Erdogan_Putin_meeting_1.jpeg#/media/File:Erdogan_Putin_meeting_1.jpeg)

*“...with 24 November, the policy of ‘compartmentalization’ has ended in Turkish-Russian relations.”*

**Source:** “Putin kararnameyi imzaladı (Putin signed the decree),” *Haberturk.com.tr*, 28 November 2015, <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/1159901-putin-kararnameyi-imzaladi>

*“Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree that involves a number of economic sanctions against Turkey including the banning of Turkish goods. [In addition], as of 1 January 2016, Turkish citizens will be banned from starting employment in Russia. Certain goods produced in Turkey will be banned from entering Russia... Vehicles that transport goods to Russia will be under intense scrutiny and control. Furthermore, Russian travel agencies are asked to avoid selling tours to Turkey. Charter flights between the two countries are being completely suspended. As of 1 January 2016, the visa-free travel between the two countries will also be suspended.”*

**Source:** “Rusya, Akkuyu Nükleer Santrali inşaatını fiilen durdurdu iddiası (Claim that Russia has effectively suspended construction of the Akkuyu Nuclear Plant),” *Hurriyet.com.tr*, 9 December 2015, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/rusya-akkuyu-nukleer-santrali-insaatini-fiilen-durdurdu-40024926>

*“According to an agreement between Turkey and Russia, Russia [was] to build the Akkuyu Nuclear Plant, with a 20 billion dollar investment, and the plan would produce 4.800 MW power. The plant was to be the first nuclear plant in Turkey. A high-level official has said, ‘The project is now uncertain following the downing of the Russian jet.’”*

**Source:** “Russia halts Turkish Stream project over downed jet,” *RT.com*, 3 December 2015, <https://www.rt.com/business/324230-gazprom-turkish-stream-cancellation/>

*“Moscow has suspended the Turkish Stream gas pipeline project in response to Turkey shooting down a Russian jet in Syria.... Gazprom’s project has been on hold since the jet incident, awaiting instructions from the Russian government.”*

**Source:** “Rusya ve Türkiye Suriye’de Neden Ayrı Düşüyor? (Why are Russia and Turkey thinking so Differently on Syria?),” *Ankarastrateji.org*, 26 December 2015, <http://ankarastrateji.org/yorum/rusya-ve-turkiye-neden-suriyede-ayr-du-uyor/>

*“... with 24 November, the policy of ‘compartmentalization’...has ended in Turkish-Russian relations. In the last 15 years, Turkey and Russia had been on opposing sides on Chechnya, Georgia, Ukraine and Syria; but Russia still became one of the top import countries for Turkey. But it is expected that in the coming era, trade and economic sanctions are expected from Russia. We see the first signs of these in the [Russian] government’s call to Russian tourists to ‘not go to Turkey’; and in the discussions of a potential cancellation of Turkish Stream....”*



## Iran: “Guarding Revolution Knows No Boundaries”

**OE Watch Commentary:** Admiral Ali Fadavi is the probably the third most powerful military commander in the Islamic Republic of Iran after Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari and Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani. As head of the IRGC Navy, Fadavi has since 2010 commanded the unit which most overtly projects power on behalf of Iran. Under his tenure the IRGC Navy has essentially transformed from a unit operating in the Persian Gulf with a few symbolic forays into the northern Indian Ocean into a force which has demonstrated the ability to both sail to China and cross multiple times in the Mediterranean.

Iranian regime rhetoric has evolved from depicting Iran as a regional power, to a pan-regional power, and increasingly into a power whose strategic boundaries extend to the Eastern Mediterranean and Gulf of Aden. Fadavi’s statement that “guarding the revolution is the same as guarding Islam itself” reinforces a doctrine in which Iranians see themselves not so much as defenders of Shi’ite Islam, but rather as a leader of the broader Islamic world. That such statements coincide with a hard currency windfall resulting from the July 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—the so-called Iran nuclear deal—and a subsequent military hardware buying spree suggest that they are no mere rhetorical bluster. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin).**

*“Guarding the revolution is the same as guarding Islam itself.”*



Ali Fadavi addresses the Basij.

Source: Basij Press (<http://basijpress.ir/images/news/58506/thumbs/58506.jpg>)

**Source:** “Pasdarani az Enghelab-e Islami Mohdud be Giografiaye Khasi Nist,” (Guarding the Revolution Knows No Geographic Boundaries), *Fars News Agency*, 8 December 2015. <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940917000240>

### **Fadavi: “Guarding Revolution Knows No Boundaries**

*Admiral Ali Fadavi, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy, at a commemoration at the shrine of the martyrs in Fars Province, in a message to the family of the martyrs, and speaking to the people gathered, said, God created his servants, and it is the nature of God that man will be tested repeatedly, but the greatest test of man is what he does with his life, and this is something about which the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has a good understanding and it is prepared to defend the revolution and Islam in all parts of the world.*

*He added, “Guarding the revolution is the same as guarding Islam itself, and knows no geographic limits.”*



Iranian navy ship Chiroo

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US\\_Navy\\_100820-N-7317W-128\\_Eight\\_mariners\\_approach\\_the\\_Iranian\\_navy\\_ship\\_Chiroo\\_in\\_a\\_rigid-hull\\_inflatable\\_boat\\_from\\_the\\_aircraft\\_carrier\\_USS\\_Harry\\_S.\\_Truman\\_%28CVN\\_75%29.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Navy_100820-N-7317W-128_Eight_mariners_approach_the_Iranian_navy_ship_Chiroo_in_a_rigid-hull_inflatable_boat_from_the_aircraft_carrier_USS_Harry_S._Truman_%28CVN_75%29.jpg)



## Iran: Supreme Leader's Advisor Goes to Syria

**OE Watch Commentary:** With the Iran nuclear file resolved under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, diplomats from the United States, European Union, Iran, and broader Middle East have begun to discuss the Syria conflict—the region's most violent current dispute.

It is against the backdrop of talks in both Vienna and Riyadh that Ali Akbar Velayati, a former Iranian foreign minister (1981-1997) who now serves as Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's chief foreign affairs advisor, made a rare foreign visit to both Lebanon, where he met with both Hezbollah and Lebanese government officials, and Damascus, where he met with besieged Syrian President Bashar Assad.

While the visit to Damascus was itself important symbolically—few foreign officials have made the journey to the Syrian capital since the civil war began—Velayati's clear and unequivocal comments that Iran's red line is Bashar al-Assad's continuance in office suggests that no Iranian compromise is on the horizon which would see another leader suitable to Iran's interests.

Iran and Syria have long been strong allies. Both had a mutual adversary in Saddam Hussein's Iraq (Syria was the only Arab state to support Iran in the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War). There was sectarian solidarity as well: while Syria might be majority Sunni, the ruling Assad family belongs to the Alawi sect, which itself is an offshoot from more mainstream Shi'ism. More practically, Assad allowed Iran to use Syria as a hub from which to deliver weaponry to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Velayati's stated logic is that Assad won the 2014 elections fair and square and so should be able to serve out his seven year term. While the Syrian government invited close allies to observe its elections—and many of these non-democracies declared the polls "free and fair"—the reality is that the civil war and the regime security forces prevented any reasonable campaign or free ballot. Velayati's reasoning also suggest some Iranian hypocrisy, as it has been consistently unwilling to recognize elections in Lebanon, Egypt, and elsewhere which produce victors who do not ascribe to Iran's wants and concerns.

For Velayati to declare Assad's continuance in power a red line should not only cast a cloud over diplomacy, but also suggests that the Supreme Leader of Iran, on whose behalf Velayati speaks, will not compromise an iota on the Syria file. For Khamenei, red lines stated with such concision are deep rooted and not merely turns of phrase. Hence, it appears that, despite the military losses which Iran has taken in support of Assad, it is willing to double down on its military investment in Syria in the weeks and months to come. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

*“If this red line is violated, no other country in the region will have security.”*



Ali Akbar Velayati meets Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, November 29, 2015.

Source: Syria Arab News Agency, <http://sana.sy/en/?p=62890>

**Source:** “Bashar Assad Khat-e Qermez-e Iran Ast” (Bashar Assad is Iran's Red Line), *Shargh Daily*, 4 December 2015. <http://goo.gl/7dEH3O>

### ***Bashar Assad is Iran's Red Line***

*Ali Akbar Velayati, speaking on live television on Saturday night, spoke about his visit to Syria and Lebanon. In response to a question, the advisor to the Supreme Leader said these discussions in Vienna are a way to resolve the crisis in a new way, but if they seek to use this to sidestep Bashar Assad, they should know that Iran is not operating on the battlefield and in the political sphere to not back Assad, and that to engage in political talks does not mean we are abandoning Assad but rather that in the political arena we are supporting Syria's territorial integrity and will not shirk from defending its state interests... The president of the Center for Strategic Research Council said that in our relationships, Iran's red line with relationship to Syria is that whether there is a solution or not, Bashar al-Assad is the red line of the Islamic Republic of Iran as he has been chosen by the Syrian people to be the president for a certain period of time, and that if this red line is violated, no other country in the region will have security.*



## Iran: Basij Prepares for Global Role

*“The Basij is preparing itself to assume global roles.”*

**OE Watch Commentary:** While presidents in the Islamic Republic of Iran define the style of any particular administration, especially with regard to diplomacy and outreach to the outside world, it is Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei who sets the substance of the Islamic Republic's policy. It is against this backdrop that a 25 November speech, in which he spoke at a forum for members of the Basij, the Islamic Revolutionary Corps' (IRGC) paramilitary wing, immediately following IRGC Commander Mohammad Ali Jafari, should be of concern.

The Supreme Leader doubled down on antipathy to America, once again declaring that the United States remains the chief enemy of the Islamic Republic and the values for which it stands. Khamenei, however, expressed animosity at not only the political leadership of the United States, but also American companies and the broader economic system, which he accused of being too much under Zionist influence.

Khamenei signaled that Iran may not limit itself to opposing American influence diplomatically. He endorsed glowingly Jafari, who announced that he plans to transform the Basij into a global force, which will enable Iran to use the Basij model to co-opt local militias and to create proxies among allies in order to extend Iran's reach, while at the same time continuing to afford Tehran plausible deniability by delegating certain operations to non-Iranian units. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

**Source:** “Beyanat dar Didar Farmandihan-e Gerdihanha-ye Basij dar Astaneh Roz Basij-e Motazafin” (Remarks in a Meeting with the Commanders of the Basij on the Eve of the Anniversary of its Founding), *Leader.ir*, 25 November 2015. <http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/index.php?p=bayanat&id=13923>

### **Remarks by the Regime Leadership to Basij Commanders**

*Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, spoke first and described the Basij as the spiritual sibling of the great founder of the Islamic Republic, saying: “The Basij is preparing itself to assume global roles with a view to realizing the ideals of the Islamic Revolution and changing the balance in favor of the oppressed and Muslims.”*

*Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said, “Today, the epitome of arrogance is America. Previously, it was England. Certainly, this enemy is not idle. It is busy. Always busy. This analysis was that of the first to speak, our beloved General [Mohammad Ali] Jafari. It is an absolutely correct analysis. Today, the global conflict is between the movement of the arrogant and the movement of those who value national independence and sovereignty that was symbolized by the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic. This is the case in the world today. There is no other fight... This is the basic dispute and it is the front line. The enemy exists and the enemy is aware. We are aware that the manifestation of this arrogance today is America. Its political system is arrogance but arrogance is not only the political system. The financial system is sometimes more important and effective. The biggest and wealthiest companies and corporations in the world are mainly Zionist. And they are the power behind the powers, and they are always engaged. Gold and force, and force and gold go hand in hand....”*

*“The Basij can help others understand that the political positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran vis-à-vis Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain, and Palestine are the most clear and logical positions a fair and wise man can adopt....”*

*“With God's grace, the Iranian nation will further preserve and mine this treasure and assisted by these endeavors and willpower and insight, it will achieve the zenith of its desired exaltation and promotion and the enemies will fail to take any countermeasure.”*



Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei addresses Basij commanders

Source: *Leader.ir*, [http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=photo&albumId=1528&img=45479\\_364.jpg](http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=photo&albumId=1528&img=45479_364.jpg)



# The Looming Mosul Mobilization

**OE Watch Commentary:** In late November 2015 Arabic media lit up with talk of a looming offensive to take Mosul from the Islamic State. According to several accounts, the purported offensive is to be spearheaded by fighters from a Sunni militia calling itself the “National Mobilization to Liberate Nineveh” (also known as the “Mosul Mobilization”). The Mosul Mobilization is run by Atheel and Usama al-Nujaifi, influential Sunni politicians from Mosul whose national political vehicle is the al-Hadba Sunni party. The first accompanying excerpt comes from an interview with Atheel al-Nujaifi, who was governor of Nineveh (Ninawa) Province (capital: Mosul) when the Islamic State overran it in the summer of 2014. He explains that only his forces are capable of freeing Mosul, and a semi-autonomous “Nineveh Region” will be created once they do so. According to him, this region will be the kernel of a new Sunni state within Iraq.

In early December the official spokesman for the Mosul Mobilization disclosed that additional Turkish armor and soldiers were being deployed to Camp Zilkan, a military site under the control of Erbil-based Kurdish Peshmerga forces, where the Mosul Mobilization has been training for the past several months. The camp is located in Bashiqa sub-district, an ethnic and religious mosaic northeast of Mosul, which has been at the frontline of fighting between ISIL and the Kurds. The announcement caused a political row between Baghdad and Ankara; the Mosul Mobilization’s spokesman disappeared, allegedly arrested by Peshmerga forces.

The Iraqi government and the powerful Shi’a-majority militias, collectively known as the “Popular Mobilization” (al-Hashd al-Shaabi), have rejected the Mosul Mobilization’s plan and sharply criticized Turkish involvement. Furthermore, the Mosul offensive risks further splitting Iraq’s Kurdish factions. As the second article notes, this could in turn shake up the politics and alliances of Kurdish groups in Syria and Turkey. A Mosul offensive would also impact the Iraqi Army’s efforts in Anbar Province, which is why some argue that attacking Mosul before Anbar is secured would do more harm than good.

Any sustained Mosul offensive is likely to bring in outside actors. The author of the third accompanying article argues that Russia seeks to draw Turkey into the Syria-Iraq battlefield, beginning in Mosul. According to the fourth excerpt, the leaders of Iraq’s most powerful Shi’a factions are calling for direct Russian intervention in Iraq in light of Turkish deployments to Bashiqa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

WILL FIGHT UNTIL LIBERATION  
سنقاتل حتى  
التحرير

Atheel al-Nujaifi  
Source: <https://atheel-alnujaifi.com/>

**Source:** محافظ الموصل السابق: القوات التركية ستلعب دور الإسناد في معركة التحرير المرتقبة  
“Former Mosul Governor: Turkish Troops Will Play a Supporting Role in the Expected Liberation War,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*. 7 December 2015. <http://goo.gl/sS4vAV>

*Al-Nujaifi stressed that Iraqi forces are “not ready to liberate Mosul, especially since the Iraqi Army does not presently have forces able to participate in such a battle. The Nineveh Operations Command has fewer than 100 soldiers under its command and they are specialized in guarding. Baghdad does not have forces ready to fight near Mosul, the nearest ones are in Baiji which is 200 kilometers away”... he expects that following the liberation “first there will be a Nineveh Region, after which this region will wait for the other provinces to eventually discuss broadening it into a Sunni Region. Nineveh Region will be established immediately following liberation.”*

**Source:** أهداف للتحرك التركي في شمال العراق 3  
“Three Targets of the Turkish Mobilization in Northern Iraq,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 6 December 2015. <http://goo.gl/W4I1cs>

*New complications arise from the strong anti-Turkish position taken by Kurdish President Fouad Maasoum, the leader of Jalal Talabani’s party, which is politically aligned with Tehran’s faithful allies. The developments could deepen inter-Kurdish divisions in Iraq and perhaps beyond... The Iraqi government rejected the preparations to liberate Mosul province from ISIL. The prime minister’s office explained that a Turkish regiment armed with tanks and artillery was present near Mosul and that this constituted a dangerous violation of Iraqi sovereignty. The Nineveh Operations Command... commander Najam al-Jabbouri said that his unit oversees three Popular Mobilization formations and has no links to the Mosul Mobilization...*

(continued)





## Continued: The Looming Mosul Mobilization

“...draw Turkey into a war it does not want but which Russia and Iran do want...”



US Army soldiers patrol the streets of Mosul, January 2005

Source: By Specialist Adam Sanders, United States Army [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

**Source:** الموصل والحرب العالمية الثالثة  
Abd al-Bari al-Jabbouri. “Mosul and World War III,”  
*al-Zaman*. 9 December 2015. <http://www.azzaman.com/?p=138063>

...the [Russian] objective is clear: draw Turkey into a war it does not want but which Russia and Iran do want... Putin himself said two days ago that Russia is ready for World War III... the United States, the region and the world are being drawn into this war which Russia has been preparing for years with its Iranian allies... the Battle for Mosul is the start of a major world war that will occur in Iraq and specifically Mosul, as well as Syria. The Battle for Mosul points to a long world war through which the great powers seek to achieve their plans and strategic objectives in the Middle East. Of course none of them will be achieved...



**Source:** تحركات الموصل: مأزق العبادي يتسع  
“Mosul Mobilizations: al-Abadi’s Dilemma Widens,”  
*al-Araby al-Jadid*. 7 December 2015. <http://goo.gl/xzSmXi>

Leaders from the “coalition” of Iran supporters, most prominently the head of the Badr militias Hadi al-Amari, the head of the Asaib al-Haq militias Qays al-Khazali, Vice-President Nouri al-Maliki, and Mowaffak al-Rubaie, all asked al-Abadi during a meeting for direct Russian intervention as in Syria, in response to Turkish military mobilizations and Saudi and Gulf political activities. Al-Abadi refused...



“National Mobilization to Liberate Nineveh” (Mosul Mobilization) Patch  
Source: <https://www.facebook.com/LiberatingNaynawa/>

Nineveh (Ninawa) Province  
Source: Natural Earth v2.0



# Saudi and Emirati Commanders Killed in Yemen's Bab el-Mandeb

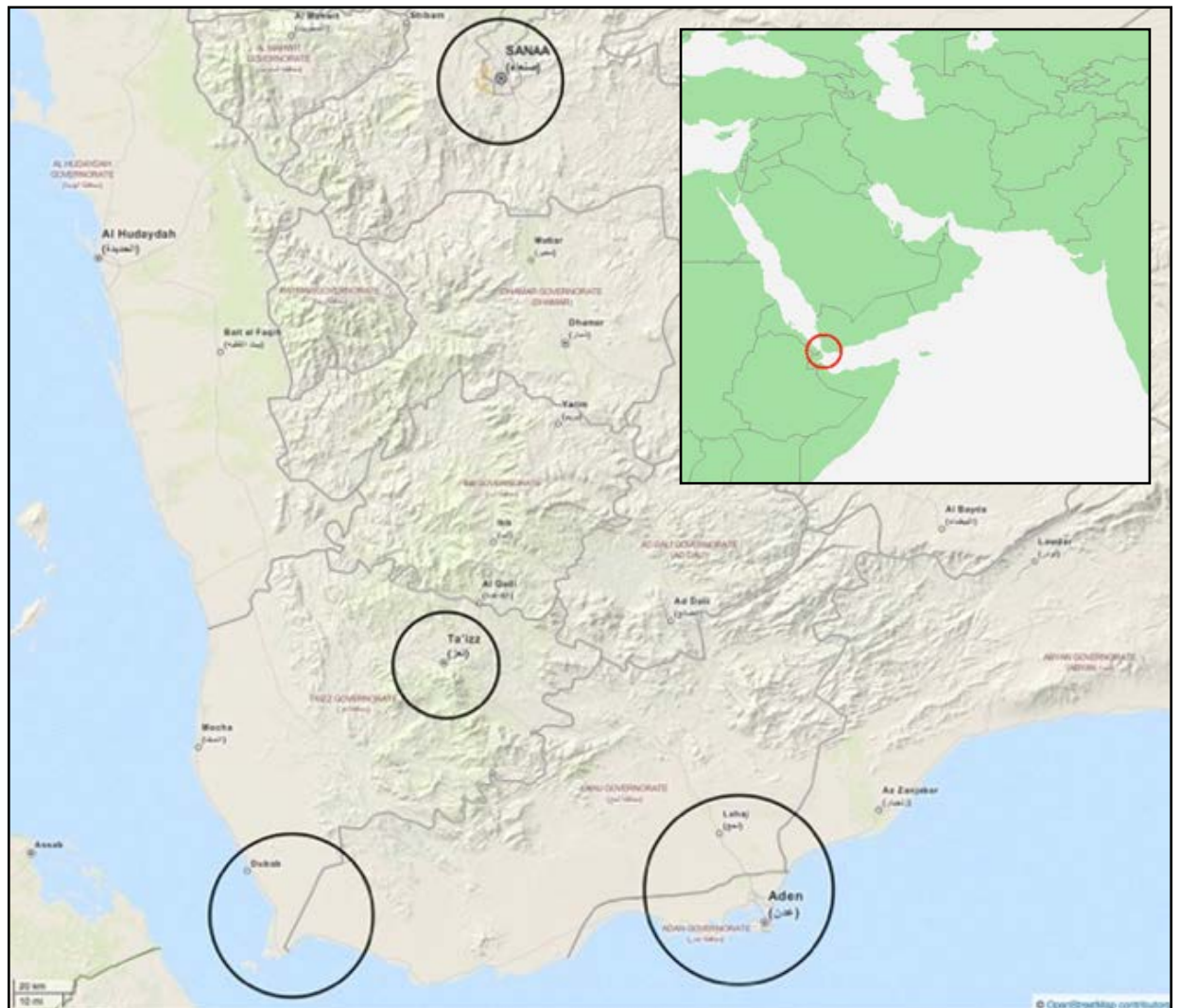
*“...more than just a missile being fired, it was a direct breach of his inner circle and the communication of extremely secret movements...”*

**OE Watch Commentary:** Shortly after Saudi airstrikes in Yemen began in March 2015, the commander of the Yemeni Army's 17th Infantry Brigade welcomed fighters from the Huthi Movement into his area of operations. The 17th Brigade's job was to safeguard the Yemeni side of Bab el-Mandeb, the all-important chokepoint for naval traffic to and from the Suez Canal. As the first accompanying article notes, 17th Brigade forces allowed Huthi fighters to secure government installations in surrounding areas, including the town of Dubab (Dhubab), located below the 17th Brigade's base (also known as the Omari Base) and overlooking Bab el-Mandeb. Thus, the 17th Brigade joined a long list of military bases throughout Yemen run by supporters of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh who joined forces with the Huthis following the launch of Saudi airstrikes.

In early October the Saudi coalition bombarded the area from air and sea and quickly seized Bab el-Mandeb and surrounding areas, as Huthi-Saleh fighters dispersed inland up the hills and north toward Mocha (Mokha). Over the following month the coalition used the coastal highway to transport troops and armor from Aden to a forward operating base (FOB) established near Dubab. In early November Huthi-Saleh fighters regained control of the Omari Base. On 17 November the Saudi-led coalition began a multipronged offensive to take full control over Taiz city and province, including Dubab and the Omari Base. The Dubab/Omari front quickly stuttered, as Huthi-Saleh ambushes and landmines halted the movement of coalition fighters. The second accompanying article, from a newspaper supporting the Saudi intervention, reflects the exasperation of many Yemenis with the heavily armed Saudi coalition's inability to advance.

In early December Huthi-Saleh media reports from the Dubab/Omari front mentioned dozens of casualties from a UAE-financed private army of ex-soldiers from across the globe, including North and South America (particularly Colombia), Australia, and England. On 14 December two top commanders in the Saudi coalition's campaign - Saudi Colonel Abdullah al-Sahyan and Emirate Colonel Sultan al-Ketbi - were killed when a missile struck the coalition's FOB, as the third article details. According to Huthi-Saleh media, significant equipment was destroyed and dozens of troops killed, including from the Saudi, Emirati, Sudanese, and Moroccan militaries.

(continued)



Southwest Yemen at the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb.

Source: M.Minderhoud (own work based on PD map) [Public domain or Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons; <http://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright>

**Source:** تفاصيل خاصة عن تسليم اللواء 17 مشاة المرباط في باب المندب للحوثيين ليلة امس  
“Exclusive Details on the Handover of the 17th Infantry Brigade in Bab el-Mandeb to the Huthis Yesterday Night,” *Mandab Press*. 26 March 2015. <http://mandabpress.com/story/2015-3-26/7406>

*A source told Mandeb Press that a Huthi force composed of 20 teams in 4x4s (“Toyota Hiluxes”) mobilized from Hodeida yesterday. Some were dressed as civilians and others in Republican Guard uniforms. They arrived in Dubab at one in the morning. As soon as the force arrived Brigade Commander BRIG GEN Saleh al-Sabari and Operations Chief Abd al-Karim al-Mukahil met them on the road, after which the brigade commander led the convoy back to the base, where special quarters had been prepared for them. The next morning, the Huthi gunmen spread out around the brigade base, Bab el-Mandeb and Dubab, and took control of all the installations...*

**Source:** دفاعاً عن المقاومة في تعز  
Marwan al-Ghafouri. “In Defense of the Resistance in Taiz,” *al-Ahale*. 3 December 2015. <https://alahale.net/article/23096>

*What is this Arab coalition, with all its European and North American arms, which was halted in Dubab even before getting to Mocha? Weeks went by and they are still there...You brought men from Colombia's FARC and put them in American tanks, and accompanied them with your airplanes and scary French warships, and still you lost in Dubab...*

(continued)



## Continued: Saudi and Emirati Commanders Killed in Yemen's Bab el-Mandeb

This is the second time that Huthi-Saleh forces hit a coalition FOB at a critical moment. As the fourth accompanying excerpt notes, the strike required ample and sustained intelligence, coordination and communication. Suspicions that the Yemeni component of the pro-Saudi coalition is infiltrated are once again being voiced, further adding to the growing discord and finger pointing among coalition factions. The continued insertion of non-Yemeni troops into Yemen's battlefields may resolve one problem, but it creates many more. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Huthi Fighters on Omari Mountain overlooking Dubab (screenshot)  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op3RJgQKedo>

**Source:** ما الذي حدث في باب المندب؟  
“What Happened in Bab el-Mandeb?” *Aden al-Ghad*. 14 December 2015.  
<http://adenghad.net/news/184557>

*At noon on Sunday the military forces arrived in Bab el-Mandeb and met with several members of the Arab coalition and the Southern Resistance. That evening the visiting group went to a small military based used by the coalition in a small mountainous part of Bab el-Mandeb known as the “al-Jinn” Pass. At eight-thirty in the evening the visiting forces stopped in the base when they were suddenly directly hit by what was believed to be a Tochka missile... This operation confirms that there was a plan in place, since shooting off a ballistic missile requires extensive communication including precise target determination...*

**Source:** من الذين خانوا السهيان والكتبي؟  
Abdel Malek al-Yousifi. “Who Betrayed Sahyan and Ketbi?” *al-Masdar*. 15 December 2015. <http://almasdaronline.com/article/77873>

*The killing of the leaders was more than just a missile being fired, it was a direct breach of his inner circle and the communication of extremely secret movements, as well as the precise time and place for the missile. Those who betrayed Taiz and provoked its resistance have also betrayed the coalition and have participated in the killing of its leaders. He who betrays once will betray a thousand times...*



Video allegedly showing Tochka Missile being launched toward Dubab on 14 December.  
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1rMEQNxr0I>



## Is the Russian Bear Eyeing Yemen's Mountains?

“... It is not out of the question for Moscow to provide intelligence and logistic assistance, including information on the coalition's military operations...”

**OE Watch Commentary:** In small demonstrations recently held outside the Russian embassy in Sana'a, Yemenis have called on Russia to break the Saudi siege of Yemen and intervene as it did in Syria. As the first two accompanying excerpts explain, supporters of the Huthi Movement and former President Ali Abdullah Saleh are seeking to leverage the momentum of Russia's Syrian intervention by insinuating that Russia is on the brink of getting involved in Yemen. As the articles note, the message has been conveyed in several ways, including laudatory media coverage of Russia's Syrian intervention and two publicized visits to the Russian Embassy in November by Saleh. There is even a rumor floating that Russian authorities have officially requested to build two military bases in Yemen, one in al-Mahrah (east Yemen) and the other in the Huthi stronghold of Saada (north Yemen).

According to the deputy foreign minister of Yemen's Saudi-backed government, talk of Russian involvement in Syria is delusional. As he points out in the third excerpt, Russia has gone along with the international consensus on Yemen and hence is on the side of the Saudi coalition, rather than the Huthi-Saleh alliance.

As the fourth article points out, Putin himself has played a part in creating the buzz by mentioning Yemen (along with Syria and Libya) as a place where Russia would not hesitate to “defend its citizens' interests.” The Huthi-Saleh alliance is Russia's most obvious Yemeni partner at present, but potential partners down the road may include factions within the Southern Movement (currently allied with Saudi Arabia), given the depth of relations between Aden and Moscow throughout the Soviet era.

Barring a major escalation in Syria, overt Russian involvement in Yemen is unlikely. Russia could, however, gradually insert itself into the gray zones of Yemen's conflict to obtain leverage in the Levant and other battlefields that may open up.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Ali Abdullah Saleh visiting the Russian Embassy in Sana'a, early November 2015.  
Source: [https://twitter.com/sayed\\_ridha/status/661545485937700864](https://twitter.com/sayed_ridha/status/661545485937700864)

### Source:

هكذا يسعى التحالف لتدخل روسي في اليمن

“This Is How the Coalition Seeks to Bring Russia into Yemen,” *al-Tagheer*. 12 November 2015. <http://www.al-tagheer.com/art33208.html>

... Russia's direct intervention in Syria provided a turning point in the psychology of the coup militias [Huthi and Saleh supporters]. Their media began praising Russian military powers and its Syrian intervention. They then began announcing their desire for Russia to intervene in Yemen. More than three demonstrations have been organized in the last two weeks in front of the Russian Embassy in Sana'a asking for immediate Russian intervention to deter the so-called Saudi-American aggression... they are using all means to have Russia intervene in Yemen... It is not out of the question for Moscow to provide intelligence and logistic assistance, including information on the coalition's military operations...

### Source:

هل تتدخل روسيا في اليمن؟ محللون يستبعدون

“Will Russia Intervene in Syria? Analysts Doubt It,” *Arabi 21*. 30 November 2015. <http://goo.gl/KxzQXy>

Ali Saleh has visited the Russian Embassy in Sana'a twice, first in early November to express condolences over the airplane lost in Sinai and the second to condemn the Turkish downing of a Russian plane along the Syrian border... [a Yemeni politician] noted that “the Huthis and Saleh are living under the illusion that Russian intervention is looming; this has helped raise hope among their followers and done the opposite to their adversaries”...

### Source:

وزير الخارجية: دعوة صالح روسيا للتدخل في اليمن وهم

“Foreign Minister: Saleh's Call for Russian Intervention in Yemen Is ‘Delusional’,” *al-Masdar*. 9 December 2015. <http://almasdaronline.com/article/77709>

According to Yemen's Deputy Foreign Minister Dr. Abdel Malik al-Mekhlafi, the attempt by Saleh and his loyalists to “insert Russia into the Yemeni conflict” is delusional. Al-Mekhlafi noted that Russia previously warned the Huthis against forming a government. Russia only recognizes Yemen's legitimate government and as such is part of the international consensus...

### Source:

روسيا تبحث عن أدوار سياسية في اليمن

Adel al-Ahmadi. “Russia Seeks a Political Role in Yemen,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*. 20 November 2015. <http://goo.gl/442RHX>

Discussions of a Russian role have recently increased in Yemen... Russian actions are of particular importance now given Moscow's mobilization in the region as well as Russian President Vladimir Putin's statement in mid-November that his country “will defend its citizens' interests, particularly if they are in difficult or crisis situations, as is the case in Libya, Syria and Yemen”... Since the coalition's activities began last 26 March, the Russian embassy was one of the few to remain open in Sana'a...



# Kenyan Military Accused of Profiting from War in Somalia

**OE Watch Commentary:** Four years ago the Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) entered war-torn Somalia in part to make sure the conflict stayed on their neighbor's side of the border. However, as the accompanying excerpted article relates, there have been accusations by the organization Journalists for Justice that the KDF, particularly its senior leaders, have engaged in extremely profitable trading with al-Shabaab, the very terrorist group they are supposed to be fighting.

Charcoal and sugar are the commodities allegedly tying the KDF and al-Shabaab together. Because the terrorist group finds charcoal so lucrative, the UN banned its export from Somalia, so a senior KDF leader who is willing to trade with the enemy and has a way to get the charcoal out of Somalia and into the hands of a willing buyer could pocket a very tidy sum. As for sugar, Kenya's high taxes on it means anyone smuggling it from Somalia into Kenya also stands to reap significant profits. As the accompanying article explains, the KDF makes tens of millions of dollars on these activities per year. For al-Shabaab, just its trading in charcoal nets it an estimated hundred million dollars annually.

There have certainly been some significant successes by the KDF against al-Shabaab. Operation Linda Nchi (Protect the Nation), which the KDF launched in coordination with the Somali military in October 2011, and additional operations after the KDF integrated into AMISOM (the African Union Mission in Somalia) have resulted in several key victories, including reclaiming the port city of Kismayo. However, recently progress seems to have stalled, and large areas of land remain in the hands of al-Shabaab, whose bloody attacks on Westgate Mall and Garissa University, both in Kenya, garnered international attention, reminding people that the terrorist group is far from defeated.

The KDF strongly refutes the allegations that it is involved in any such trading activities with al-Shabaab, though, as the accompanying article relates, other allegations against the KDF, including that its recruiting officers demand bribes from new recruits, has put that organization's credibility at an all-time low. Concerns are that if the KDF is indeed trading with the enemy, eventually the entire AMISOM operation could evolve into a de facto criminal enterprise, a situation which would not only leave al-Shabaab in place, but actually strengthen it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

*“If this report is true, then Kenya’s intervention in Somalia is nothing more than a criminal enterprise, a perfect example of the intersection between organized crime and politics, with an added twist: all its running costs are paid for by the international donors that fund AMISOM.”*



A member of the Kenya Defense Forces in Somalia: Are some of his superiors doing business with the enemy?

Source: <https://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/think-again-who-profits-from-kenyas-war-in-somalia>

**Source:** Simon Allison, “Think Again: Who Profits from Kenya’s War in Somalia?” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 7 Dec 2015 <https://www.issafrica.org/iss-today/think-again-who-profits-from-kenyas-war-in-somalia>

*The official rationale is no longer entirely convincing. The original purpose of the military intervention was to insulate the country from the conflict in Somalia.*

*... a new report written by researcher Ben Rawlence for Journalists for Justice suggests another, less noble explanation. The report examines the illegal trade in sugar and charcoal, and finds that senior KDF figures are involved in both. Even worse, in doing so they are collaborating with al-Shabaab, and providing the militant group with a vital source of revenue.*

*‘The Kenya Defence Forces, rather than taking the fight to al-Shabaab, are actually in garrison mode, sitting in bases while senior commanders are engaged in corrupt business practices with the Jubaland administration and al-Shabaab,’ ...*

*Further, it raises questions about how much the Kenyan government really knows about what its military is up to. It is damning either way: either the politicians are colluding, or they have no control.*

*Naturally, an outraged KDF has been quick to deny the contents of the report.*

*‘The credibility of the Kenyan army spokesmen is at an all-time low, however, following a series of other allegations into corrupt practices A senior source told ISS Today that the report stains not only the image of the KDF, but of the AU itself, raising questions about the AU’s ability to maintain effective command, control and oversight of the troops operating under its banner in Somalia. The source said that if the AU fails to act, there is an immediate risk of AMISOM drifting further out of control and morphing into a de facto criminal syndicate in Somalia.*



## Protests in Ethiopia Turn Deadly

**OE Watch Commentary:** As compared to other regional neighbors in the Horn of Africa, such as South Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia, Ethiopia has generally been - with the exception of some low-level insurgencies - more or less a bastion of stability. However, over the past weeks, waves of violent protests, unprecedented since 1991, have been wreaking havoc there. While details remain unclear, protests started with groups of students at and near the University of Ambo outside of Addis Ababa over the government's urbanization plans. Over the course of the past week there have been rumors that multiple students have died in protests, with as many as fifty having been killed since November.

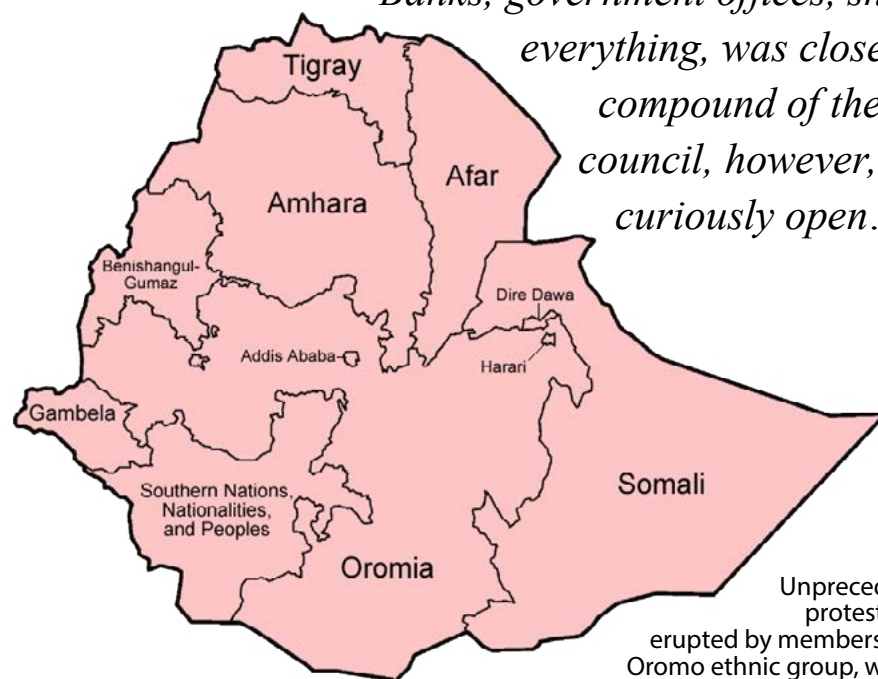
At the heart of the recent waves of violence is a clash between members of the primarily Oromo ethnic group in central Ethiopia, who are protesting against plans by the federal government to expand the city's urbanization plans into Oromo territory. At the crux of the issue is the 1995 Ethiopian constitution, which, in a shrewd move, helped to unite Ethiopia's numerous ethnic groups under a federal structure, granting substantial autonomy to each group. With the government's plans to encroach into Oromo territory in the expansion of Addis Ababa, the Oromo autonomy protected by that constitution is being called into question.

More specifically, they worry about land being seized - in the form of eminent domain - without adequate compensation. As the accompanying excerpted article details, one Ethiopian reporter's entrance into the besieged town of Woliso - home to Ambo University - was wrought with uncertainty and a lack of clarity as to what had happened in relations to the protests.

The waves of protest between the Ethiopian government and protestors have particularly deep implications for the US military, especially given that Ethiopia is a lynchpin of US military strategy in the multi-issue Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is clearly a regional and military leader, as evidenced by its significant contributions of peacekeepers to missions run by the African Union and the United Nations, as well as strong leadership in the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development. Moreover, Ethiopia's strong military and wide-ranging security services have generally been willing to work and cooperate with the US, especially in the fight against Islamic militants in the form of the al-Shebab in Somalia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

*“Interviewing people in Woliso was a fanciful idea... Upon arrival, it looked like a deserted town. I could only count three cafeterias on the main road.*

*Banks, government offices, shops, everything, was closed. A compound of the city council, however, was curiously open....”*



Unprecedented protests have erupted by members of the Oromo ethnic group, who are angered by plans from the federal government to expand the capital's jurisdiction into their territories.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethiopia\\_regions\\_english.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ethiopia_regions_english.png)

**Source:** Berhane, Daniel. 2015. "Woliso, A Day at a Hotspot of Oromo Protests." *Horn Affairs (Ethiopia)*. 13 December. <http://hornaffairs.com/en/2015/12/11/woliso-hotspot-oromo-protests/>.

*Just 120 Km drive from Addis Ababa, there is Woliso town, South West Shewa zone of Oromia region – one of the hotspots of the three-week long protests.*

*Being close to Addis is not unique to Woliso, as several hotspots are also close to Addis Ababa, including Bantu, where one of the first deaths was reported. But Woliso is a town of 50,000 residents, with a campus of Ambo University and located on the main road to Jimma, which is a major city and trade center. In short, it is a kind of area where the Ethiopian state traditionally cares to ascertain its control.*

*However, today, travelling to Woliso was not a smooth affair. Half way on the road, on Tulu Bolo town, the bus driver declined to go anymore. Fellow travelers could not sway him, as half a dozen minibuses parked in the bus terminal agreed with him. Fortunately, another minibus popped up to save the day.*

*Students and locals in Woliso had been staging demonstrations for three consecutive days. Fellow travelers claimed protests were sparked when the authorities detained university students – even those who left the campus and took refuge in local households – in a bid to preempt demonstrations.*

....

*Interviewing people in Woliso was a fanciful idea. Upon arrival, it looked like a deserted town. I could only count three cafeterias on the main road. Banks, government offices, shops, everything, was closed. A compound of the city council, however, was curiously open.... Gunshots, or sounds like it, were audible from distance. I sat at a cafeteria and tried to question the waitperson, he stonewalled me: “business is okay, no trouble, just rumors.”*

*There was a sizable demonstration by students in the town since Tuesday. That same day or the next day, locals from informal settlements from two corners of the town had joined. The road was a no-go for vehicles with government plate....*

*A group of protestors allegedly destroyed the house of a former administrator and some incumbent officials, a local teacher told me. Yet, many asserted, the protestors mostly refrained from civilian properties. Noticeably, the shiny glasses of the buildings – on the side of the roads with burnt tires and stones -were intact....*

*It was obviously time to leave the town.*



# The US Fight Against Boko Haram: Considering the Role of Children in Combat

*“‘The [Boko Haram] militants kept telling us that they wanted us to be generals, commanding different groups of fighters,’ Patrick said. ‘They said we were going to train and lead other children to war.’”*

**OE Watch Commentary:** With the United States showing a renewed commitment to fighting Boko Haram, one underexamined aspect of that fight relates to the role of children in conflict. In short, given Boko Haram’s tendency to kidnap, attempt to indoctrinate, and deploy children under 18 years of age, the US is faced with addressing how to deal with the role of battling what are essentially children in combat.

One of Boko Haram’s tactics is to kidnap children, both boys and girls. By June 2015 the United Nations was aware that Boko Haram had likely kidnapped some 1000-1500 children and was using them mostly as servants to do menial chores in its camps. However, it has also been revealed that Boko Haram has used children (reports say as young as eight years old) in its front lines as “human shields” as they enter into combat.

The ways that Boko Haram uses children - and thus how the US will need to think about how to approach them - differs. For girls, the most typical outcome, beyond the use as servants, is as wives. The most internationally well known example of Boko Haram’s kidnappings was the April 2014 capture of some nearly 300 girls in the town of Chibok (which then prompted the internationally known hash tag #Bringbackourgirls). As has been shown - and is assumed to be the case with the Chibok girls - those girls who are captured are thought to be married off as fundraising efforts or gifted to Boko Haram fighters as rewards. While some girls are simply married off, Boko Haram has frequently used women as suicide bombers, prompting Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and more recently, Senegal to ban full Muslim veils for national security purposes.

Yet, as the excerpted article below details, Boko Haram’s capture of boys presents new challenges, especially for members of the US military sent to fight the group. Like the boy Patrick, described in the article, Boko Haram is known for kidnapping boys and attempting to indoctrinate them so that they can serve as leaders in the next generation of Boko Haram. “‘The militants kept telling us that they wanted us to be generals, commanding different groups of fighters,’ Patrick said. ‘They said we were going to train and lead other children to war.’” **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**



Boko Haram is known for kidnapping and recruiting children to serve in its ranks. As the US deepens its engagement in the fight against the group, it now must increasingly strategize how to fight an enemy that contains children in its midst.

Source: <http://www.nationalhelm.com/2015/04/photos-43-boko-haram-child-soldiers.html>

**Source:** Philip Obaji. 2015. “U.S. Troops Vs. Boko Haram’s Child Soldiers in Cameroon.” *The Daily Beast*. October 16. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/16/u-s-troops-vs-boko-haram-s-child-soldiers-in-cameroon.html>.

*...I met 14-year-old Patrick at the southern Nigeria village of Abonorok, close to the border with Cameroon, where he has lived since he escaped Boko Haram, and now survives by shining shoes.*

*Patrick said after he was abducted he was taken along with dozens of other children into a relatively peaceful part of the country where they “were locked in cells and taught to cock and fire AK-47s.”*

*The abducted children had nearly two weeks of shooting practice, during which a couple of them were killed by smaller colleagues who were unable to control their weapons.*

*“The militants kept telling us that they wanted us to be generals, commanding different groups of fighters,” Patrick said. “They said we were going to train and lead other children to war.”....*

*Not all child recruits to the Boko Haram ranks have been kidnapped. Local authorities say thousands of young people in northern Cameroon, who lack access to school and employment, are fighting alongside Boko Haram....*

*Although the boys who talked to The Daily Beast were forcibly recruited into Boko Haram’s fold, there are other factors that drive children into the group.*

*The sect is using economic incentives to persuade unemployed young people and former students to join its ranks. Underemployment in Cameroon is at least 75 percent. In the far north region, 60 percent of the population lives in poverty, according to the government’s 2010 National Population and Housing Census.*

*“Boko Haram men came and told us to stop wasting our lives here and join them in the holy battle to save our faith and the lives of our families, who are living in abject poverty here,” 21-year-old Moustapha Alidu, who used to live in a border village outside of Kolofata, recently told the humanitarian news agency IRIN....*



# New Chinese Military Base in Djibouti: In the Service of Djibouti's Grand Strategy

**OE Watch Commentary:** In November China signed a deal with Djibouti President Ismail Oumar Guelleh to open what would be China's first military base in Africa. Intended to be primarily used as a logistics base, the new base will afford China a foothold in both Africa and, to a certain extent, the Middle East. Although China has long had a heavy presence in Djibouti and has signed numerous bills of cooperation related to infrastructure, trade, and development, the recent move has been considered in some quarters as a bit of an insult to the "Western" countries - the US, France, and Japan - that each already has military bases in Djibouti. However, as is explained in the accompanying excerpted article, Djibouti's decision to allow China to host a military base within its borders is less a statement of Djibouti's ideological position and more part and parcel an attempt to use its status as a small country in a volatile region to build its reputation as a "new Dubai."

In short, because the Djiboutian press is tightly monitored, few stories of local perspectives on the announcement of the new Chinese base have come to light. Rather, what is more revelatory is the story excerpted here, which details Djibouti's grand strategic hopes of becoming "east Africa's next Dubai." The article explains how Djibouti's active courting of foreign presence - not just military, but also commercial and economic - is simply a means by which to grow its reputation as a trusted enclave in the middle of an otherwise tenuous neighborhood.

Thus, rather than interpreting the entrance of China as an insult, observers should understand instead that for President Guelleh the calculation is simple: allowing China's entry is simply part of Djibouti's larger grand strategy. Djibouti's foreign and security policy is based on a principle that might rightly be called "self-subordination," or the tendency for some of the world's smallest and weakest states to, in essence, sell off parts of their sovereignty to global powers in exchange for both money and protection. While Djibouti's strategy has long been to subsist on the rents from leasing military bases to the French and the US, the addition of China is simply adding another layer of financial benefits. In addition, the presence of so many powerful states on its soil offers various facets of national security: heavy international military presences helps it theoretically fend off external attacks and offers it significant fire and manpower in the event of domestic insurgency (which, in the case of Djibouti has most frequently been in the form of uprisings from the marginalized Afar ethnic group.)

In short, China's entrance is just part and parcel of a larger Djiboutian push for a deeply ambitious re-imagined role in Africa and beyond. As observers continue to monitor the Chinese and Djiboutian approaches to the base, this understanding of Djibouti's grand strategy should remain at the forefront of their minds. **End OE Watch Commentary (Warner)**

*"Even before Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong, the economic and maritime hubs in the region were Aden and Djibouti... We know what to do to regain our place."*



China has recently negotiated a deal to open a new military base in Djibouti. As new details emerge, observers should keep in mind Djibouti's larger grand strategy of serving as an East African military and economic hub akin to a "new Dubai." Source: <http://www.tesfanews.net/china-negotiates-military-base-in-djibouti/>

**Source:** Lehbou, Karim. 2015. "Horn of Africa's Djibouti Dreams of Becoming 'new Dubai'." *DjibTalk (Djibouti City)*, May. <http://www.djibtalk.com/horn-of-africas-djibouti-dreams-of-becoming-new-dubai/>.

*For years the Horn of Africa nation Djibouti was seen by foreign powers as a far-flung military outpost overlooking the Gulf of Aden. Now the strategic port wants to capitalize on its key position on one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, the gateway to the Suez canal.*

*Djibouti offers an African base across from the Arabian Peninsula at the crossroads for cargo traffic between Asia and Europe. It may be a tiny country of around 850,000 people, but it has a bold ambition to become the commercial hub of eastern Africa, building on its role as the main port for landlocked Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country...*

*"More and more shipping lines are interested in Djibouti, we are now making the way to be a Dubai, even Singapore!" said Suleiman Ahmed, a senior executive at Doraleh container terminal. Cargo trade is booming. It has increased between six and 10 percent each year, with Djibouti enjoying growth partly because other regional ports are struggling. Kenya's port city of Mombasa is already overstretched, while the secretive Red Sea state of Eritrea sees little if any traffic. And Yemen's once key port of Aden — just across the Gulf of Aden from Djibouti — is now a war zone.*

*"Mombasa is congested, Eritrea is not a welcoming country, but Djibouti is a strategic and safe location — we rely on it," Ahmed said.*

*In a volatile region, Djibouti hopes to build a reputation of stability and security....*

*"Even before Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong, the economic and maritime hubs in the region were Aden and Djibouti," says port authority chief Abubaker Omar Hadi. "We know what to do to regain our place."*

*"Even before Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong, the economic and maritime hubs in the region were Aden and Djibouti," says port authority chief Abubaker Omar Hadi. "We know what to do to regain our place."*



## Boko Haram Exploits Sunni-Shia Divide in Nigeria

**OE Watch Commentary:** Nigeria has a nearly five-million member Shia population, which has grown rapidly with Iranian support since 1979. However, Boko Haram has not yet targeted the Shia population consistently in Nigeria as other salafi-jihadist groups have done in other countries around the world. In what may be a change in Boko Haram's strategy, however, on 27 November Nigeria's *Vanguard* reported a suicide attack on a Shia procession in Kano that killed more than 20 people and was carried out by two Boko Haram militants.

The article states that the second attacker (the one who was arrested and did not detonate his suicide vest) was trained in Sambisa Forest of Borno State, which is one of Boko Haram's largest base areas. This suggests that the attackers were deployed from there to Kano specifically to target the Shia procession. The broader context of this attack is that in March 2015 Boko Haram's leader pledged allegiance to ISIL leader Abubakr Al-Baghdadi. Since one of ISIL's main strategies is to attack Shia communities in the Middle East, it is possible that ISIL will advise Boko Haram (which is renamed Islamic State in West Africa Province) to do the same in Nigeria.

What the article does not mention is whether the Nigerian security forces are anticipating further attacks on Nigeria's Shia population. If Boko Haram follows in the footsteps of ISIL, it could carry out more attacks on the Shia to open up a divide between the Sunni and Shia of northern Nigeria, in addition to the already tense relationships between Muslims and Christians in that region. Considering the risks at stake, the military may soon need to increase preparedness in case this trend develops. There would need to be greater protection at Shia events and processions in Nigeria and more strategic communications to encourage harmonious relations between religious and sectarian communities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

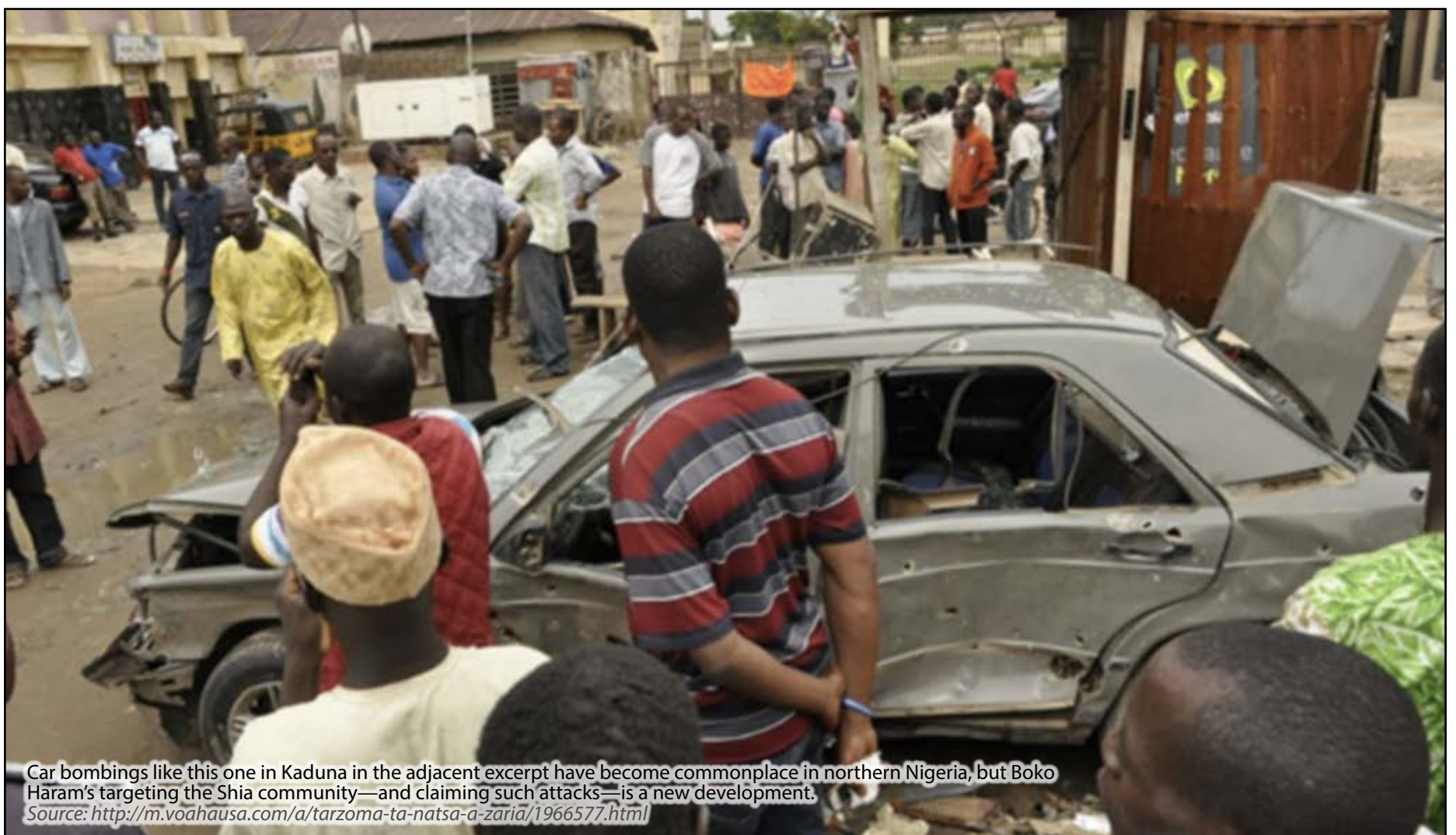
*“The suicide bomber blew himself up among crowds at a Shia Muslim procession outside the City of Kano, in the latest violence to hit the troubled region.”*

**Source:** “Scores Feared Dead as Suicide Bomber Hits Shia Procession in Kano,” *Vanguard*, 27 November 2015.

### ***Scores feared dead as suicide bomber hits Shia procession in Kano***

*The suicide bomber blew himself up among crowds at a Shia Muslim procession outside the City of Kano, in the latest violence to hit the troubled region. The organiser, who asked to remain anonymous, said the bomber ran into the crowd before he could be spotted and detonated his explosives. “He was dressed in black like everyone else. His accomplice was initially arrested and confessed they were sent by Boko Haram,” he added.*

*They were part of the young men abducted by Boko Haram in (the Borno state town of) Mubi last year and taken to Sambisa Forest where they were given some military training. They were sent to Kano and kept in a house specifically for this attack. The bomber detonated his explosives after realising his accomplice had been arrested.*



Car bombings like this one in Kaduna in the adjacent excerpt have become commonplace in northern Nigeria, but Boko Haram's targeting the Shia community—and claiming such attacks—is a new development.  
Source: <http://m.voahausa.com/a/tarzoma-ta-natsa-a-zaria/1966577.html>



## Venezuelan Legislative Elections

**OE Watch Commentary:** Venezuela held its scheduled legislative elections on 6 December peacefully and without notable incident. The coalition of opposition parties won in a landslide. The Table of Democratic Unity party (Mesa de Unidad Democrática, or MUD) not only won a majority of seats, but also won a supermajority theoretically sufficient to override presidential vetoes. After the elections, President Maduro unexpectedly, if grudgingly, recognized the results.

A common local interpretation of events holds that, although all possible mechanisms of electoral fraud were available to the government, and many were employed, the opposition numbers were so overwhelming that they overwhelmed the fraud. Moreover, the governing party seems to have counted on intervention by the military as a final and decisive prophylactic measure. In the one open drama associated with the election, Minister of Defense and Commanding General of the Armed Forces Vladimir Padrino López, ostensibly a socialist party loyalist, refused in a meeting with governing party leader Diosdado Cabello to employ the military against the wave of public intent evident in the vote.

However, along with public elation about the voting results and appreciation for Padrino's decision, plenty of room in regional commentary is filled with what seems to be reasonable pessimism. It is easy to see how, with Cuban encouragement, Padrino soon could be replaced with a more obedient leader willing to shut off any effort of the newly filled National Assembly to change the country's ideological azimuth. It appears that all now depends on what the military institution does and does not do. The division of attitudes and loyalties within the Armed Forces has become highly overt, as exemplified in an open letter from the retired officers to the active duty leadership. In any case, Venezuelans have proven to be without merit this commentator's prediction that 2015 would not end without widespread violent chaos. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

*“...A very dangerous period of instability is opening in Venezuela.”*

**Source:** Rafael Nieto Loaiza, Venezuela: Triunfo de cristal (Venezuela: Glass Victory), *El Colombiano*, 13 December 2015, <http://www.elcolombiano.com/opinion/columnistas/triunfo-de-cristal-GC3271228>

*“...Diosdado Cabello threatened to call the militias out into the streets and reject the results. For this they were prepared. Maduro had already warned that the revolution would win ‘however’ and that it would govern with a ‘civic-military union’ .... But they lost their military wing. Vladimir Padrino, minister of defense, confronted Maduro and Cabello and opposed the non-recognition of the results...Padrino was the hero of the moment. But not because of democratic conviction...In the electoral precincts where the military voted the opposition won with seventy percent. Padrino knew that to not recognize the results would mean a fracturing of the armed forces and certainly a military uprising, a confrontation with the militias and a blood bath...Now Maduro is asking for the resignation of the cabinet, and, along with Diosdado, wants to defenestrate Padrino.” Cabello wants to place one of his classmates in command. If they take definitive control of the armed forces they can ignore the opposition's victory. Without the support of the military, it [the election] is but glass. A very dangerous period of instability is opening in Venezuela.”*



An electronic voting machine by Smartmatic used for Venezuelan elections.  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Electronic\\_Voting\\_Machine.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Electronic_Voting_Machine.jpg)

**Source:** Gerardo Arellano, Untitled open letter, Full Story, 15 December 2015, <http://www.fullstory.co/p85r0>.

*“We ratify our unshakable commitment to democracy, peace and to the National Armed Forces as an institution, we again remind our respected companions in arms on active duty: officers, sergeants, national guardsmen, cadets and soldiers, that you are in the exclusive service of the Nation and in no case that of a person or political faction...in the [electoral] process of 6 December, Venezuela and democracy won -- our sincere appreciation, 11 December, 2015. Signed:... ”*



## Colombian Plebiscite

**OE Watch Commentary:** In January 2016, assuming that the plebiscite process passes constitutional muster in the Colombian high court, the Colombian electorate will have the opportunity to vote on the implementation of an agreement that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) secured with the government of Colombia. As drafted by the administration of President Manuel Santos and approved by the Colombian legislature (controlled by the government party), the plebiscite is an up or down vote, with the passage threshold being 13% of the electorate, i.e., rather than 50% plus of the vote itself, the YES vote will only need to gain what would be 13% of the total of eligible voters. An odd formula, the math lends considerable advantage to the possibility of passage.

The government has been framing the vote as one of voting for or against peace, the negotiation called a peace negotiation and the deal a peace agreement. For many (maybe most) Colombians, it is far less, too much of the possible content of that word having been surrendered. Hence, many Colombians are clamoring for the NO vote—probably so many, and for such compelling reasons, that even if the YES vote succeeds, it is hard to be optimistic that the future condition of the country will improve in quality to what Colombians might define as peace.

The references offered here represent a. the doubt with which many Colombians are receiving information about the plebiscite, b. the anger that the form and content of the deal inflames in some Colombians, and c. the seeds of a future non-peace that the deal may be planting, even if it passes. Much of what we might like to pin down as the “truth” or “reality” of what has been negotiated (what persons are to be trusted, rewarded, punished or compensated and why) has been thoroughly obfuscated and corrupted, at least in the short run.

There is, however, one solid data point: there is no reasonable space for the suggestion of moral equivalency between the Colombian state or system or society and the FARC. The FARC is a criminal organization that has committed thousands of the most heinous violations of everything. Most Colombians freely express that any Christmas gift the FARC gets is more than its behavior has earned. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

*“...it does not want to see the criminal bosses of the FARC...dismantling the democratic institutions.”*

**Source:** Diego Mora, “Plebiscito: ¿sí o no?” (Plebiscite: Yes or No?), *El Colombiano*, 17 December 2015, <http://m.elcolombiano.com/plebiscito-si-o-no-JB3289649>

*“...I haven’t the remotest idea which way I will vote, given the fact that they are obliging me to say yes or no on a theme so important for the country it doesn’t seem to me completely democratic, I think it is missing the option to vote nul or other options that carry implicit conditioning messages. There are probably many Colombians in the same situation, maybe for the same reason just planted, but also because it is too early to know the meaning of this vote, if the text with the final agreement coming out of Havana is not even yet known.”*

**Source:** Editor, “Margarita Maria Restrepo hablando del drama de los niños de las FARC” (Margarita Maria Restrepo speaking fo the drama of the children of the FARC), *Periodico Debate* citing *Radio Red RCN*, 11 December 2015, <http://periodicodebate.com/index.php/welcome/item/10335-margarita-restrepo-pide-proteger-a-los-niños-en-poder-de-las-farc>

*“Margarita María Restrepo, member of the House of Representatives for Antioquia from the Democratic Center Party, denounced the atrocities committed by an ex-doctor or an ex-nurse of the FARC accused by the Colombian Attorney General of having practiced abortions on more than 500 young guerrillas who had initially been forcefully taken-in by the FARC. She explained that that individual, sought at this time in Spain [since this article he has been arrested there] in order to be extradited to Colombia, even aborted a woman who was eight months pregnant. Then, monsterously, he killed the live baby....”*

**Source:** Eduardo Mackenzie, “La prueba de que el plebiscito de Santos es una trampa” (Proof that Santo’s plebiscite is a fraud), *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 12 December 2015, <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/la-prueba-de-que-el-plebiscito-de-santos-es-una-trampa.html>

*“The opinion poll confirms, in general, what public opinion has been saying for the past three years: that it does not want an peace adulterated by impunity, that it does not want to see the criminal bosses of the FARC continue armed and incrustated in the Congress and practicing politics with full protections and dismantling the democratic institutions...”*



## LATAM Ideological Swing

**OE Watch Commentary:** It is an old cliché that Latin America swings back and forth ideologically, like a pendulum, seeming to mark time in some never-ending magisterial rendition of the Spanish Civil War. Regional observers comment on the apogees, and, so it seems, we are witnessing one now. It would be imprecise to assert that the pendulum still swings from left to right, inasmuch as so much has changed in the style and content of what is left-socialism and right-socialism. It does appear, however, that peak leftist socialism has been reached in this cycle.

If so, the swing has major implications for US military planning. Some countries that have been sour to US military assistance and presence will be opening up to US military partnership, and some may be asking for more help in opposing select brands of terrorism and insurgency.

The far left and its various armed wings will be on the defensive. Meanwhile, there always seem to be countercurrents and paradoxes. As one of the referenced authors observes, Colombia seems curiously to be moving against the tide, giving what seems to be an enormous, unearned political victory to the FARC. Colombia, a bulwark against the swing toward totalitarian left socialism in the continent, could end up as the continental friction brake against the left's retreat. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

*“The pendulum seems to be on its way back, and in that ordering of ideas, the victory of conservative Mauricio Macri en Argentina’s presidential elections prefigures a severe blow to what in the continent is called ‘socialism of the 21st century’...”*

**Source:** José Félix Lafaurie, “El Péndulo” (Latinamerica: the Pendulum), Periódico Debate, 12 December 2015, <http://www.periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/10333-el-péndulo>

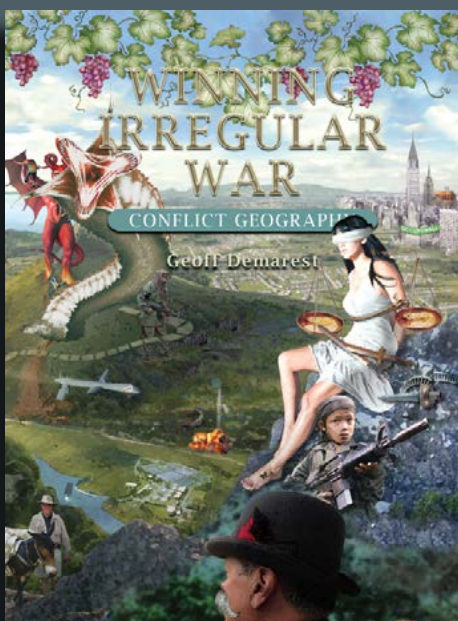
*“...Eternally back and forth, like a pendulum, seems like a mythological punishment, but it is more of a dialectic sine in the life of the human being, physically as well as in the ambit of ideas and politics. Today our little piece of America moves forcefully, wanting to unburden itself from the socialist avalanche...And Colombia? Lopez Pumarejo asserted that ‘the country likes to follow the second-to-latest fashion’, and today, sure enough, it appears that while everyone else has started coming back, we go [in the other direction], because the price of peace is higher every day, politically empowered by a group of terrorists that makes war while it talks of peace...”*

**Source:** Eduard Soto, “El péndulo regresa en América Latina / Análisis” (The Pendulum Goes Back in Latin America/ Analysis), *El Tiempo*, 23 November 2015, <http://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/el-pendulo-regresa-en-a-latina-analisis/16439244>

*“The pendulum seems to be on its way back, and in that ordering of ideas, the victory of conservative Mauricio Macri en Argentina’s presidential elections prefigures a severe blow to what in the continent is called ‘socialism of the 21st century’, a rhetorical mirror or electoral strategy that sought to aggregate the rise of various leftist movements, but which, as the days pass, moves crestfallen and with obvious signs of exhaustion.”*

**Source:** Darío Ruiz Gómez, “Revolución y contrarrevolución” (Revolution and Counterrevolution), *El Mundo de Medellín*, 14 December 2015, <http://goo.gl/I3tz7p>

*“It is not that the American embassy decided the fall of Cristina Kirchner or Maduro, or that it influenced the popular classes to denounce Luna and Dilma Rousseff for corruption, nor incited students and workers against Bachelet, nor the great indigenous centers against Evo and Correa, but rather that in the context of globalized information those demagogic pseudo discourses are no longer able to maintain the falsehood...”*



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



## Satellite GPS Technology Utilized by Drug Trafficking Organizations to Locate Shipments at High Sea

**OE Watch Commentary:** Drug traffickers moving shipments from South America via maritime routes in Central America and Mexico are constantly changing strategies to avoid detection and seizure. As this source points out, one of the newest types of technology involves GPS-enabled satellite buoys. These devices are tied to drug shipments wrapped in fishing net and dropped at high sea, where they float with support of the buoys (semi-submerged) until they can be picked up and moved to land. Sometimes the GPS packages are even dropped directly from airplanes into the water.

This tactic is unique because it effectively uses international waters as a storage facility for large-scale drug shipments. Second, it mitigates risk of detection and seizure, as the packages are remotely monitored via the internet and picked up by multiple boats responsible for delivering smaller shipments to different locations. The satellite buoy tactic was first noted by Colombian authorities in late 2014, but Central American authorities have indicated the tactic has moved into their area of operations in recent months. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

**Source:** “Cómo el narco usa al mar como bodega (How Drug Traffickers are using the Ocean as their Personal Warehouses.” *CR Hoy*. Accessed from <http://us.crhoy.com/radio-boyas-como-el-narco-usa-al-mar-como-bodega/>

*GPS satellite buoys represent a new technology employed by drug traffickers in central and South America to avoid seizure of shipments. As indicated by Freddy Ramos, the Deputy Director of the national drug police in Ecuador, the GPS satellite tactic operates in the following manner: “maritime vessels, which may be fishing boats or fast boats leave from shore without any type of drug shipment. They tell port authorities that they are conducting a fishing trip and provide information regarding crew members and the date of return. Drug transport vessels then drop shipments in opportune locations and turn on the GPS locators. These packages are then tracked remotely via the internet and the coordinates are provided to empty vessels so that they can be picked up.” Ramos noted that this tactic is popular amongst traffickers as it mitigates risk of arrest and seizure.*

## Cuban Migration Crisis Causes Contention between Costa Rica and Nicaragua

**OE Watch Commentary:** Cuban nationals commonly begin their migration process to the United States from Central and South America, as Panama and Ecuador maintain immigration policies which allow them to enter without visas. Given Cuba’s proximity to the United States, migratory ocean routes between Florida have also been used for decades, but the land-based journey in Central and South America is historically much safer, which is why it has gained popularity in recent years.

*La Prensa* supported the claim that Cuban immigration is on the rise in Central America by citing migration statistics in Costa Rica. In 2013 authorities reported the passage of 2500 Cuban nationals. In 2014 this number jumped to 5600, and by the end of the year it is expected that more than 13,000 will enter through the country. *La Prensa* further cited two reasons associated with increased migration: anticipated changes in US immigration policies with Cuba and organized human-smuggling teams dedicated to moving large numbers of Cubans through Central and South America to the United States.

The question then remains, if Cuban migration has been a consistent trend in recent years, why is it currently causing a crisis? This crisis can be attributed to the fact that transient migratory increases incur inevitable humanitarian assistance costs which are overwhelming impoverished nations along the route, and no single government wants to take responsibility. At present, Nicaragua has militarized its shared border with Costa Rica, and Panama is refusing the re-entry of Cuban nationals back into its national territory. These actions have left Costa Rica with thousands of Cuban migrants with no place to go and are causing contention among leaders in the region, especially those in Nicaragua, as discussed in the *La Prensa* excerpt below. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

**Source:** “Nicaragua y Costa Rica tenían una práctica de deportación de cubanos (Deportation Norms of Cubans in Nicaragua and Costa Rica.” *La Prensa*. Accessed from <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2015/11/19/nacionales/1939533-nicaragua-y-costa-rica-tenian-una-practica-de-deportacion-de-cubanos>

*On November 15, 2015, the government of Nicaragua expelled nearly 2,000 Cuban migrants who entered into the country through the Penas Blancas border checkpoint. In response to this incident, Nicaragua accused Costa Rica of violating its borders and triggering a humanitarian crisis by provoking “the forced entry of thousands of Cuban nationals.” In a bid to remove them from Nicaraguan soil, the government implemented a security operation that mobilized an Army infantry battalion and Special Forces of the National Police in the southern border, set up roadblocks, and launched tear gas.*

*Following this incident, Rosario Murillo of the Nicaraguan government released a statement stating that “we emphatically denounce the government of Costa Rica for violation of our national sovereignty, and for breach of its obligations as a State, which participates in international mechanisms where there is agreement regarding respect for sovereign borders and the rights of those who move from one country to another in these times of human mobility.” Meanwhile, the Costa Rican government has had no choice but to allow Cuban nationals re-entry back into Costa Rica.*

*Panama has taken a similar stance on Cuban migrants and is currently refusing the re-entry of Cuban nationals from Costa Rica back into Panama. It is important to note however, that Panama’s immigration policy allows Cuban nationals to enter into the country without a visa. Ecuador maintains the same policy which means that many of the Cubans that end up in Central America arrive in either Ecuador or Panama first.*



## The FARC and ELN Exert Territorial Control along the Venezuela/Colombia Border

**OE Watch Commentary:** According to an article released by *El Espectador*, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) are running what has been deemed an “independent republic” in the Colombian Department of Arauca (a department is the US equivalent of a state). What is unique about this partnership is that the FARC and ELN are not traditional allies, but instead began working together around 2010 in an effort to exert total control over the population and its activities in Arauca for political and financial gain. The department’s shared border with Venezuela is particularly lucrative to both organizations, as it is used to traffic drugs and weapons. Oil theft from the Bicentenario duct is also prevalent, as is control of the black market trade along the international border. For these reasons and many more, cooperation between the FARC and ELN has been key to their success in recent years, as their combined efforts have resulted in effective control of Arauca, which has resulted in financial gain for both sides.

As reported by this source in the excerpt below, control in this region runs so deeply that the guerrilla organizations have successfully implemented community norms regarding health, education, religion, and use of land and environmental resources. Within each city directorates ranging from social projects to land repatriation have been set up under the guise of supporting the communities, but in reality their key function is to provide the strict order and discipline necessary to maintain control. In short, what is happening in Arauca is nothing less than the implantation of a *de facto* government by guerilla forces to maintain their interests at all costs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

**Source:** “La “república independiente” de Arauca (The Independent Republic of Arauca).” *El Espectador*. Accessed from <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/investigacion/republica-independiente-de-arauca-articulo-591977>

*Arauca is a strategic region for the FARC and ELN and they have stopped at nothing to ensure they maintain strict control over the local population. In fact, these groups are now implementing guidelines that regulate the sale or lease of properties which basically means that no transaction can be made in the department without first being presented before a guerrilla commission. Other regulations outline land-use and even dictate where licit and illicit crops can be grown.*

*The control clandestinely exerted by the FARC and the ELN on the border with Venezuela in Arauca is so specific that their joint working committees detail, property by property, more than 100 farms with names and coordinates. These farms engage in productive activities such as dairy production, livestock, breeding of small animals, poultry, reforestation of streams, or opening of trails and paths with natural shade.*

*In religious matters the guerrilla groups control is specific. Christian pastors have to be natives of the region; they cannot evangelize door to door and are barred from declaring their political affiliation, participating in elections, or building new churches.*

*However, control extends beyond the public sector and into the private lives of families which is evidenced by the fact that fishing trips and other family outings must be preapproved in some areas. Furthermore, any citizen that recommends a stranger or someone from another region is accountable to the community for their misconduct. Shops and bars are banned from selling alcoholic beverages to people with knives. In municipal administrative regions, there are even rules against unscrupulous merchants or drug dealers. In short, all of the controls exerted outline a *de facto* government where the FARC and the ELN are the authority in Arauca.*



## Organized Crime Violence Forces Residents to Flee from the Tierra Caliente Region in Michoacan

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Tierra Caliente Region of Mexico sits along the Central Pacific Coast and comprises ten municipalities in Michoacan, Guerrero, and Mexico State. This region is known for high levels of organized crime violence, as three criminal groups—La Familia Michoacana, Los Caballeros Templarios, and the New Generation Cartel of Jalisco—continue to fight for control of it.

This same violence recently extended to the civilian populace and is forcing residents out of dozens of communities such as Tepalcatepec, a small town in the region with 26,000 inhabitants. Here and in many other Tierra Caliente region communities it is difficult for residents to obtain necessities such as gasoline and even food, as distributors sometimes do not show up for days because they run the risk of having entire shipments robbed. As reported by this source, citizens trying to make a living in the region are further plagued by extortion, as cartels take a percentage of nearly all goods sold, and, in some cases, even dictate which distributors citizens can sell to. These same groups charge citizens “protection fees” to keep them safe from rival criminal organizations and are known to set the homes of those who cannot pay on fire. Despite the presence of Federal Police and the Mexican Army in the region, security concerns continue.

As a direct result of security issues, thousands have left the region in what is being referred to as one of the largest emigration movements seen in Mexico in recent times. Those who are financially able simply abandon their homes and begin their lives in safer regions of Mexico or in the US. The tendency for working-age males is to relocate to the US. For those who simply cannot afford to leave, self-defense groups have been formed to protect families from abuses carried out on a daily basis by the cartels. Similar emigration issues manifested in northern Mexico in 2011-2012 as Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel battled for control of territories along the US/Mexican border region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

**Source:** Clima de violencia, motivo de peso para dejar Tierra Caliente (Violence Forces Residents to Flee from Tierra Caliente Region). *El Cambio de Michoacan*. Accessed from <http://www.cambiodemichoacan.com.mx/nota-260649>

*Many families in the Tierra Caliente region have emigrated to other parts of Mexico and the United States in response to violence and the fighting between criminal groups operating in the region. Despite this obvious displacement, especially in rural areas, the municipal government is reporting that only three in ten families have gone elsewhere because of the violence but these numbers are not accurate.*

*Emigration intensified in the region when the federal government started to eradicate the groups operating there. At that point, many males of working age decided to go to the United States or move to northern border states for work. Others stayed and joined the known Rural Police Force to fight against the injustices imposed by criminal organizations. Among the municipalities most affected by migration are Aguililla and Tepalcatepec. Here, there are numerous abandoned homes and even more for rent as entire families fled after being threatened by criminals. In less affluent municipalities like La Huacana and Coalcoman, relocation to neighboring states or cities is the norm. Despite the fact the forced emigration from organized crime violence is common within certain geographical areas of Mexico, families affected by this phenomenon receive little to no protection from the Public Security Secretariat or from migrant care units.*





# Mexican Military Expands Participation in U.N. Peacekeeping Operations

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Mexican government is sending a small contingent of personnel to participate in U.N. operations, but the gesture is a huge step forward for the Mexican military. In mid-December 2015 the Mexican secretaries of defense (SEDENA, which includes the Army and Air Force), navy (SEMAR, which includes Mexico's Marine Corps), and foreign affairs (SRE) made a joint announcement that eight Mexican military personnel will follow four already serving in U.N. peacekeeping roles (first excerpted article).

The personnel are balanced between SEDENA and SEMAR personnel, primarily officers assigned to work in the headquarters staffs of partner Spanish-speaking nations in Haiti, Western Sahara, and Lebanon (second excerpted article). These staff roles are similar to those of the initial four officers (third excerpted article).

Twelve officers serving in U.N. peacekeeping operations appear *prima facie* as a negligible contribution, but within Mexico this is a major advance. Historically, because of traditions, domestic priorities, and legacy cultural and legal restraints, Mexico has been hesitant to participate in international operations led by foreign governments, even in Ibero-America (fourth excerpted article). The Mexican military, especially SEMAR, has envisioned participation in so-called "blue helmet" operations at least as far back as the Fox Administration, but this ambition has only been realized in a very limited fashion in the case of humanitarian assistance in high-profile crises, e.g., the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia. Consequently, the two small deployments of staff personnel in 2015 are really heralding a new era in Mexican military history and a transformation of Mexico from a relatively isolationist government into a true global security partner. **End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**

**Source:** Staff author(s), "México envía los primeros observadores militares y oficiales de Estado Mayor en las Operaciones de Mantenimiento de la Paz de la ONU" [Mexico Will Send Its First Military Observers and General Staff Officers to U.N. Peacekeeping Operations], 13 March 2015, <http://saladeprensa.sre.gob.mx/index.php/en/comunicados/5767-138>

*... in the next few days, Mexican military officers will be incorporated into some of the United Nations peacekeeping operations ... four members of the Mexican Armed Forces, two designated by the Department of National Defense and two by the Department of the Navy. The personnel will be deployed as officers of the Chief of Staff in the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and as observers of the U.N. Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). In the case of MINUSTAH, a Lieutenant Junior Grade specialized in communications and an Infantry Major will be incorporated in functions of advising and planning operations in the headquarters of the mission. In the case of MINURSO, they will be comprised of a Lieutenant Junior Grade and an Infantry Captain, who have been training to develop functions of observation through certification courses from the U.N., as well as to develop tasks of humanitarian nature.*

**Source:** Staff author(s), "México enviará a ocho militares más a Operaciones de Paz" [Mexico will send Eight Additional Soldiers for Peace Operations], *Informador*, 13 December 2015, <http://www.informador.com.mx/mexico/2015/632349/6/mexico-enviara-a-ocho-militares-mas-a-operaciones-de-paz.htm>

*At the end of this month, the government of Mexico will send eight more Soldiers to U.N. peacekeeping operations, which will bring the total to twelve armed forces members in peacekeeping operations ... the new eight personnel will be deployed between six and twelve months in three U.N. missions. These include the U.N. Stabilization Mission to Haiti (MINUSTAH), the U.N. Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), and the U.N. Provisional Force to Lebanon (UNIFIL).*

**Source:** Staff author(s), "México envía ocho observadores militares a operaciones de paz de la ONU" [Mexico Will Send Eight Military Observers to U.N. Peace Operations], *Terra*, reprinted from EFE, 13 December 2015, [http://noticias.terra.com.mx/mexico/mexico-envia-ocho-observadores-militares-a-operaciones-de-paz-de-la-onu\\_21c1df054146204cc8eab99ec31b500abize118o.html](http://noticias.terra.com.mx/mexico/mexico-envia-ocho-observadores-militares-a-operaciones-de-paz-de-la-onu_21c1df054146204cc8eab99ec31b500abize118o.html)

*... In Haiti, a Major and a Sergeant from SEDENA and a Lieutenant designated by SEMAR will join the Chilean National Contingent Headquarters to serve as communications advisors ... In the Sahara, a Major and a Captain designated by SEDENA will join the mission to serve as military observers. In Lebanon, in the context of "close cooperation between Mexico and Spain", a Captain designated by SEDENA and a Lieutenant Junior Grade by SEMAR will serve in the functions of advising and planning for the Spanish National Contingent Headquarters ....*

**Source:** Olga Pellicer, "Mexico en las operaciones de mantenimiento de la paz; decisión tardía y controvertida" [Mexico in Peacekeeping Operations: A late and Controversial Decision], *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 12 October 2014, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Mexico%20en%20las%20operaciones%20de%20mantenimiento%20de%20la%20paz.pdf>

*Speaking at the high-level debate of the U.N. General Assembly, President Enrique Peña Nieto issued a decision that was long-awaited by scholars of Mexican foreign policy. In a cautious manner, stressing that it would, "follow the guiding principles of the foreign policy established by [Mexico's] Constitution," he announced the decision to participate in U.N. peacekeeping operations ... It is unclear why those in the ranks of Mexican government display strong animosity to participation in such operations ... When the U.N. peacekeeping operation in Haiti was created in 2004, Latin American nations were placed at the vanguard. Under the leadership of Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay rapidly joined; their representatives immediately sought Mexican participation. The search was more intense following the earthquake of 2010 ... the Mexican response was negative.*



# ISRO Launches Singaporean Satellites

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has ended 2015 on a high note with the 16 December launch of six Singaporean satellites aboard ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV). The launch is being viewed by both Singapore and India as a great success.

For Singapore, the launch was important because its primary package (in addition to five micro-satellites) was Singapore's first Earth observation satellite produced by a Singaporean defense contractor. The satellite's stated mission is Earth observation, covering shipping routes and disaster-prone regions (first excerpted article). This mission is consistent with Singapore's defense priorities: Singapore's principal security concern is the critical shipping chokepoint upon which the country is situated, plus Singapore is a pro-active regional partner in security and humanitarian missions.

From India's perspective, the launch is one of a series of successes for ISRO and ISRO's PSLV. This was the 32nd PSLV launch (second excerpted article) and ISRO's 50th launch mission (third excerpted article). Although India has a much shorter spacefaring history than the traditional actors, Indians see themselves as rapidly catching up in the space race, and this launch further validates that opinion.

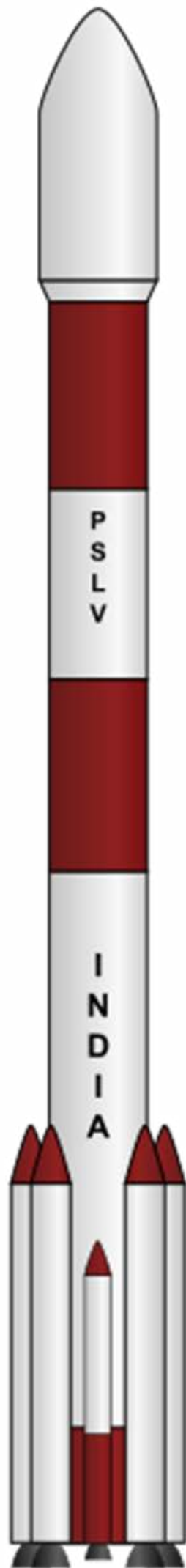
**End OE Watch Commentary (Freese)**



NASA imagery of smoke over Singapore.  
Source: [http://eoimages.gsfc.nasa.gov/images/imagerecords/81000/81431/indonesia\\_tmo\\_2013170\\_lrg.jpg](http://eoimages.gsfc.nasa.gov/images/imagerecords/81000/81431/indonesia_tmo_2013170_lrg.jpg)



ISRO logo.  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian\\_Space\\_Research\\_Organisation#/media/File:Indian\\_Space\\_Research\\_Organisation\\_Logo.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Space_Research_Organisation#/media/File:Indian_Space_Research_Organisation_Logo.svg)



Sketch of ISRO's PSLV by DV Graham.  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polar\\_Satellite\\_Launch\\_Vehicle#/media/File:PSLV.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polar_Satellite_Launch_Vehicle#/media/File:PSLV.svg)

**Source:** K.S. Jayaraman, "ISRO Launches Six Satellites for Singapore," *Space News*, 16 December 2015, <http://spacenews.com/isro-launches-six-satellites-for-singapore/>

*The Indian Space Research Organisation on Dec. 16 successfully launched six Singaporean satellites aboard a PSLV rocket, including TeLEOS-1, Singapore's first domestically built commercial Earth observation spacecraft ... The six satellites, built by organizations including defense manufacturer Singapore Technologies Electronics (ST Electronics), the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU), were placed into a 550-kilometer circular orbit inclined at 15 degrees relative to the equator ... TeLEOS-1 carries a camera that can take pictures with 1-meter ground resolution. In a Dec. 16 press release, ST Electronics said the satellite covers major shipping routes and disaster- and fire-prone regions with a mean revisit time of 12-16 hours. The launch was a major step for Singapore's space industry and marks ST Engineering's arrival as a player ....*

**Source:** Bobins Abraham, "ISRO Continues To Make India Proud As It Launches Six Singaporean Satellites Into Orbit," *India Times*, 16 December 2015, <http://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/isro-continues-to-make-india-proud-as-it-launches-six-singaporean-satellites-into-orbit-248468.html>

*... Wednesday's launch was the thirty-second flight of India's tried and tested Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C29). For ISRO this is a fully commercial launch whereby it will earn an undisclosed sum of income by putting into orbit these six Singaporean satellites ... the other five satellites include two micro-satellites and three nano-satellites. TeLEOS-1 is the first Singapore commercial earth observation satellite.*

**Source:** Staff author(s), "Isro launches Singapore satellites" *Deccan Herald*, 16 December 2015, <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/517975/isro-launches-singapore-satellites.html>

*... The 44.4-metre tall PSLV-C29, Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro's) most trusted rocket and workhorse launch flight, weighing 620 kg took off precisely at 6 pm from the first launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), about 90 km north of Chennai ... when Singapore is celebrating 50th year, Isro, which is also launching its 50th mission, has put six of its satellite into the orbit ... This is the eleventh flight of PSLV in "core-alone" configuration that will not use the solid strap-on motors ... In 2015 Isro has launched 14 satellites (3 Indian and 11 foreign) from its rocket port in Sriharikota till date.*



# Southeast Asian Countries Support, but Cautious about New Muslim Alliance Against Terror

**OE Watch Commentary:** Saudi Arabia recently formed a new military coalition of 34 countries to fight terrorism in the Islamic world, comprising countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. Interestingly, Malaysia and Indonesia, both of which are the source of hundreds of new ISIS recruits, have been somewhat cautious about committing to the coalition.

As of 18 December Indonesia's reluctance to commit has surprised some observers because, as the first excerpted article points out, the country is the most populous Muslim state. Press reports from Indonesia explain that the country is in a holding pattern. The second excerpted article quotes Armanatha Nasir, a spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, as saying that Indonesia is "waiting to see the modalities of the military coalition formed by Saudi Arabia." The government wants to first ensure that Saudi Arabia's intentions in forming the coalition are in line with Indonesia's principles and law. For one thing, Indonesian officials are expressing an interest in combatting terrorism through more of a soft approach, and, as the article indicates, there is a reluctance to become part of a military alliance. According to Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Luhut Panjaitan, the government prefers to combat terrorism by stopping radicalization, which he says is more effective than military action.

Malaysia seems to be of a similar mindset. Having not yet made a firm commitment to the coalition, Malaysian Defense Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein is supposed to visit Saudi Arabia in January to discuss it with key Saudi officials. According to the third excerpted article, while the defense minister is supportive of the coalition, he says that for now there will be no decision on a military commitment from Malaysia.

Hundreds of Malaysians and Indonesians have already been recruited into ISIS. There has also been talk of ISIS planning to form an "official" Islamic State faction in South-East Asia. This regional IS faction, according to the last excerpted article, plans to unite terror cells in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. This could explain the two countries' cautious approach to trying to come up with a solution to ISIS' growing influence in the region. The countries want to tread cautiously. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

*"...the Saudi foreign minister had approached Jakarta twice in the past few days to ask it to join a 'centre to coordinate against extremism and terrorism.'"*

**Source:** "Confusion Over Saudi Arabia's Islamic Coalition Against Terrorism," *The Daily Star*, 17 December 2015, <<http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/confusion-over-saudi-coalition-188467>>.

*Armanatha Nasir, foreign ministry spokesperson for Indonesia, the most populous Muslim state, said the Saudi foreign minister had approached Jakarta twice in the past few days to ask it to join a "centre to coordinate against extremism and terrorism."*

*Surely Indonesia, with a Sunni population of more than 200 million, would have an interest in joining their fellow Sunni Muslims in this unprecedented "coalition"? Or could it be that with more than 30 Indonesian Maids on Saudi Arabia's death row after grotesquely unfair trials, the country wants an end to this injustice before committing its army to the Kingdom?*

**Source:** Marguerite Afra Sapiie, "Indonesia Yet to Decide on Saudi-Led Military Coalition," *The Jakarta Post*, 16 December 2015, <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/12/16/indonesia-yet-decide-saudi-led-military-coalition.html>>.

*As Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi had said, Armanatha added, the government would first ensure that Saudi Arabia's intention to form this coalition was in line with Indonesia's principles and law, as the decision to join would reflect Indonesia's serious commitment to international action. "Indonesia cannot commit to any international cooperation if the scope, mechanism and approach are not in Indonesia's favor," Armanatha said. According to Armanatha, Indonesia was sticking to its principle of only joining international military missions or committing military troops under the flag of the UN.*

*Separately, Coordinating Political, Legal and Security Affairs Minister Luhut Panjaitan said that Indonesia would not yet join the military coalition as the country still wanted to use a soft-approach model of counter-terrorism. According to Luhut, the government wants to combat terrorism by stopping radicalization as that is more effective than military action.*

**Source:** Sungai Buloh, "Hishammuddin to Visit Saudi Arabia in Support of Muslim Alliance Against Terror," *Bernama*, 17 December 2015, <<http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v8/ge/newsgeneral.php?id=1200312>>.

*Defence Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein will visit Saudi Arabia in January to discuss the alliance of 34 Muslim nations against terrorism. Hishammuddin, however, said that there would, for the time being, be no decision on military commitment from Malaysia.*

**Source:** Eunice Au, "Malaysian Militants Plan to Start ISIS Faction in S-E Asia," *The Straits Times*, 16 November 2015, <<http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysian-militants-plan-to-start-isis-faction-in-s-e-asia>>.

*Wanted Malaysian militants hiding in the southern Philippines are planning to form an "official" faction of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in South-east Asia by bringing together terror groups in Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, including Jemaah Islamiah and Abu Sayyaf.*

*Former Universiti Malaya lecturer Mahmud Ahmad and his comrades - sundry goods shop owner Mohd Najib Husen and former local council employee Muhammad Joraimee Awang Raimee - who have been on Malaysia's wanted list since April last year, have been identified as individuals integral to this unification plan, The Star reported.*

*"He (Mahmud, also known as Abu Handzalah) has performed the bai'ah or the oath of allegiance on video but to form the South-east Asian cell of IS, Mahmud has to travel to Syria and swear his allegiance in front of IS supremo Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi," Senior Assistant Commissioner Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay said, using another name for ISIS.*



# Indonesian Security Forces Close In on Santoso while Islamic State Continues to Support Local Extremist Groups

**OE Watch Commentary:** Indonesian security forces have stepped up the manhunt in the thick jungles of Poso, Central Sulawesi, where Indonesia's most wanted terrorist, Santoso, is thought to be hiding. According to excerpts from the accompanying article in *The Straits Times*, as the crackdown on Islamic militants enters its third month, the joint operation among the national police, its elite Detachment 88 counterterrorism unit and the Indonesian military has been ratcheted up in the past week as the task force believes it is closing in on members of local extremist group East Indonesia Mujahidin.

As described in the accompanying article, several recent threats have been attributed to Santoso and East Indonesia Mujahidin, including a nine-minute video on social media sites that called for strikes on the Jakarta police headquarters and the presidential palace. As the excerpt from the *Jakarta Post* points out, East Indonesia Mujahideen, which hides out in the jungle in an area known as a militant hotbed, is considered one of the few remaining extremist outfits that pose a serious threat in Indonesia and has been accused of deadly attacks on police. Santoso's group has pledged allegiance to Islamic State.

Excerpts from *The Straits Times* also point out that police investigations and intelligence have uncovered funding and other support from the Islamic State reaching domestic extremist groups in Indonesia, such as East Indonesia Mujahidin. The Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre reports that US\$500,000 in cash has flowed into Indonesia to fund terrorism activities over the last three years. Authorities said the money was used to finance military training, pay for arms and compensate widows of the terrorists who died fighting for the cause. Throughout Indonesia the Islamic State has reached out to militant elements in recent years in at least five Indonesian provinces – East Java, Lampung in Sumatra, South Sulawesi, West Sulawesi, and Central Sulawesi.

With the Islamic State expanding throughout Indonesia and with the support of local extremist groups, Jakarta police chief Tito Karnavian warned that Indonesia could become a host for the Islamic State in Southeast Asia, according to excerpts in accompanying article. His comments and the recent activity of the Islamic State in Indonesia paint an ominous picture for the group's impact in Indonesia and the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**



Indonesian Army.

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indonesia\\_Army\\_soldiers.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indonesia_Army_soldiers.jpg).

**Source:** "Indonesia Intensifies Hunt for Most Wanted Terrorist Santoso," *The Straits Times*, 1 December 2015. <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/jakarta-intensifies-hunt-for-most-wanted-terrorist>

*As a crackdown on Islamic militants enters its third month, security forces have stepped up the manhunt in the thick jungles of Poso in Central Sulawesi where Indonesia's most wanted terrorist is thought to be hiding.*

*The joint operation between the national police, its elite Detachment 88 counterterrorism unit and the Indonesian military has been ratcheted up in the past week as the task force believes they are closing in on members of local extremist group East Indonesia Mujahidin (MIT).*

*Several threats issued recently, including a nine-minute video on social media sites that called for strikes on the Jakarta police headquarters and the presidential palace last weekend, have been attributed to Santoso and the MIT.*

*ISIS has reached out to militant elements in at least five Indonesian provinces - East Java, Lampung in Sumatra, South Sulawesi, West Sulawesi as well as Central Sulawesi - in recent years.*

*Police investigations and intelligence have uncovered funding and other support from ISIS reaching domestic extremist groups such as MIT.*

*The information was backed by the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (PPATK) ... detected seven billion rupiah (S\$700,000) in cash flowing into Indonesia to fund terrorism activities over the last three years.*

*PPATK deputy chief Agus Santoso said the money was used to finance military training, pay for arms and to compensate widows of the terrorists who died fighting for the cause.*

*Jakarta police chief Tito Karnavian ... warned last week that Indonesia could become a host for ISIS in South-east Asia*

**Source:** "Indonesia Jails Uighur Over Attempt to Join Militants," *The Jakarta Post*, 29 July 2015, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/07/29/indonesia-jails-uighur-over-attempt-join-militants.html#sthash.jSjUYnG3.dpuf>

*Santoso's group, which hides out in the jungle in an area known as a militant hotbed, is considered one of the few remaining extremist outfits that pose a serious threat in Indonesia and has been accused of deadly attacks on police.*

*Santoso has also pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group.*



# Are Southern Insurgents Ready to Settle with the Thai Government?

**OE Watch Commentary:** To restart peace talks, an area in the Thai border province of Narathiwat could be designated a “safety zone,” free of insurgent violence, in a joint effort by Thai authorities and southern separatists. According to excerpts in the *Bangkok Post*, negotiations between the government and southern insurgents were expected to start again with the Muslim fighters’ agreement to the imposition of a violence-free zone to prove that they could be trusted and keep their promises. Lieutenant General Nakrob Boonbuathong, secretary-general of the Thai negotiation team, said that, as a result of unofficial talks in Malaysia, Thai negotiators proposed that Mara Patani, the southern insurgency umbrella organization participating in the peace process, choose an area for the pilot program. He said that the peace negotiation was likely to begin officially after the New Year.

As pointed out in excerpts, Mara Patani includes six established insurgency groups: the Barisan Revolusi Nasional, three factions of the Patani Liberation Organisation, the Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Patani and the Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani. The excerpts also said that the Thai negotiation team proposed that Mara Patani nominate areas for development and that the government would offer pardons, parole and alternative justice actions. Mara Patani then came back with three proposals: government recognition of the peace process as a national priority, immunity for fugitive insurgents, and the recognition of Mara Patani.

The latest round of negotiations builds on Boonbuathong’s efforts in June 2015, when he said in *BenarNews*, “There is a need to build triangular trust among Thailand, Malaysia and the various dissident groups.” Then, in another interview in *BenarNews*, he commented, “[Malaysia] is the facilitator that glues us together, which is very effective. We trust Malaysia and so do the dissidents living there. When we met the dissidents, Malaysia brought us together perfectly.” By holding unofficial talks in Malaysia with southern insurgent groups, Boonbuathong has followed through with his earlier comments.

Since June the peace process for the insurgency in Southern Thailand has been able to stay on track. By creating a potential “safety zone” for insurgents and creating other measures sought by the both sides, Boonbuathong’s negotiation team is headed in the right direction toward settling the southern insurgency. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**

**Source:** “Insurgents, Govt Discuss ‘Safety Zone’ in South,” *Bangkok Post*, 30 November 2015. <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/security/780833/insurgents-govt-discuss-safety-zone-in-south>

*An area in the border province of Narathiwat could be designated a “safety zone” free of insurgent violence in a joint effort by Thai authorities and southern separatists to restart peace talks.*

*Negotiations between the government and southern insurgents were expected to start again with the Muslim fighters’ agreement to the imposition of a violence-free zone to prove that they could be trusted and keep their promises.*

*A security source said on Monday that some area of Narathiwat was likely to be announced as such a zone.*

*Lt Gen Nakrob Boonbuathong, secretary-general of the Thai negotiation team, said on Monday that, in unofficial talks in Malaysia on Nov 11-12, Thai negotiators proposed that Mara Patani, the southern insurgency umbrella organisation participating in the peace process, choose an area for the pilot programme.*

*... Mara Patani continues to include six established insurgency groups, he said, referring to the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), three factions of the Patani Liberation Organisation (Pulo), the Gerakan Mujahideen Islam Patani (GMIP) and the Barisan Islam Pembebasan Patani (BIPP).*

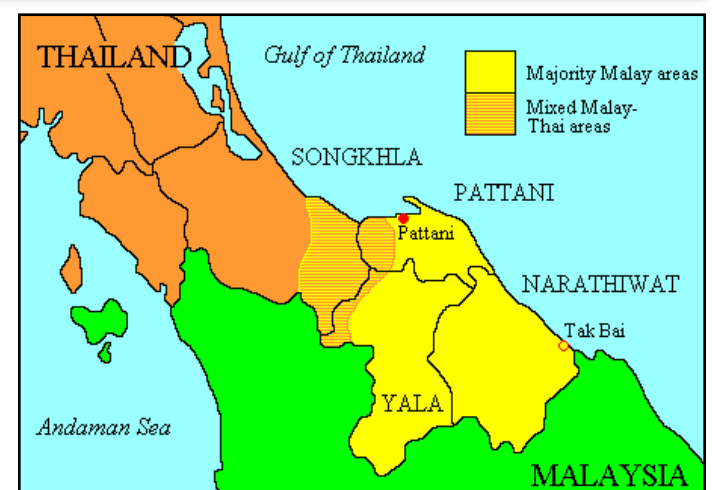
*... the Thai negotiation team proposed ... that Mara Patani nominate areas for development and the government would offer pardons, parole and alternative justice actions.*

*Mara Pattani came back with three previous proposals: government recognition of the peace process as a national priority, immunity for fugitive insurgents, and the recognition of Mara Patani.*

*Lt Gen Nakrob also said that the peace negotiation was likely to begin officially after the New Year.*

**Source:** “Thailand: Southern Peace Talks Delayed,” *BenarNews*, 19 June 2015, <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/peace-talks-06192015175749.html>

*“There is a need to build triangular trust among Thailand, Malaysia and the various dissident groups,” Nakrob said.*



The map shows the southern provinces of Thailand showing the Malay-Muslim majority areas.  
Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Thailand\\_insurgency#/media/File:Souththailandmap.GIF](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Thailand_insurgency#/media/File:Souththailandmap.GIF)

**Source:** “Interview: Malaysia ‘Glue’ to Solving Thailand’s Southern Conflict, Official Says,” *BenarNews*, 26 June 2015, <http://www.benarnews.org/english/news/thai/nakrob-boontbuathong-06262015182342.html>

*[Malaysia] is the facilitator that glues us together, which is very effective. We trust Malaysia and so do the dissidents living there. When we met the dissidents, Malaysia brought us together perfectly.*



# Extremists from the Philippines and Indonesia May be Working Together

**OE Watch Commentary:** Philippine security forces were able to take over a camp run by Ansar al-Khalifa, an ISIS-inspired group, in Sultan Kudarat, located in the restive island of Mindanao in the southern Philippines, following a week-long manhunt and pursuit operations against Mohammad Jaafar Sabiwang Maguid, the group’s leader. According to excerpts from the accompanying article in the *Zamboanga Times*, Brigadier General Emmanuel Salamat, Commander of the 1st Marine Brigade, commented that soldiers of the 6th Marine Battalion Landing Team and the Philippine National Police took over the camp after killing seven gunmen, including a young recruit and an Indonesian expert bomb maker. Maguid remains at large and is believed to be hiding in the jungles of coastal towns in Sultan Kudarat.

According to the excerpts, Philippine authorities travelled to Sultan Kudarat to serve arrest warrants on Maguid for various crimes, including a bomb attack in General Santos City. As authorities approached the village to serve the warrants, approximately 40 gunmen opened fire, sparking a four-hour firefight.

As described in the accompanying article, when the firing stopped the bodies of eight men were found scattered in the camp, including that of Indonesian bomber Ibrahim Ali, a senior member of the Mujahideen Indonesian Timur (according to Professor Rommel Banlaoi, a local security analyst, the group is connected with the Malay Archipelago Unit for the Islamic State, a regional unit believed to carry out recruitment activities). Philippine authorities describe Ali as a follower of Julkifli bin Hir, one of Southeast Asia’s most wanted militants, who was killed in January in a clash that left 44 Philippine police commandos dead. He was believed to be training local militants on bomb making in Palimbang Mountains.

Authorities throughout Southeast Asia need to be aware of the connection between the Islamic State and Muslim extremists in Southeast Asia. Since Philippine and Indonesian militants are collaborating to support the Islamic State in a joint effort, local officials need to step up their counterterrorism activities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ortiz)**



Philippine soldiers watch a survival training exercise.  
Source [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine\\_Army#/media/File:Army.mil-2008-02-21-124604.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philippine_Army#/media/File:Army.mil-2008-02-21-124604.jpg)

**Source:** “PHL Flag Replaces ISIS Flag in Captured Camp,” *Zamboanga Times*, 3 December 2015. <http://zamboangatimes.ph/top-news/17028-phl-flag-replaces-isis-flag-in-captured-camp.html>

## PHL flag replaces ISIS flag in captured camp

*Brig. Gen. Emmanuel Salamat, commander of the 1st Marine Brigade based in Kalamansig town, Sultan Kudarat province, told reporters that soldiers of the 6th Marine Battalion Landing Team and the Philippine National Police (PNP) in Sultan Kudarat took over the camp of Ansar al-Khalifa, an ISIS -inspired group, after killing seven gunmen, including a young recruit and an Indonesian expert bomb maker.*

*Salamat said the gunbattle came after a week-long manhunt and pursuit operations against Mohammad Jaafar Sabiwang Maguid also known as Commander Tokboy, the group leader, in the village of Butril, Palimbang town, Sultan Kudarat.*

*Salamat said Commander Tokboy remains at large and believed to be hiding in the jungles of Palimbang and Maitum towns, both coastal towns in Sultan Kudarat.*

*Philippine Marines and men of the Philippine National Police’s Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) ... to serve arrest warrants on Commander Tokboy for various crimes, including a bomb attack in General Santos City. ... when some 40 gunmen opened fire on them around 5:30 a.m., sparking a four-hour firefight.*

*When firing stopped, the bodies of eight men were found scattered in the camp including that of Indonesian bomber Ibrahim Ali, alias Hudzaifa, a senior member of the Mujahideen Indonesian Timur (MIT), who Philippine authorities describe as a follower of Julkifli bin Hir, a.k.a. Marwan, one of Southeast Asia’s most wanted militants who was killed in a clash that left 44 Philippine police commandos dead in January. He was believed to be training local militants on bomb making in Palimbang mountains.*

*Professor Rommel Banlaoi, a security analyst, told radio dzBB on Saturday that the group is connected with the Malay Archipelago Unit for the Islamic State, a regional unit believed to carry out recruitment activities ...*



China’s Increasing Emphasis on Civilian-Military Integration

**OE Watch Commentary:** Over the next five years China will be focused on integrating the country’s military and civilian resources to become a maritime, space, and cyber power. Xu Qiliang, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, describes these three areas as “strategic fields for military competition.” He explains that integrating both the military and civilian efforts is “an inevitable choice for China to ensure security and development while increasing wealth and building a strong army.” While little information is given on China’s exact planned path to integrating both areas, the article does point out that China plans to build a unified national public aerospace network open to both areas. The government will also offer “strong capital input and policy support,” while authorities will select several areas deemed to be of strategic importance to “set up innovation demonstration zones.”

Highlighting examples of past successes in the integration of civilian and military efforts, such as the US Manhattan Project, the Apollo Program, and China’s Shenzhou space program, Xu envisions both social and economic benefits coming from integrated projects. “Our country is going from large to powerful and is proceeding to the center of the world stage,” he once wrote in an article.

Based on the following article and other writings over the past five years, we might expect to see a marked increase in the merging of civilian and military thoughts and resources. The question that comes to mind, however, concerns a blurring of the line. China has long been a peaceful society. As the country’s military and civilian resources become increasingly merged, to what extent might this change the overall nature of Chinese society and culture? **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“Our country is going from large to powerful and is proceeding to the center of the world stage...”

**Source:** “China Plans Maritime, Space Projects in Next Five Years,” *Xinhua*, 12 November 2015, <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/12/c\\_134810266.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/12/c_134810266.htm)>.

China Plans Maritime, Space Projects in Next Five Years

“China is on its way to building itself into a maritime, space and cyber power,” said Xu Qiliang, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC)...

Vowing strong capital input and policy support, Xu said authorities will... select several areas of strategic importance to set up innovation demonstration zones.

The current Communist Party of China (CPC) leadership has promoted a national strategy of “deepening integration of military and civilian development” since it took the helm in late 2012.

Integrated military and civilian development is “an inevitable choice for China to ensure security and development while increasing wealth and building a strong army,” Xu wrote. He added that other countries have adopted a similar approach.

“Our country is going from large to powerful and is proceeding to the center of the world stage,” he wrote in the article. “External pressures are becoming greater, and risks and challenges are also growing.”

China Modernizing its Tank Killer Capabilities

**OE Watch Commentary:** The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is undergoing further renovation by phasing out its tank destroyers and replacing them with more powerful technologies. According to the accompanying excerpted article, the artillery regiment of PLA Shenyang Military Command’s 39th Group Army held a ceremony to mark what is believed to be the withdrawal of its Type-89 tank destroyers, which are reportedly being replaced with missiles and helicopters. The article points out that, while the Type-89 tank destroyer can “easily pierce the armor of enemy tanks using a 120-mm smoothbore gun,” it has some shortcomings: a short firing range; thin tank armor; comparatively high maintenance costs; and use limited to tanks.

It appears that China is already in the process of replacing all tank destroyers, not just the Type-89. According to the article, “the PLA has been gradually replacing tank destroyers with HJ-10 anti-tank missiles and WZ-10 and WZ-19 attack helicopters at the group army level.” The HJ-10 is reportedly China’s most advanced homegrown anti-tank missile capable of destroying tanks, permanent defensive works, and helicopters flying at low altitude and at low speed. The WZ-10 is China’s first domestically produced specialized attack helicopter and is rated among the top ten attack helicopters in the world. Both are primarily meant to provide fire support to the battlefield.

While the Type-89 tank destroyer was once one of the most lethal anti-tank weapons in the world, in today’s operational environment it and other tank destroyers must be losing their appeal. The article states that, “Thanks to the past 20 years of modernization, our armored forces have acquired a large number of advanced tanks equipped with large-caliber, powerful guns, which means specialized tank destroyers, such as the Type-90, will no longer be needed.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

**Source:** Zhao Lei, “Tank Destroyers Targeted by Modernization,” *China Daily*, 17 November 2015, <[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-11/18/content\\_22479899.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-11/18/content_22479899.htm)>.

Tank Destroyers Targeted by Modernization

Many weapons researchers said that the Type-89 was once the most lethal anti-tank weapon in the world, as it had the strongest smoothbore gun and most powerful armor-piercing shell in the 1990s, capable of destroying every type of tank in use at that time.

However, the weapon has some shortcomings: Its firing range is short, the armor is thin, the maintenance costs are comparatively high and it can only be used against tanks, according to Wang.

“Anti-tank missiles and helicopters represent the trend of anti-tank warfare. They can form a three-dimensional anti-tank firepower network,” Wang said.



World Robot Conference Highlights Importance of Robots in an Anti-terror Role

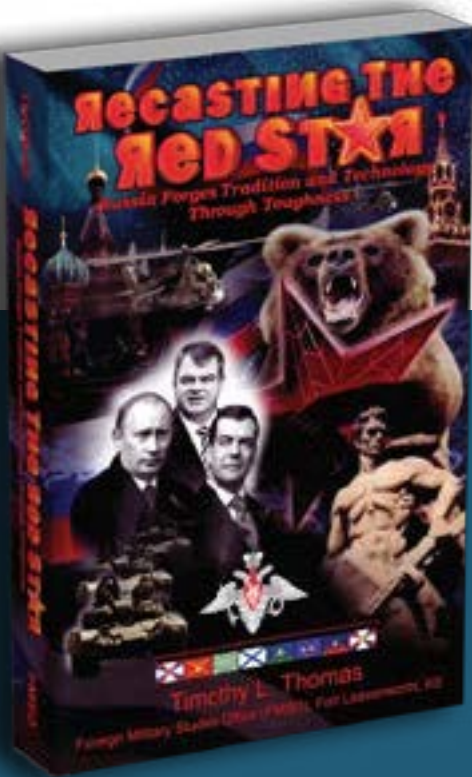
**OE Watch Commentary:** The World Robot Conference in Beijing ended on 23 November 2015. The conference aimed to develop collaboration among many countries regarding the innovative and creative process of building societies that are more and more dependent on robotic advancements. Guo Shengkun, head of the national anti-terrorism leading group and China’s police chief, urged heightened alert and prevention of terrorism at a televised meeting following the deadly Paris attacks. He asked officials to remain aware and told them not to take chances when it comes to protecting people’s safety and property. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

**Source:** Xinhua (in English), 25 November 2015

*Based on the analysis of the type of explosives and need for evacuation, the small EOD robot and the armed attack robot will start their missions. The small EOD robot is tasked with moving and defusing the bomb. If the complexity is beyond the robot’s capabilities, then bomb experts in the office have to come up with a proper solution, said Wu. The small EOD robot, which weighs about 12 kg, is specially designed for soldiers working alone. Made of aluminum alloy and industrial plastic, the robot can be carried on the back of a single soldier. The armed attack robot, or the attacker, is designed to carry minor-caliber weapons, recoilless rifles and grenade launchers. With a sighting telescope, a trigger and a safe installed, the attacker can hit its target from a long distance.*

*The set of three robots is priced at 1.5 million yuan (about 230, 000 U.S. dollars), according to Chen Deqiang, sales manager of HIT Robot Group. Wu said the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau is among the buyers who have shelled out for the robots. Apart from anti-terror operations, they can also be applied in firefighting, public security, forestry and agriculture, said Chen.*

*“Three robots specializing in reconnaissance, small explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and armed attack have debuted at the just-concluded 2015 World Robot Conference in Beijing amid escalating global terror threats. The toy-sized robots can coordinate with each other on the battlefield. The scout, or reconnaissance robot, is responsible for field detection through camera or sensor, according to Wu Yanpeng, an engineer at HIT Robot Group in northeast China’s Harbin city, developer of the robots. When the scout detects or senses something suspicious such as poisonous gas, dangerous chemicals and explosives, the information is transmitted back to headquarters for further analysis, said Wu.”*



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



## Military Reform in China According to President Xi Jinping

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 26 November Chinese President Xi Jinping discussed breakthroughs that must be made in order to reform the country's Armed Forces by 2020. His remarks appeared to work with the carrot (the first paragraph in the excerpt below) and stick (the second paragraph in the excerpt, citing ways to fight corruption in the force) approach. On the one hand he described in detail the importance of reforming the Armed Forces to develop them into a military power and thereby fulfill the Chinese dream of a strong military. On the other hand there were serious overtones about managing corruption in the force. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

*“According to Xi, the CMC’s “centralized and unified” leadership should be strengthened to ensure that supreme administration and command status belong to the CMC and the CPC Central Committee. Xi cited measures designed to “integrate the administrative system and the joint battle command system,” including a general command center for land forces and enabling the CMC to directly administer and command various military departments. The current regional military commands will be adjusted and regrouped into new battle zone commands supervised by the CMC, Xi said. The reform will establish a three-tier “CMC - battle zone commands - troops” command system and an administration system that runs from CMC through various services to the troops. Currently, a majority of Chinese troops consist of 850,000 land forces, which are deployed in seven military area commands headquartered in Shenyang, Beijing, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Lanzhou.”*

**Source:** Xinhua (in English), 26 November 2015.

*The move to deepen defense and military reform is aimed at breaking down systematic, structural and policy barriers, modernizing the organization of the military, further unleashing the combat capacity and vigor of the military. It should also aim at building a firm defense and strong military commensurate with China’s international standing and interests in security and development. Xi said, the history of the people’s army is one of reform and innovation. “Under the leadership of the Party, the army has gone from small to large, from weak to strong, and from victory to victory,” Xi said. The reason why the military has stayed vigorous is that it has kept pace with times and never ceased reforming itself, Xi added. “Now, as the country progresses from a large country to a large and powerful one, defense and military development stands at a new and historic starting line, Xi said. Taking into consideration the world’s larger picture as well as profound and complicated changes in the international landscape, “We must deepen defense and military reforms with greater wisdom and courage,” Xi said.*

*Xi stressed the importance of regulating power within the military, demanding a strict system to regulate and supervise the use of power. “Decision-making, enforcement and supervision powers should be separated and distributed in a manner that ensures they serve as checks and balances on each other but also run in parallel,” Xi said. Solving the problem of weak discipline enforcement and inspection, auditing and judicial supervision processes of the military are paramount, Xi said, pledging to eradicate the “soil” of corruption with stricter rules and systems. A new discipline inspection commission will be established within the CMC and disciplinary inspectors will be sent to CMC departments and zone commands. The CMC will have an audit office and a political and legal affairs commission. The independent and fair exertion of judicial power by military courts and procuratorates will be ensured with adjustments to the military judicial system.*

*He called for strengthening the militia and reserve forces and national-level efforts to enhance management of and security to veterans. Xi also noted the transfer or retirement of military personnel, saying special policies for arranging jobs should be given to them. The military must resolutely terminate all paid services, Xi ordered. Xi highlighted a timeline for achieving concrete results in the reform, saying breakthroughs in overhauling the leadership and joint command system must be made by 2020. To finish the task, Xi said high-ranking military officers must take the lead to support the reform and defend the authority of the central leadership. Common soldiers should be guided to embrace the reform.*



## A Chinese Perspective on Turkish-Russian Tensions in Syria

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 24 November ground-to-air fire downed a Russian warplane along the Syrian-Turkish border, leading to a threat of escalation between Turkey and Russia. Russian President Putin promised that Turkey would regret its action for a long time and Turkey asserted it was within its right to fire at the warplane because it warned the pilot multiple times that he had entered Turkish airspace. Soon after the incident, the international community called for de-escalation.

The excerpted Chinese-language article from 26 November 2015 on *military.china.com* sides with the Russians. The article emphasizes that Russia was not threatening Turkish territory in any way. Moreover, the article suggests that Turkey's intentions were probably not related to defending Turkey, but rather to defending the rebels in Syria, whom Turkey supports but who are being targeted by the Russian airstrikes.

It is clear that the writer believes Russia's actions in Syria are legitimate, despite the fact that the West sees Russia as wrongfully backing an illegitimate regime. One reason for China's position may be that Russia's air strikes are indirectly helping China because they are targeting the main anti-Chinese militant group in Syria, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP). According to social media photographs and claims, Russian strikes have killed 30 TIP militants, destroyed the TIP headquarters in Abu Dhuhur in Idlib Province, and injured Al-Qaeda-aligned cleric Abdullah Muhyasini, who has issued propaganda videos in support of the TIP. In addition, China, like Russia, views Bashar Al-Assad as the most stable leader for the country, and China, as a matter of foreign policy strategy, tends to oppose the overthrow of any leader by foreign powers, even if the leader is dictatorial.

Thus, China's assessment of the conflict between Turkey and Russia in the excerpted article aligns closely with what China views as its broader strategic interests. Nonetheless, the author does not expect the conflict between Turkey and Russia to continue to escalate because the risks are too high for both Turkey and Russia, as well as for NATO. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

*“If Turkey simply wants to protect its own airspace there is absolutely no need to take such a radical approach.”*



Russian air strikes in Syria are indirectly supporting China's counter-terrorism interests in Syria.  
Source: <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-syria-campaign-under-fire/27321270.html>

**Source:** “俄报复极可能重点摧毁土库曼 俄罗斯不会与土耳其正式开战，但不排除将来偶尔巡航导弹误炸” [Russian retaliation is likely to focus on the destruction of Turkmen brigades and Russia and Turkey will not officially go to war, but this does not rule out future mistaken bombings], *military.china.com*, 26 November 2015.

***Russian retaliation is likely to focus on the destruction of Turkmen brigades and Russia and Turkey will not officially go to war, but this does not rule out future mistaken bombings.***

*On the morning of November 24, two Russian Su-24 fighter-bombers were striking in Syria, but at the Syrian-Turkish border, one of the planes was shot down. Russia will not officially go to war with Turkey, but that does not rule out future conflict.*

*The Russian Su-24 fighter-bomber's combat performance is very backward, and is virtually no threat to Turkey's F-16 capabilities; and its intention was very clear that it is not focusing on targets inside Turkey. If Turkey simply wants to protect its own airspace there is absolutely no need to take such a radical approach. Turkey attempted this to interfere and obstruct Russian actions in Syria.*

*After the incident, the issue of most concern to the outside world is that the dispute between Turkey and Russia not be upgraded to a war between the two countries and even a further evolution of a NATO-Russia war.*

*But I believe that the possibility of all-out war between Russia and Turkey is very low. There are two reasons for this: first, Russian military power in Syria is too weak; and, second, NATO does not necessarily support this action, because after the war the price will be too high.*



## China Promotes First African Military Base in Djibouti

**OE Watch Commentary:** : China has announced it will build its first military base (though it officially calls it a resupply station) in Africa at the port in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. China is nonetheless concerned about what it calls the “China Threat Theory” in the West, so it is trying to play down the notion that the base exemplifies growing Chinese militarization in Africa. The excerpted article from the 1 December edition of *South China Morning Post* suggests that China will portray its presence in the Horn of Africa in the same way that it does its posture in its own near-abroad in East Asia: namely, through the lens of history and economy, and as being a responsible global actor.

In the excerpted article the author legitimizes the military base in Djibouti by harkening back to the days of Chinese Admiral Zheng He, a Muslim, who is reported to have sailed through the Straits of Malacca to present-day Kenya and Somalia in the 15th century. China also taps into not only history but also economic affairs when it references its new Maritime Silk Road extending to East Africa, which is portrayed as a modern-day version of the ancient Silk Road, which went by land to the Middle East. In terms of being a responsible global actor, China proclaims that it will use the base in Djibouti to combat piracy on international waters, which, the article notes, is an area where China has earned praise.

At the same time, Chinese internal analyses about its objectives—namely, those that are not released to the public—may paint a different picture than articles like the one excerpted from the *South China Morning Post*. China, for example, has been selling arms to East African countries and building infrastructure in the region to assist in exporting goods and resources to China, including most recently making deals with Ethiopia. It has also publicly portrayed its activities in East Asia as nonmilitaristic, while gradually asserting itself militarily in the South China Sea. Thus, China may similarly be seeking to increase its military capabilities in East Africa, including with the base in Djibouti, while downplaying these actions publicly to diminish any perceptions of the threat.

As the article notes, however, the strategic trend for China is that its military might follows and protects its economic might as the latter expands. This is certainly happening in Djibouti and East Africa. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

*“No matter what the vantage point, China’s establishment of its first military base on foreign soil, in Djibouti, is as desirable as it is necessary.”*



In 2015, Chinese naval ships, such as the one in the adjacent photo, have increasingly touched down at African ports.

Source: <http://news.usni.org/2015/11/25/u-s-africom-commander-confirms-chinese-logistics-base-in-djibouti>

**Source:** “Chinese Military Base in Djibouti Necessary to Protect Key Trade Routes Linking Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe,” *South China Morning Post*, 1 December 2015.

### ***Chinese military base in Djibouti necessary to protect key trade routes linking Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe***

*China is being coy about the navy installation it is setting up in the East African country of Djibouti, referring to it simply as a resupplying position for its ships participating in United Nations anti-piracy missions. But whether it is to be called an outpost, a base or some other term, there is no escaping the symbolism and meaning. The historic role of the Chinese military has been to protect borders and territory, yet the Horn of Africa nation is more than 7,700km from Beijing.*

*The country’s strategic location, near sea lanes between Asia and the Middle East and Europe, and close to hotspots for piracy and Muslim extremism, makes it ideal for locating security forces. Given China’s “One Belt, One Road” plans, its investments and vast trade networks in Africa and need for oil from the Middle East, basing protective military forces in the nation makes pragmatic sense.*

*Beijing has won praise for the navy’s anti-piracy efforts in the Indian Ocean and it has pledged to help with international peace and security measures. It has well-established ties with Djibouti through billions of dollars of investment in its port and construction of a rail line to neighbouring Ethiopia. The greater China’s rise, the more its interests and people will spread; one million Chinese have moved to Africa to live and work over the past decade. No matter what the vantage point, China’s establishment of its first military base on foreign soil, in Djibouti, is as desirable as it is necessary.*



## Another Step for Kazakhstan's Defense Industry?

**OE Watch Commentary:** As Kazakhstan's defense industry has slowly grown over the past several years, there has been speculation that it would go beyond fulfilling orders for the state's military and security services and start exporting various weapons or equipment. The accompanying excerpted article shows that exports are set to take place and updates the status of the defense industry.

The deal with Paramount Group of South Africa marks another joint venture to produce armored vehicles, though these have heavier armor than the "Cobra" armored vehicles which were purchased a few years back from the Turkish firm Otokar as part of an agreement to eventually manufacture them in Kazakhstan. The status of the production of Cobras has not been publicized, and it appears that if this new factory reaches full manufacturing capability, it could produce vehicles to meet domestic requirements fairly quickly before fulfilling agreements for exports. A deal to export 50 of the Marauder vehicles to Jordan is referenced in the article, though there is no timeline of when this will happen. It is possible that Kazakhstan will sell its version of Paramount's armored vehicle for less, as Jordan had reportedly been involved in negotiation to purchase directly from Paramount several years ago.

The article brings up how Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering has its own engineers working on designs for future projects, and this provides an update on one issue regarding Kazakhstan's defense industry. Defense analysts have said that the industry is being held back from competing with other defense firms around the world due to a lack of engineers. Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering may have enough engineers to develop additional projects, but the article also notes how it is a subsidiary of Kazakhstan Engineering, which is the main state company involved in defense production. It is unknown how well other subsidiaries are doing with developing and retaining engineers.

Additionally, the 40 percent local production might be a good starting point for the factory's first couple of years, but, considering past statements within the industry about becoming more self-sufficient overall, this number could change. Ultimately, news of the production of the armored vehicle shows that one company in Kazakhstan's defense industry has taken a step forward, though it remains to be seen what effect this has on the industry as a whole. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

*"There are later plans to export the armored vehicle. It is known that a memorandum was signed with Jordan, which will acquire 50 of the vehicles."*



Production on a variant of Paramount Group's (South Africa) Marauder Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (pictured) vehicle has started in Kazakhstan with the first version set to roll out in January 2016.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marauder\\_%28vehicle%29#/media/File:Parad\\_878.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marauder_%28vehicle%29#/media/File:Parad_878.jpg)

**Source:** Mosunov, Igor. "Первый казахстанский броневик поставят на колёса в январе 2016 года" (Kazakhstan's first armored vehicle will be rolled out in January 2016), *Inform Buro*, 7 December 2015. <http://informburo.kz/novosti/pervyy-kazahstanskiy-bronevik-postavyat-na-kolyosa-v-yanvare-2016-goda.html>

### ***Kazakhstan's first armored vehicle will be rolled out in January 2016***

*The production of armored vehicles on the basis of a vehicle from South Africa has started in Astana. It is planned that local production will reach 40 percent. "This vehicle protects against ambushes, i.e. the MRAP..." – Erbol Salimov, the director of Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering, told reporters during a tour of the factory. According to him the vehicles are highly mobile and ideal for using in counterterrorism operations... "The first vehicle will come out in January of next year." – he added.*

*The main customer of this enterprise – the Ministry of Defense... There are later plans to export the armored vehicle. It is known that a memorandum was signed with Jordan, which will acquire 50 of the vehicles... "I have a complete engineering group – Bolashak scholars and graduates of the Universities of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. They are drawing up (new) designs... We are planning and designing our own vehicles," – said the director... Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering is a partner of Kazakhstan Engineering Distribution (a subsidiary of Kazakhstan Engineering) with the South African company Paramount Group...*

*It should be noted that the amount of the armored vehicle at cost or its export price was not disclosed. The price of the armored vehicle in South Africa is around \$480 thousand... Production capacity of the factory is 120 armored vehicles a year...*



## Changes to the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division in Tajikistan

**OE Watch Commentary:** The recent announcement by the Russian Central Military District that the 149th Motorized Rifle Regiment would be transferring from the city of Kulyab to Dushanbe came as a surprise to many in Tajikistan, and, as the accompanying article reports, there are a few things about it that could have short- and long-term effects. Outside of any impact on security for Tajikistan, the transfer will affect the economy of Kulyab. The article mentions that 30-40 people met with representatives of the 149th Regiment, and this was likely related to how some residents of Kulyab will lose their jobs when the transfer takes place. A number of Kulyab residents have worked at the base, and, while there was controversy this past year over a delay in wages being paid, it has provided a source of revenue for the city that will now be gone.

The author believes that the transfer will weaken the Tajik-Afghan border, specifically that the 149th will no longer be in place in the event of an incursion by a militant group from Afghanistan, and that Tajik forces would not be able to deal with it on their own. The author provides the example of the Russian border post that was attacked in 1993 and how the 149th played a role in providing support at the time. The 201st Motorized Rifle Division will remain in Tajikistan at the same strength, with units now based near Dushanbe and Qurghonteppa, but the author does not believe that the 201st or the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) collective reaction force would be able to deploy quickly enough in response to an incursion. The CSTO did carry out a joint exercise in May 2015 that focused on quickly deploying units of the reaction force to the Tajik-Afghan border. The exercise involved deploying around 2500 soldiers to the Tajik-Afghan border in 48 hours, with Russia providing the bulk of the transport planes and other aircraft. The exercise did not involve any units from the 201st, and only Kazakhstan contributed transportation for its own units. While this is the only rapid deployment exercise the CSTO has conducted with its reaction force, it may have influenced the Russian leadership regarding the transfer of the 149th.

The article also brings up the potential border force made up of contributions of border guards from member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), in addition to the return of the Russian Border Guards to the Tajik-Afghan border. Any border force from the CIS is still in an early stage of development, much less deploying to the Tajik-Afghan border, and the return of the Russian Border Guards has been periodically mentioned in Russia since their departure in 2005-2006, but nothing has been initiated. The government of Tajikistan has not shown any sign thus far of seriously considering the return of the Russian Border Guards. The Russian government may have transferred the 149th regiment from Kulyab to consolidate its forces; while the author outlines a few effects of the transfer, how the government of Tajikistan reacts will be worth watching. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

*“By mid-December of this year the 149th Motorized Rifle Regiment, of the Russian 201st (Division) garrisoned in Tajikistan, will have fully withdrawn from the city of Kulyab”*



Soldiers from Russia's 201st Motorized Rifle Division conduct training with a 120mm mortar in Tajikistan.

Source: <http://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/201406240537-sl6c.htm>

**Source:** Gaysina, Liliya. “Россия «сливает» Таджикистан?” (Is Russia “consolidating” Tajikistan?), *Asia-Plus*, 28 November 2015. <http://news.tj/ru/news/rossiya-slivaet-tadzhikistan>

### *Is Russia “consolidating” Tajikistan?*

*By mid-December of this year the 149th Motorized Rifle Regiment, of the Russian 201st (Division) garrisoned in Tajikistan, will have fully withdrawn from the city of Kulyab. Russian soldiers will be sent to Lyaur...Residents of Kulyab were notified last week about this... The notification of relocation was dated 15 October...According to the announcement from the (Russian) Central Military District, “...two military bases will remain – the motorized rifle regiment in Qurghonteppa and the optical electronic facility “Okno”...The military facility in Kulyab will be transferred to Tajikistan...*

*...the districts of Hamadoni and Shurobad have a certain geographic feature...Combatants could hit Tajikistan within this area...In Soviet times there was a double line of defense with border guards on the line and reserve units in Kulyab. The well-known 12th border post, attacked in 1993, was reinforced by the 149th...With respect to Tajik forces, protecting this section of the border is not easy and it would not be possible to receive reinforcements from the 201st or the CORF (Collective Security Treaty Organization's operational reaction force) in time...*

*...The possible return of the Russian border guards was discussed in October in Astana during the CIS summit. Putin said that a border force of Commonwealth states will be formed for the protection of the Tajik-Afghan border...Last Sunday about 30-40 residents of the city expressed concerns to the representatives of the regiment about the withdrawal of the Russian soldiers...*



## The Kyrgyz-Tajik Border: Halfway to Demarcation?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Border demarcation negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been ongoing for the past couple of years following multiple violent incidents in disputed border areas. The accompanying excerpted articles report on the recent draft agreement to demarcate over half of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border and the status of the construction of the road near the border (in the Batken Oblast, southern Kyrgyzstan), which was at the center of a couple of the incidents. There are a few things about both announcements that provide some insight into how the border issue will continue to play out.

It is important to note that, while this is a draft agreement and may not have been finalized by either government, it is the closest the two sides have come to resolving the issue in the past couple of years. The specific areas of the border that they agreed on are not mentioned in the article, and the draft agreement might not include the most contentious areas. While the number of incidents has risen in the past few years, they have occurred at only a couple of places along the border, particularly the area where road construction has been taking place.

The announcement that construction of the road would be finished next year could be related to the negotiations, but, as the article stated, construction continued in 2014, even after a few of the violent incidents. One of the complaints from the Tajik side has been that the road construction was carried out without any prior notification, not just because it was happening in a disputed border area. If the government of Kyrgyzstan has notified Tajikistan about continuing road construction or if the recent agreement could assist in negotiating sections of the border that include infrastructure, such as the road, then this could reduce the chances of another violent incident taking place on the border. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

*“As reported by the government, the meeting between the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan resulted in a draft of an agreement on the length of 519.9 km of the state border.”*



The Kyrgyz-Tajik border area at the northern end of the village of Internatsional. Leilek District, Kyrgyzstan  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyrgyz-Tajik\\_border\\_area,\\_Internatsional.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyrgyz-Tajik_border_area,_Internatsional.JPG)

**Source:** “А.Карашев: «Завершение процесса делимитации и демаркации границы – одно из важных условий стабильности кыргызско-таджикских отношений» (A. Karashev: The completion of the process of delimitation and demarcation of the borders – one of the important conditions for stability of Kyrgyz-Tajik relations), *Kabar*, 20 November 2015. <http://kabar.kg/rus/politics/full/99127>

**A. Karashev: «The completion of the process of delimitation and demarcation of the borders – one of the important conditions for stability of Kyrgyz-Tajik relations»**

*... Additionally, the participants of the meeting discussed the remaining unmarked sections of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border...The meeting also resulted in an agreement on the promotion of possible exchange of individual sections of land by mutual agreement, and in consideration of the opinions of the population along the border.*

**Source:** “Строительство стратегической автодороги Кокташ—Аксай—Тамдык в Баткене планируют завершить в следующем году (Construction of the strategic Koktash – Aksay – Tamdyk road in Batken is planning to be completed next year),” *Turmush*, 17 November 2015. <http://turmush.kg/ru/news:264844>

*...The road is considered strategic for the Batken region. The length of the road is 24.5 km with an estimated cost of 326 million Som (\$4.3 million). Construction began in 2013, but stopped because of border issues at the time. It resumed in 2014...today work is being carried out at 4 sections of the road...*



## Artilleryman Developing New Tactics, Considering Further UAV Integration

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Russian Federation is currently engaged in a major modernization overhaul and is making big investments in numerous military capabilities. Russia's current exploits in Ukraine and Syria are proving to be fruitful laboratories for testing these new systems and tactics. Unlike military capability developments currently ongoing in the West, the Russian military has taken a particularly keen interest in armored vehicle and artillery developments. Russia, a relative latecomer to the UAV field, is also now fielding many new airframes with a variety of capabilities. Although Russia is developing UAV technologies capable of functioning as weapons platforms, this does not appear to be the main intent for Russian UAV usage. They are seen primarily as a supplemental, enabling capability for enhancing the use of existing and future artillery systems. It appears to be the Russian view that a UAV with a few missiles can be effective, but nowhere near as effective as a UAV that can loiter for an extended duration and provide reliable targeting information to batteries of tried and true tube and MLRS artillery systems. (For more information, see "The Orlan-10 and Artillery, Let's Ponder How They Work Together..." OEW, August 2015, and "Ground Forces Integrate UAVs into Artillery Reconnaissance Units" OEW, September 2014.)

Interestingly, Russia's decision to use UAVs in this manner has caused it to adopt a much more decentralized UAV C2 system than the way they are controlled by the US Armed Forces. Traditionally, Russian tactics have dictated communicating targeting data to firing batteries by the use of artillery command and reconnaissance vehicles (ACRVs), which use thermal, radar, sound, and other types of sensors to acquire the locations of various targets. This information is then relayed to fire direction centers (usually 1 per 6-gun battery), which processes the information and, in turn, relays it to the guns. Artillery spotting UAVs have been integrated into this process by attaching UAV teams to the ACRVs. This alleviates any need to directly (digitally) integrate UAVs into the current fire control system by, in a sense, making the UAV just another sensor for the ACRV.

To date, this usage for UAVs has been somewhat impromptu. Russian UAVs that fulfill this mission typically also fulfill electronic warfare, radio retransmission, and other functions and are usually found in the maneuver brigade's UAV company, so they may be tasked by priority as needed. The accompanying articles discuss current Russian artillery innovations, including the idea of making a UAV an organic component of Russia's newest ACRV, the PRP-4A "Argus." Apparently, this scheme has proven effective in current combat environments, so Russia and other Soviet-modeled armies may soon start making UAVs organic to most artillery units. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

*"Whereas the Armed Forces had only 180 UAV systems in 2011, now we have 1,720 state-of-the-art UAVs"*

– Russian Defense Minister, General Sergei Shoygu  
11 December 2015



PRP-4A Artillery Command and Reconnaissance Vehicle

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russia\\_Arms\\_Expo\\_2013\\_\(531-22\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Russia_Arms_Expo_2013_(531-22).jpg)

**Source:** Vitaly Kuzmin, "Modernized Artillery Reconnaissance Vehicle for Russian Federation Army May Get a UAV," TASS Online, 19 November 2015, <<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/2452314>>, accessed 9 December 2015.

### ***Modernized Artillery Reconnaissance Vehicle for Russian Federation Army May Get a UAV***

*A modernized portable reconnaissance system (PRP) designed for the Russian Army may be equipped with an unmanned air vehicle..."We continue to work on designing new reconnaissance assets and vehicles. In particular the PRP, which is employed by artillery subunits, may be supplemented with an unmanned air vehicle, which will expand the capabilities of the system," the Uralvagonzavod Corporation announced.*

*In addition, a subsidiary of Uralvagonzavod in the town of Rubtsovsk in Altayskiy Kray is working on upgrading the PRP-4A armored vehicle that is already in service and is being continuously supplied to the Russian Army...The PRP-4A is a modification of the PRP-4, designed as an artillery reconnaissance asset on the basis of the BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicle. It is designed to detect and identify single and group targets at any time of the day, including concealed targets. Work is currently in process on employing modern platforms such as the BMP-1 and the BMP-3K to install reconnaissance assets...*

*(continued)*



## Continued: Artilleryman Developing New Tactics, Considering Further UAV Integration

**Source:** "Artilleryman Use New Tactics in Live-Firing Exercise," *Interfax-AVN*, 19 November 2015

### **Artilleryman use new tactics in live-firing exercise**

Artillery sub-units of the Central Military District have been using a new tactic for destroying the enemy, nicknamed the "Fire Carousel", in live firing exercises...

"After carrying out concentrated firing at the Chebarkul firing range, the crews of Grad multiple-launch rocket systems and Sani mortars and 152-mm Akatsiya self-propelled howitzers, sequentially changed positions with each other in previously prepared positions. Such a tactic disorients the enemy and ensures a high degree of destruction by fire," said the head of the rocket forces and artillery in the Central Military District, Major General Aleksandr Glushenko...

**Source:** Ivan Petrov, "Fire for Effect: New Heavy Weapons Function in 'Simultaneous Fire Assault Mode'," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 19 November 2014, <<http://www.rg.ru/2014/11/19/artilleriya.html>>, accessed 15 December 2015.

### **Fire for Effect: New Heavy Weapons Function in 'Simultaneous Fire Assault Mode'**

The Chief of Ground Forces for Artillery and Missile Troops, Major General Mikhail Matveyevskiy told *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* how the arsenal of heavy combat equipment is being augmented...

#### **[RG] What new models of arms and military equipment are coming into the Missile Troops and Artillery?**

[Matveyevskiy] The leadership has specified the ultimate goal of organizational development of our troops: they must become a reconnaissance-fire delivery system. In this connection modernized MSTA-SM 152-mm self-propelled howitzers are coming into artillery subunits. They have an increased rate of fire and are capable of functioning in a "simultaneous fire assault" mode. This is when each self-propelled howitzer fires on trajectories of different heights against the same target in a brief period of time. That method of fire ensures simultaneous impact of projectiles on the target, i.e., each piece replaces 6-8 guns in terms of firepower potential. Tornado-G multiple-launch rocket systems with the capability of automatic laying of the fighting vehicle on the target have begun coming into rocket artillery subunits...

#### **[RG] Does the artillery need unmanned aerial vehicles [UAV's]? Are they being employed? And in general, to what extent are state-of-the-art technologies being used in the troops such as in command and control of subunits and fire control?**

[Matveyevskiy] You have to take into account the developing trend of long-range fire engagement of the enemy. Therefore the Missile Troops and Artillery are making increasingly wide use of all available reconnaissance assets, including UAV's. They permit detecting targets of the enemy grouping and providing adjustment of fire and strikes in a real-time mode with necessary accuracy. And this is not theoretical research, but real reconnaissance-fire delivery and reconnaissance-strike loops...



President Vladimir Putin and The Chief of Ground Forces for Artillery and Missile Troops, Major General Mikhail Matveyevskiy.

Source: Начальник ракетных войск и артиллерии Сухопутных войск Михаил Матвеевский награждён орденом «За военные заслуги».jpg This file comes from the website of the President of the Russian Federation and is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License. In short: you are free to distribute and modify the file as long as you attribute [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru)



# Theorist Proposes a Doctrinal Usage for Russian “Combat Robots”

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Russian military, as many other militaries, is now seriously considering the role of robotics and artificial intelligence on the modern battlefield. Despite references to the “Terminator” movie franchise, Russia does not appear to see a future, in the near term, where combat is conducted solely by autonomous robots. Instead, remote controlled and semi-autonomous robotics will be integrated into conventional units, serving in the most dangerous roles as fire fighters, mine clearers, explosive ordnance disposal technicians, armed sentries, and, as the accompanying articles describe, cannon fodder for the initial assaults on fortified positions.

In keeping with these functions, and unlike many of the robots in “Terminator”, Russian robots have a distinctively mechanized appearance, with most systems being found on tracked chassis. In fact, just as much discussion of robotics deals with automating existing platforms (such as the Armata, Kurganets, and even T-72 chassis) as with creating new systems. Russia’s newest generation of light track chassis, the Kurganets, reportedly utilizes a Sony PlayStation-like controller for steering. Apparently, designers think that Russian soldiers of the future will be much more comfortable with this scheme of maneuver, than with steering levers and a manual transmission. However, these sorts of novel designs will also more easily facilitate the installation of automated control systems. In short, if Russia does field automated combat robots, they will look much more like T-72s than T-800 “Terminators” for the foreseeable future. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

**Source:** Leonid Orlenko, “Breakthrough Robots,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 23 September 2015

## Breakthrough Robots

*One of the most complex and dangerous modes of battle for the ground forces is attack for the purpose of penetrating pre-fortified defense...Today’s motorized rifle subunits do not satisfy these conditions...By upgrading obsolescent vehicles it is possible to greatly reduce troop losses during an attack operation...*

*For penetrating fortified defense, the current Ground Troops Field Regulations prescribes: That a company should attack a platoon strongpoint on a 500-meter front in a formation of three motorized rifle platoons and a tank platoon, that is to say three tanks and 10 BMPs – around 103 personnel and 13 combat vehicles in all. The company may also be augmented by other (antitank, engineer...) subunits. There are a number of fundamental shortcomings in this arrangement:*

- 1. The company’s speed in an attack operation is determined by the capabilities of the soldiers attacking on foot, that is to say 5-7 km/h...the faster the attack, the fewer attackers are lost.*
- 2. Unsatisfactory minefield negotiation. If tanks have mineclearing gear, they plow three furrows, along which 63 men and 10 BMPs must pass, in turn, while under continuous fire from the defending side. In the process, the company’s combat order is disrupted, and this inevitably leads to major losses of men and equipment.*
- 3. Soldiers are armed with assault rifles and antitank grenade projectors, which are ill-suited to fighting against emplacements, dug-in tanks, BTRs, BMPs, and soldiers concealed in full-sized vehicle pits. Whereas, to the defending side, the attackers are, in effect, firing-range targets...*

*Although, before and during an attack operation, the defenses are subjected to strikes by artillery, mortars, aircraft, and missile troops, experience of past wars shows that total suppression of defending forces is unsuccessful...motorized rifle companies are, in this case, left operationally incapable when attacking fortified defense. The “Armata” and “Kurganets” systems will change nothing...*

*The question arises: What kind of attacking tactics are needed for successfully breaking through an enemy’s fortified defense, and what system of combat vehicles is necessary in this situation?*

## Robots in the vanguard

*In order to minimize the human and materiel losses during an attack on fortified defense, it is necessary to create robotized companies which are armed not only with tanks and BMPs, but also with remote-controlled combat robots and assault vehicles...The simplest robotized combat vehicles are remotely controlled by an operator via a cable or a radio channel.*

*An experimental robotic system based on the T-72 has been created in Russia which provides for remotely controlling a tank over a distance of up to 2 kilometers. With the aid of relays, the distance over which remote control is possible may be increased manyfold.*

*Robotized companies can be created relatively quickly. It is sensible to develop assault vehicles on the basis of upgrading T-72’s and T-80’s on the “Armata” or T-90 platform...*

## Echelons go on the attack

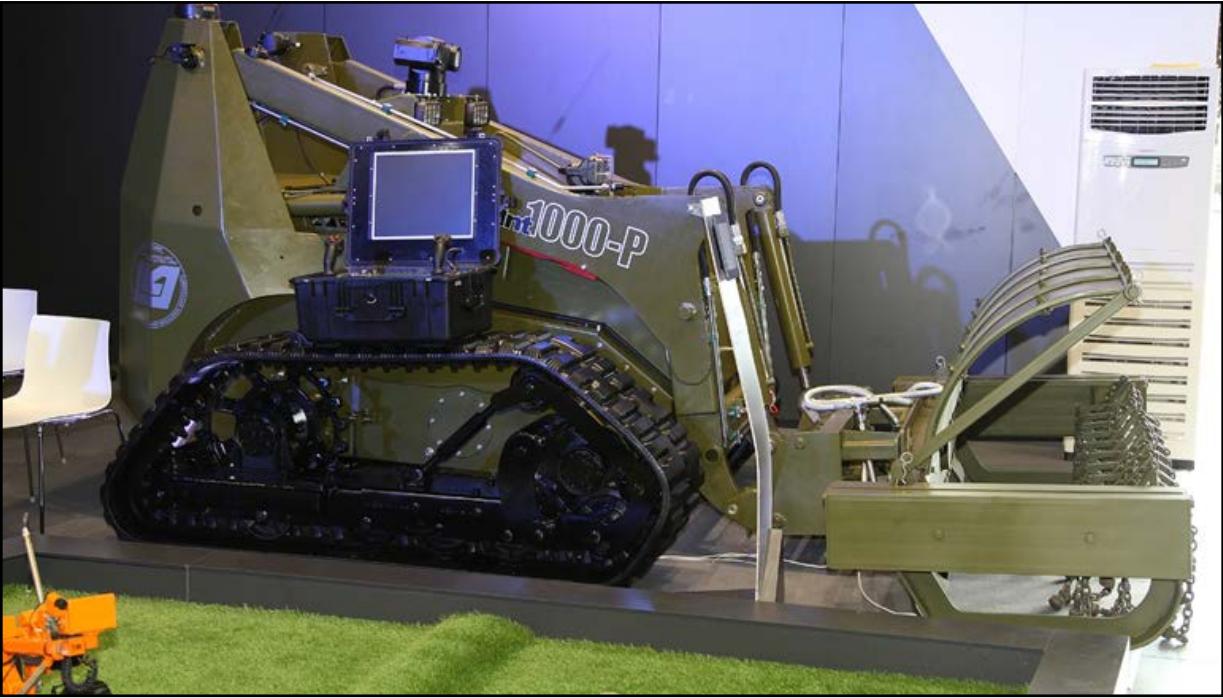
*...Thus, six remote-controlled combat robots (the first echelon), three assault vehicles and three tanks (the second echelon), and seven IFV’s (the third echelon) are involved in the operation. The attacking company comprises 82 men in all -- 21 fewer than a modern motorized rifle company, which attacks in a single echelon -- but in three lines, as the Field Regulation prescribes. The cost of arming a company equipped with remote-controlled combat robots and assault vehicles is greater, but losses of human life will be minimal, while the probability of breaking through the defense is maximized.*

*Robotized companies have no fundamental shortcomings. They attack three to four times faster, negotiate minefields efficiently, and provide better protection for the motorized rifle troops during an attack operation...*

(continued)



## Continued: Theorist Proposes a Doctrinal Usage for Russian “Combat Robots”



Роботизированный комплекс АНТ-1000Р (АНТ-1000R robot)  
Source: <http://vitalykuzmin.net/?q=node/584>

**Source:** “Russian ‘Skynet’ to Lead Military Robots on the Battlefield,” RT Online, 19 October, 2015, <<https://www.rt.com/news/319082-russia-military-artificial-intelligence/>>, accessed 15 December 2015.

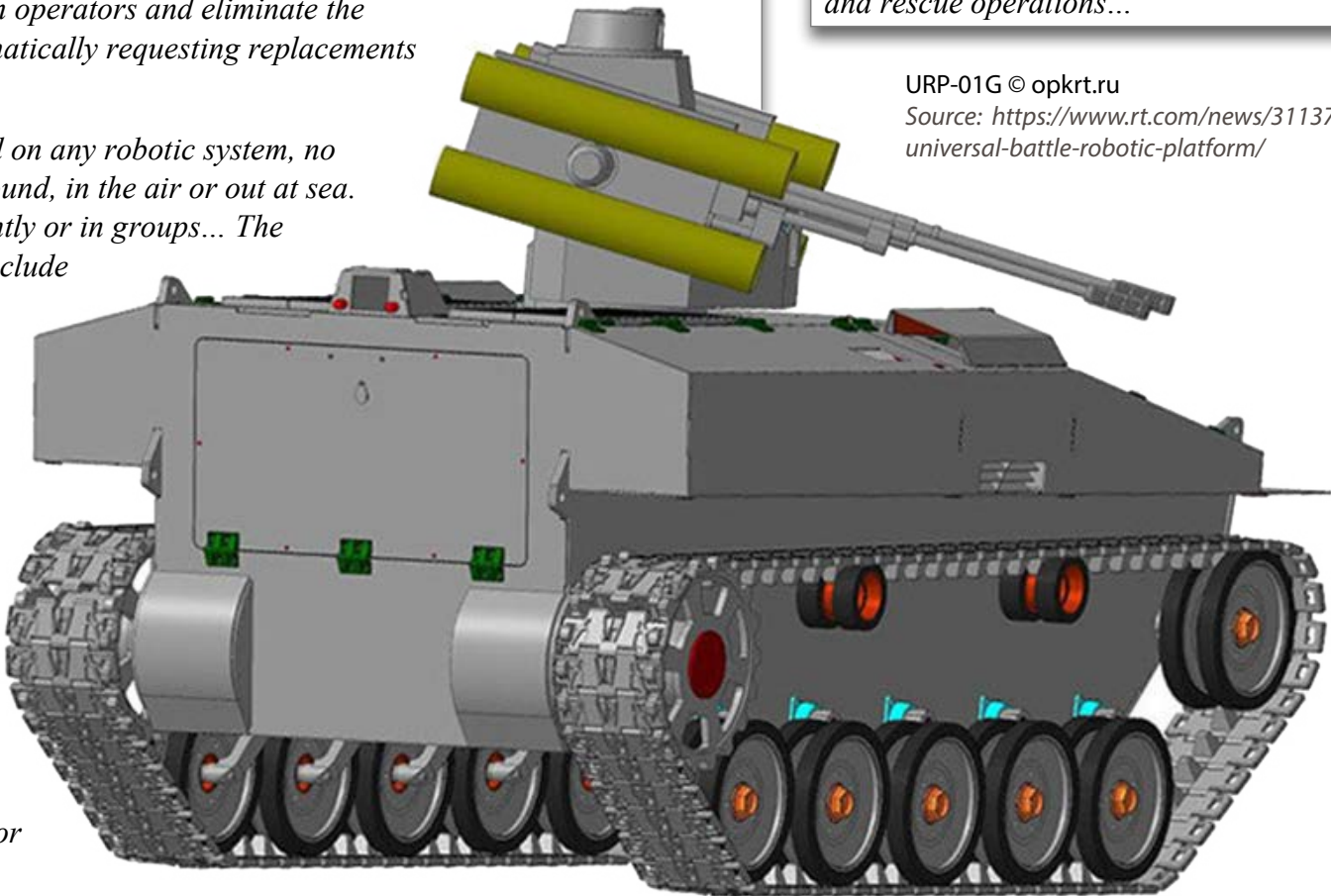
### Russian ‘Skynet’ to lead military robots on the battlefield

...The United Instrument Manufacturing Corporation (UIMC), an integral part of the Rostec arms corporation, says it has developed the Unicum (Latin for ‘the only one’) software package that gives military or civilian robots enough artificial intelligence to perform complicated tasks completely on their own.

Powering a group of up to 10 robotic complexes, the Unicum artificial intelligence (AI) communicates and distributes ‘roles’ among the robots, chooses the ‘commander’ of the robotic task force and assigns combat mission to each individual machine. It can locate targets, choose dominating positions on a battlefield, request target elimination validation from human operators and eliminate the targets. It is also capable of automatically requesting replacements for disabled machines...

The Unicum AI could be installed on any robotic system, no matter where it is used: on the ground, in the air or out at sea. It has the ability to act independently or in groups... The developers claim their AI could exclude humans from taking part in the actions of robots altogether.

“With Unicum, the robots will be capable of executing tasks independently, to see and evaluate the situation, plotting new courses as well as communicating with other machines. In fact, this is yet another step to the creation of fully-fledged artificial intelligence, enabling mechanisms with nearly human capabilities,” OPK Deputy Director Sergey Skokov said...



URP-01G © opkrt.ru  
Source: <https://www.rt.com/news/311372-universal-battle-robotic-platform/>

**Source:** “Russia Develops 7-Ton Universal Armored Robotic Platform,” RT Online, 2 August 2015, <<https://www.rt.com/news/311372-universal-battle-robotic-platform/>>, accessed 13 December 2015.

### Russia develops 7-ton universal armored robotic platform

A Russian crawling traction robotic system due to be trialed by the end of 2015 will be capable of being used in human-unfriendly environments, such as a battlefield, a nuclear fallout area, extreme polar night Arctic conditions or mine sweeping. The robotic platform, called URP-01G, will weigh up to 7 tons, depending on the equipment requirements and type of armor, with dimensions of about 3.5 meters long and less than 2 meters wide. The robot will carry up to 2 tons of hardware and have a maximum speed of 40 km/h. It will remain operable after a fall of up to 2 meters.

The system is being developed by Russia’s Systemprom Concern, an integral part of the United Instrument Manufacturing Corporation. The producer promises that will be used in situations where human life is endangered, such as army scout-attack missions, police counter-terrorist operations, firefighting, post-accident clean-up after incidents at nuclear power plants, chemical and biological hazard reconnaissance, guard patrol functions and rescue operations...



## Russia Increasing Already Robust MLRS Capabilities

### OE Watch Commentary:

The Russian Army has long been a strong proponent of multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS), as had the Soviet Army before it. Currently, most maneuver brigades have at least a battalion (18 launchers) of BM-21 “Grad” MLRS launchers, each of which has 40 122mm rockets capable of engaging targets up to 20 kilometers and impacting an area of approximately 10 square acres. The larger BM-27 “Uragans” are found in artillery brigade MLRS battalions (4 launchers); each launcher has 16 220mm rockets capable of engaging targets up to 35 kilometers and impacting an area of approximately 72 square acres. Russia’s biggest MLRS launchers are found in dedicated MLRS artillery brigades. The BM-30 “Smerch” has 12 300mm rockets capable of engaging targets up to 90 kilometers and impacting an area of approximately 148 square acres.

The Russian Federation has engaged in a number of improvements to enhance these capabilities. A new generation of rockets has increased ranges, is GPS/GLONASS capable, and fields a variety of warheads ranging from high explosive (HE), smoke, radio jamming, mines, and cluster munitions. Some new rockets for the BM-21 “Grad” reportedly have a range of up to 45 kilometers. In addition to a new generation of rockets, Russia is now fielding a new generation of launchers. As with other Russian developments, current innovations focus upon modularity and interoperability. As the accompanying article discusses, the “Uragan-1M,” a modernized version of the “Uragan,” has passed state trials. Instead of a rack of 16 rockets that the “Uragan” sports, the “Uragan-1M” has two pods of 6 rockets each. This pod capability is intended to increase firing rates by speeding the replenishment process. The “Uragan-1M” will be reloaded by removing an empty pod and replacing it with a full one, which is presumably quicker than loading one rocket at a time. In addition, this pod system will allow the “Uragan-1M” to fire rockets of varying calibers.

This pod system is being incorporated into Russia’s next generation of MLRS launchers, the “Tornado” family. One member of this family, the 9A52-4 Tornado, built upon a Kamaz-63501 chassis, will reportedly be able to launch pods of any of the three caliber types, albeit of fewer number for the larger caliber rockets. Russian capability improvements have not stopped at material improvements, but also include doctrinal improvements. The Russian Army has been experimenting with the use of MLRS systems in direct fire roles, and has recently changed doctrine (field regulations) for engaging observable targets from unprepared positions. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Tornado-G (Upgraded BM-21 “Grad” Multiple Rocket Launcher)

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tornado-G\\_MLRS.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tornado-G_MLRS.jpg)

**Source:** “Troops in Western Russia to Be Reinforced with 50 MLRS Systems by Year End,” *I Interfax-AVN*, 2 December 2015.

### ***Troops in Western Russia to be reinforced with 50 MLRS systems by year end***

*The combined arms formations [Army Groups] of the Western Military District will receive some 50 “Smerch,” “Grad” and “Uragan” multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS), the Russian Defense Ministry reports. “These systems will significantly enhance the combat capabilities of motorized rifle units conducting defense and offensive operations...”*

*The MLRS are meant for striking area targets, exposed or sheltered personnel, light and heavy armored weaponry, artillery formations, tactical missiles, command posts, communication units, and other enemy infrastructure.*

*The long-range 300mm “Smerch” system has a range of 20km to 70km and with the capability of striking an area exceeding 60 hectares. The system can both fire individual guided rocket projectiles and make a full salvo from 12 tubes. Preparing the “Smerch” for combat takes no more than five minutes; a full salvo is made within 40 sec. Afterwards it is ready to move in one minute, which permits anti-fire maneuvers in the shortest possible time. The “Grad” and “Uragan” systems are capable of firing at ranges of 20 to 35km and impacting an area of 4 and 29 hectares respectively.*

*Earlier the Tamanskaya motor rifle division and the Kantemirovskaya tank division received Tornado-G multiple rocket launch systems, the headquarters of the Western Military District reports...*

*(continued)*



## Continued: Russia Increasing Already Robust MLRS Capabilities

**Source:** Sergei Picthkin, “A Younger Katyusha,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online, 20 November 2014, <<http://www.rg.ru/2014/11/20/katyusha.html>>, accessed 15 December 2014.

### A Younger Katyusha

The “Grad” Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) has long been a symbol of fire power and simplicity, as is the “Kalashnikov” assault rifle. In place is a “Katyusha” [nickname for older MLRS systems] a new generation of multi-caliber “Tornado” MLRS systems will come into being in the twenty-first century. The “Grad” has excellent capabilities, and is one of the most common MLRS systems in the world. But no matter how perfect the design is, time dictates new requirements...

The Russian Army has MLRS systems of three calibers: the 122mm “Grad”, 220mm “Uragan,” and the 300mm “Smerch”. The modular “Tornado” design will allow the same chassis to support weapon pods of all of these calibers...This one platform will become a universal base for all types MLRS rockets used by the Army. For the first time in the multiple launch rocket systems will use guided missiles [instead of unguided rockets], which will improve capabilities significantly...

...also entering service is the 122 mm “Tornado-G”. The letter “G” indicates that it uses the same caliber of rockets as the classic “Grad.” Unlike its predecessor, which has 40 launchers trunks in a single unit, the “Tornado-G” is equipped with two rocket pods of 15 barrels each. The entire system is mounted on a four-wheeled BAZ-6950 chassis. [Information on the Tornado-G varies, most reports state the system has one pod with 40, 122mm rockets]



BM-30 “Smerch”

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:9A52-1#/media/File:9%D0%9A58\\_%D0%A1%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%87\\_3.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:9A52-1#/media/File:9%D0%9A58_%D0%A1%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%80%D1%87_3.jpg)

**Source:** Ilya Shchegolev, “Bi-caliber MLRS “Uragan-1M” Passed State Tests,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* Online, 24 August 2015, <<http://www.rg.ru/2015/08/24/uragan-site-anons.html>>, accessed 15 December 2015.

### Bi-caliber MLRS “Uragan-1M” Passed State Tests

The new Russian bi-caliber MLRS system “Uragan-1M” successfully passed state trials and will soon be put into service...The main essence of this modernization, is the use of interchangeable pods that will allow the use of larger caliber and ammunition...The bi-caliber capability allows the system to fire either the 220mm rockets of the “Uragan” MLRS system, or the 300mm rockets of the “Smerch” MLRS system. Unlike previous generations of MLRS systems, All processes of the “Uragan-1M” are completely automated, loading is accomplished by replacing the pods. [instead of individual missiles]...



Uragan-1M

Source: <http://thepowerofrussianarmy.tumblr.com/post/127712383206/reactive-system-uragan-1m-passed-state-tests>



## Syrian Innovations Underscore Importance of Armored Vehicles

**OE Watch Commentary:** True to the proverb that “necessity is the mother of invention,” the Syrian Army is fielding many innovations in its ongoing civil war, as the accompanying articles discuss. Many of these innovations have to do with antiquated air defense systems that the Syrian Army has repurposed for the conduct of ground operations. This is not a new idea: the Soviets and Russians both used the quad-mounted 23mm 2A7 anti-aircraft guns on the ZSU-23-4 ‘Shilka’ for engaging ground targets, a capability that was especially used for Russian operations in Grozny, as tank barrels had insufficient vertical traversal to engage targets on top of multistory buildings. Even deprecated lightly armored anti-aircraft missile systems are finding use, as they are stripped of their missiles and mounted with once towed or statically mounted anti-aircraft guns.

Interestingly, as one of the accompanying articles recounts, the Syrian Army is basing some of these makeshift armored innovations on some relatively new Russian ideas about the future of armored warfare. The Soviet Union, and later the Russian Federation, saw two capability gaps that the existing system of tanks, armored personnel carriers (BTRs), and infantry fighting vehicles (BMPs) have when engaging in field and urban environments.

In terms of the field environment, the heavily artillery-focused Soviet/Russian Army was, and still is, concerned about the period of transition between the time that preparatory artillery and mortar attacks must end to prevent friendly casualties, and the time that armored and mechanized infantry begin assaulting positions during offensive operations. As for urban operations, conventional (Western) wisdom states that armored vehicles are unsuited for urban warfare and, if used, must be supported by dismounted infantry to protect the armored vehicles from antitank weapons. This is the West’s lesson from the last several conflicts, and especially Russia’s Grozny debacle in the First Chechen War. The Russian Federation has learned a much different lesson, and views the use of armored vehicles (including tanks) as essential for the conduct of successful urban operations, albeit with some additional support. In order to close these capability gaps for both field and urban operations, the Russian Federation has been experimenting with tank combat support vehicles (BMPT) and fire support combat vehicles (BMOP). These names are often used interchangeably to describe a class of vehicle that is as heavily armored as a tank (built on tank chassis), more heavily armed than a BMP, and intended to survive longer on the modern battlefield than BTRs and BMPs, while suppressing personnel with antitank weapons in both field and urban environments. Due to these antipersonnel capabilities of these vehicles, they are often referred to as “Terminators.”

At a time when the U.S and West are increasing special operations forces and other “lite” capabilities, (continued)



ZSU-23-4 “Shilka”

Source: Image Courtesy Vitaly Kuzmin, <http://vitalykuzmin.net/?q=node/596>

**Source:** Lev Romanov, “Syrian Armor 2015: ‘The Terminator’ and ‘Tank’ Based on the ‘Box’,” *Vestnik Online*, 4 December 2015, <<http://vestnik-rm.ru/news-4-14388.htm>>, accessed 9 December 2015.

### Syrian Armor 2015: ‘The Terminator’ and ‘Tank’ based on the ‘Box’

*In the past year, the Syrian security forces have had to compensate for the deficit of modern military equipment, by modernizing their existing combat vehicles. As a result, some of these projects are generating sufficient interest. Let’s speak about the Syrian “Terminator” [Tank Support Combat Vehicle (BMPT)] and homemade “tank” based on the “Box” [a nickname for a chassis with a “box-like” appearance].*

*As the base of the substitute for the “Terminator,” the Syrians have chosen to use the T-72 chassis...Instead of a turret with a 125-mm cannon, a lighter enclosed turret with a quad anti-aircraft machine gun with 14.5mm barrels is mounted. The front is strengthened additional armor plates, the sides and rear are equipped with latticed cages, which should improve in combat survivability. [from antitank weapons such as RPGs]...*

*Another interesting modernization, is an improvised “tank” in fact a Fire Support Combat Vehicle (BMOP), made on the chassis of the GM-578 anti-aircraft missile system (SAM), known as the “Box.” [the chassis has a “box-like” appearance] This SAM was used in the 1973 [Arab-Israeli War] and is outdated...the Syrian military had the idea to install on these old chassis [towed] S-60, 57mm anti-aircraft guns, with an armored housing...Syria has over 500 S-60s...The S-60 works well not only for air targets, but also for ground targets, with a range of up to 4 km...*

*The current situation with regard to the qualitative composition of Syrian military equipment has begun to change for the better, but the “Terminator” and the fire support combat vehicle based on the “Box” is coming in handy in the battle with the terrorists...*



## Continued: Syrian Innovations Underscore Importance of Armored Vehicles

belligerents (Russia, Syria, and the Ukraine) in current conflicts are all investing in heavy capabilities. These armies see wheeled and light tracked platforms as insufficient in these conflicts. It can be assumed that the Syrian Army's current experimentation with makeshift BMPTs/BMOPs has more to do with putting together available components to produce a viable weapon system than the experimentation with new ideas about armored warfare, but that does not mean that the knowledge gained from these experiments is not valuable. Since these makeshift systems have capabilities similar to Russian-produced BMPTs, their successful implementation could encourage Russia and other post-Soviet and Soviet-modeled armies to incorporate them permanently into their organizational structures. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



A Syrian made BMPT, a quad 14.5mm anti-aircraft machine gun mounted on a T-72 chassis  
Source: <http://vestnik-rm.ru/news-4-14388.htm>

**Source:** Lev Romanov, "Syrian Modernized T-55MVs Are Better than Some Modifications of the T-72," *Vestnik Online*, 22 November 2015, <<http://vestnik-rm.ru/news-4-14227.htm>>, accessed 15 December 2015.

### Syrian modernized T-55MVs are better than some modifications of the T-72

*Even professional historians cannot say how many armed conflicts the T-55 tank has been in. And now there are several wars in this world, where these armored veterans are still used. Of course, these war machines are used in Syria. Of course, unmodernized or unimproved T-55s do not meet modern requirements. They are easy to hit, even obsolete. The only exceptions are the tanks T-55MV. These modernized machines even now are considered among the best Assad's arsenal...*

*In the early 80-ies in the Soviet Union began to decide what to do with a giant park, the first postwar generation tanks: T-54, T-55 and T-62. As a result, it was decided to modernize part of these combat vehicles. Upgrade options T-55 engaged in Omsk, which is not surprising: the tanks were made at the local tank factory until the end of the 70s, however, at this time most of the produced equipment was exported.*

*One of the developed versions of the T-55, is the T-55MV. It has latticed cage armor and the "Contact-I" active protection system... Designers fundamentally improved the "stuffing" of the tank to include a fire control computer (which, incidentally, was not at that time produced in the versions of the [more modern] T-72) which allows the firing of 9K116 and 9M117 guided antitank missiles [fired through the main gun]... mobility has been improved through the use of new caterpillar tracks, and a more powerful V-46-5M engine...*

*These machines have become involved in the fighting almost from the outset of the conflict and, according to military experts, in many ways it has performed better than existing Syrian T-72s, due to the dynamic protection capabilities of the T-55MV to withstand rocket-propelled grenades hits, not only in frontal areas but also on the sides. The shorter barrel [than the T-72] is also better in urban environments to allow full traversal of the main gun...*

**Source:** Lev Romanov, "The Syrian War has Transformed the Legendary ZSU-23-4 'Shilka' into an 'Antiterror Machine,'" *Vestnik Online*, 15 November 2015, <<http://vestnik-rm.ru/news-4-14140.htm>>, accessed 15 December 2015.

### The Syrian War has Transformed the Legendary ZSU-23-4 'Shilka' into an 'Antiterror Machine'

*The ZSU-23-4 is one of the main combat machines used in the Syrian conflict, and have been widely used since the beginning of the conflict. During the offensive, the Syrian army used these vehicles to provide fire support for armor and infantry. This self-propelled anti-aircraft defense system performed especially well in urban combat...*

*The "Shilka" was used during the civil war in Lebanon, as well as older ZSU-57-2, which were particularly effective for sweeping high-rise buildings in Beirut for snipers that were in fortified positions on them...*

*When the civil war began, Syria had about 400 ZSU-23-4s. During the fighting, some of these were captured by militants. Given the nature of the ongoing fighting, it was once again proved that the armor protection of the "Shilka" is unsatisfactory - only 9.2 mm [for the chassis] and 8.3mm for the turret.*

*Due to this situation, some vehicles have been modernized. They have been equipped with lattice cages, steel chains, and additional armor to stop rifle and light machine gun bullets, and have had their air defense radars removed. As a result, this one time anti-aircraft gun, is now virtually full-fledged fire support combat vehicle...*



## Engineer Additions Grow Russian Maneuver Enhancement Capabilities

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia has long had a strong engineer corps. Combat engineers became particularly important as the Soviets transitioned from a “leg” to a motorized/mechanized force after the Second World War. Soviet doctrine and operational art required fast moving tanks and motorized/mechanized infantry that could rapidly exploit advances. To further this end, Russian engineers must provide substantial maneuver enhancement capabilities.

Russian combat engineers have been shaped by not only military doctrine, but also Russian geography. The flat plains of Russia have created relatively shallow, but very wide rivers. In order to overcome these obstacles Russian military vehicles, such as BTRs and BMPs, often have some amphibious capability. Even most Russian tanks can cross water obstacles by the use of a snorkel. In terms of maneuver enhancement requirements, Russian engineers possess a variety of equipment to surmount water and other obstacles that seem somewhat exotic. These innovations include, amphibious ferries, ferry-bridge vehicles, and several varieties of pontoon bridges that can function as ferries, some even capable of servicing freight trains.

The accompanying articles discuss current Russian engineer capability improvements, namely the addition of pontoon bridge and engineer-sapper brigades to each of Russia’s combined arms armies. (A combined arms army has approximately the same combat power as a small US Army corps.) It is probable that most of these additions will come by way of “upsizing” existing regiments, not creating these units from scratch. Although Russia is not likely to engage NATO in a large ground maneuver war, as was envisioned in Soviet times, these capability improvements are still seen as necessary. The Russian military has shown more of an interest in domestic disaster relief operations in the last few years, likely due to current Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu’s previous stint as the emergency situations minister. (For more information, see “MoD Adds First Disaster Relief Regiment to the Ranks” OEW, October 2015.) Given that there have been several high-profile floods that have caused a great deal of damage in the past several years, including the destruction of many bridges, increasing engineer capabilities that can provide needed and quick relief may be a good move for public relations as social spending dwindles, while Russia continues to spend vast sums on rapidly modernizing its military.

Russia’s decision to create engineer-sapper or “assault” units may have to do with current Russian operational experience, which is somewhat reminiscent of a time before the Cold War. In the Second World War the Soviets had 10 sapper armies (usually with 5-7 brigades) and about 20 engineer assault brigades. These troops were responsible for certain rear area construction projects and building field fortifications. They also typically accompanied forces engaging in any urban or fortified areas, situations that are normally avoided in high-speed maneuver warfare. Russia’s current operations in Ukraine and Syria may again stress the need for combat engineers for these purposes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



General Yuriy Stavitskiy, Chief of the Russian Armed Forces’ Engineer Troops  
Source: <http://defendingrussia.ru/upload/images/ckeditor/546c96be83475.jpg>

**Source:** “Every Combined Arms Army Will Receive an Engineering Assault Brigade by 2020,” TASS Online, 2 December 2015, <<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/2492454>>, accessed 15 December 2015.

### ***Every Combined Arms Army Will Receive an Engineering Assault Brigade by 2020***

*Special engineer-sapper and pontoon-bridge brigades of the Engineer Troops are planned to be created in each of the combined arms armies by 2020, said Chief of the Russian Armed Forces’ Engineer Troops, Yuri Stavitskiy. “We are hoping to form several more regiments before 2020 within every combined-arms army and within centrally-subordinated units. Each of our brigades will have completely new units with tasks relevant to the present time.” For example, the newly formed pontoon-bridge brigades are designed for the transport of various types of equipment across large water barriers. This unit will also provide assistance to people during floods, and will be able to provide support in emergencies...*

*The new engineer-sapper brigades will also have an assault battalion to provide passage through minefields, wreckage and rubble. “With our Airborne Troops, the tasks are completely different, despite the Airborne Troops, too, having storming units,” said Stavitsky when describing the job of new bomb-disposal storming units...*



Pontoon Bridging System  
Source: [http://bastion-opk.ru/VVT/PP-91\\_02.jpg](http://bastion-opk.ru/VVT/PP-91_02.jpg)

(continued)



## Continued: Engineer Additions Grow Russian Maneuver Enhancement Capabilities

**Source:** “Russian Army Creates First Assault Battalions in Engineer Units,” *Interfax-AVN*, 02 December 2015.

### **Russian Army creates first assault battalions in engineer units**

*The Russian Armed Forces’ first assault battalions in the engineering forces have been established in Vladimir Region, the head of the Russian Armed Forces’ engineering forces, Yuriy Stavitskiy, [Chief of the Russian Armed Forces’ Engineer Troops] told the media...*

*“The engineering forces assault and obstacle-clearing battalion have become part of the reformed engineering sapper brigades of the high command reserve. The importance of this unit is quite high. This is the reserve of the head of the General Staff, these sub-units are specific,” the general said.*

*He explained that the assault engineering sapper sub-units’ mission is to ensure the unhindered movement of the motor-rifle, infantry and other units in enemy territory, providing a significant increase in the effectiveness of combat operations and maximum avoidance of casualties.*

*“Experience of the Chechen campaigns showed that a lack of such units has a negative effect on the results of the fighting. The people in these brigades are protected in the relevant manner and are ready to act the right way when encountering obstructions, minefields, fortified areas and other obstacles. Special equipment is envisaged for them,” he said.*

*Such units are mainly made up of sportsmen, suitable by their physical condition and character.” We try to get servicemen on the same principle as the special forces. Competition is pretty high, starting in the Tyumen Military Academy and in our training centers,” he said. He expressed hope that as soon as 2016, the new engineer-sapper brigade and assault battalions in it will “start working together with the forces”.*

*The new assault sub-units will receive the specially developed OVR-ZSh personal equipment system, he said...The OVR-ZSh system comprises body armour with level 6 grade protection and pockets for a combat Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) system, a “live, injured, killed” unit and modular GLONASS/GPS, armoured helmet, sappers’ machete, door-breaking equipment, assault ladder, hydraulic cutters, disc-cutter, hydraulic jack, combination scissors, blasting unit and other equipment.*

**Source:** “Military Engineers Demonstrate Very High Level of Professional Development at Open Water Competition,” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Online*, 15 July 2015, <[http://function.mil.ru/news\\_page/country/more.htm?id=12045409@egNews](http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12045409@egNews)>, accessed 15 December 2015.

### **Military Engineers Demonstrate Very High Level of Professional Development at Open Water Competition**

*The professional skills of military engineers and, in particular, those of pontoon-crossing units, keep improving. In the opinion of Yuriy Stavitskiy, Chief of the Russian Armed Forces’ Engineer Troops... military engineers are demonstrating a “very high level of professional development” at the Open Water competition...*

*“Pontoniers display their skills not only during competitions but also when people need their help in emergency situations,” the chief of the Engineering Troops stressed. “Pontoniers were involved in Altayskiy Kray last year. The pontoon battalion of the 30th Engineer Regiment has recently been helping the civilian population in Arkhangel’skaya Oblast. The pontoniers did a really good job there,” Yuriy Stavitskiy stated.*

*Talking about the development of engineer units, he said that a new pontoon-bridging brigade will be created within the Engineering Troops by the end of this year. According to Yuriy Stavitskiy, “this will be a unique unit, the only one of its kind in the Armed Forces, with great capabilities for setting up crossings over water barriers.” The new brigade will contain pontoon battalions, ferry-bridge machines, airborne units, and bridge-building units...*



Soldiers Deploying PMP-M Pontoon Bridging System

Source: hFoto №16 Наводка 20 – и т. моста из парка ПМП-М. Муром: июнь 2010 г  
<http://www.xn--80adcqployo.xn--p1ai/media/image/vk/image031.jpg>



## Russia's Economic Problems Matter More than Donbass and Syria, Says Russian Business Leader

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 2 December 2015 Russian Information Agency *Regiony Online (Regions Online)* published an interview with Konstantin Babkin, co-chair of the Moscow Economic Forum and president of the Industrial Union “New Commonwealth.” The accompanying excerpt is from this interview.

Babkin says that Russia is fighting on three fronts—not only in Syria and Ukraine, but also with the domestic economy. He feels problems within the Russian economy undercut Russia's ability to carry out an effective foreign policy. In fact, he considers Russia's economic problems to be more important than other issues. “[I]t is impossible to conduct a successful foreign policy with an ailing economy, when internally your powers are being eroded by completely wrong decisions, which are not clear to entrepreneurs. Wrong economic policy weakens us from a technological point of view, from a financial [point of view] makes the country less attractive as a partner for other countries.”

Commenting on Turkey's recent downing of the Russian plane, Babkin feels Russia has little leverage over Turkey, and a better strategy would be to manage the economy and find supporters rather than “fight with everybody.” He adds he is confident the situation is not “tragic,” and “everything will be fine.” Asked if there is war in Russia's future, Babkin says that the leading countries have no interest in waging war against Russia. Tensions may increase, he says, but he feels confident that the Russian leadership is up to the task.

Russia's economic problems indeed are serious. It is especially indicative that a man in Babkin's position, who cannot directly criticize the Kremlin, says, for example, that Russia's economic decisions are wrong and not clear to Russian businessmen, and that it is not in Russia's interest to fight with everyone, even as he expresses full confidence in the Russian government's ultimate ability to handle the situation. At the same time, the questions Babkin's interviewer asks are perhaps as revealing as his answers: it is indicative of Russia's fears that his interviewer asks if Russia will be “facing a war,” indirectly implying that the West will wage this war. Babkin understands this very clearly when he says that the “leading powers” have no interest in starting a war with Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

**Source:** “Константин Бабкин: Россия ведет борьбу на трех фронтах – это Сирия, Донбасс и экономика” (Konstantin Babkin : Russia is fighting on three fronts - Syria, Donbass and the economy), *Gosrf.ru (Regiony Online)*, 2 December 2015. <http://www.gosrf.ru/news/21322/>

...

**Konstantin Anatoliyevich, can we say that geopolitics is more important than the business in connection with new external challenges for Russia related to Syria and Turkey?**

*- I would not say that geopolitics is more important than the economy. My feeling is... [Russia] is strained on three fronts – that is Syria, Donbass and the economy. And it is impossible to conduct a successful foreign policy with an ailing economy, when internally your powers are being eroded by completely wrong decisions, which are not clear to entrepreneurs. Wrong economic policy weakens us from a technological point of view, from a financial [point of view] makes the country less attractive as a partner for other countries.*

*I would put the economic front problems in first place. If everything is “OK” with us on the economic side, many foreign policy problems can be solved more easily. At this busy time, when the flow of negative information from Syria, Donbass does not subside, it is important not to lose sight of the economic front....*

**- How has Russia's position in the world changed after the events on the Syrian-Turkish border, when it is already known that NATO confirmed the adequacy of the actions of the Turkish Air Force that shot down the Russian aircraft?**

*- This...has become more obvious that such a bold foreign policy, which is not supported by a strong economy - is risky. Today, Turkey has a lot of leverage to create trouble for the Syrian army and for our group. Especially since...NATO leaders voiced support for anti-Russian actions of the Turkish side. We risk running into serious problems. But I do not think that the situation is tragic. Problems can be solved if we build up the action on three fronts. It is necessary to build a proper management of the economy, to enlist the support of the right supporters, that is, to manage not to fight with everyone. All this is not easy, of course, but I think everything will be fine.*

**-Your prognosis: is a war in our future? And on what fronts would it unfold?**

*-I don't think there will be war. There are no such economic reasons and interests for the leading countries to undertake enormous sacrifices or risk enormous sacrifices. Of course, the tension in the world may even intensify. I would like to see a reasonable foreign policy, to see more effort to strengthen external economic union, more efforts directed towards strengthening our own positions. And well, of course, you can't fight with everyone. I think the leadership will meet these challenges.*



Konstantin Babkin  
Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Babkin\\_Konstantin-A-2010.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Babkin_Konstantin-A-2010.jpg)



## Putin's Comment about Helping the Syrian Free Army

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 11 December 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed the Russian Defense Ministry's expanded board meetings, where he said, for the first time according to Western press reports, that Russia is helping the Free Syrian Army—an opponent of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Russia has supported Assad unequivocally since the beginning of the Syrian uprising in March 2011. The accompanying excerpt from *Kremlin.ru*, the Kremlin's official web-site, quoted a seemingly contradictory statement by Putin, in that he appears to be saying that Russia is supporting both governmental and opposition efforts: "I will especially emphasize that the work of our aviation group promotes joint efforts of both government forces and the Free Syrian Army.... In addition, we support them from the air, as well as the Syrian army, assisting them with arms, munitions and materiel." It was impossible to independently verify the validity of Putin's statement, according to the *Washington's Post*, and no further information is available at the time of this writing.

The same day Dmitry Peskov, Putin's press secretary, clarified Putin's comment about the Free Syrian Army, as per the accompanying excerpts from *RBC.ru*. Russia is not supplying weapons to the Free Syrian Army, he said, but rather support is about "military-technical cooperation" and special supply of what he called "special property...carried out in accordance with international law." He also urged not to "nitpick on the language," which appeared to be a reference to Putin's language.

Meanwhile, numerous reports have indicated consistently since Putin's Syria intervention on 30 September that, despite his official calls to fight terrorism, the vast majority of Russia's air strikes have not been directed at the Islamic State, but at armed opposition against Assad, which included those supported by the West. Indeed, the Kremlin defines "terrorist" as any armed opposition against Assad. Representatives of the Syrian National Coalition (SNC)—the main Western-backed opposition group and one which coordinates with the Free Syrian Army—had refused to attend two rounds of Syrian peace talks Moscow hosted in February and April 2015 because, in their view, these talks only included members of the Syrian opposition who supported Assad. Furthermore, many observers noted that civilians casualties and the flow of refugees from Syria have only increased since Russia's intervention in Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

**Source:** "В Кремле уточнили слова Путина о военной помощи Свободной сирийской армии" (Kremlin Clarified Putin's Words about Military Aid to Free Syrian Army), *RBC.ru*, 11 December 2015. <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/11/12/2015/566b1baa9a7947ca1d96eed2>

...

*Russia is not supplying weapons to the Syrian Free Army; the issue is the supply within the framework of military-technical cooperation (MTC) with Syria. Russian President's press secretary Dmitry Peskov announced this on Friday, commenting on the statement by the President regarding support for forces in Syria fighting against terrorists.*

*"This is MTC. We have a certain supply of what is called special property. These supplies are carried out within in strict accordance with international law," Interfax quotes Peskov.*

*...Russia does not, he underscored, supply weapons to the Free Syrian Army. Peskov said that the Russian military is supporting forces that fight against terrorism and called on "not nitpicking" on the language.*

*On Friday, Putin, speaking at the Defense Ministry's expanded board meeting, said that the Russian aviation group "promotes joining efforts" of the Free Syrian Army forces with government troops in fighting terrorists...*



Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir\\_Putin\\_12019.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vladimir_Putin_12019.jpg)

**Source:** "Расширенное заседание коллегии Министерства обороны" (Expanded meeting of Defense Ministry Board), *Kremlin.ru*, 11 December 2015. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50913>

*...I will especially emphasize that the work of our aviation group promotes joint efforts of both government forces and the Free Syrian Army. Now several of its parts comprising a total of more than five thousand people, as well as regular troops, conduct offensive operations against terrorists in the provinces of Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Raqqa. In addition, we support them from the air, as well as the Syrian army, assisting them with arms, munitions and materiel...*



## Open Letter in Support of Anti-Kremlin Russian Parliamentarian Dmitry Gudkov

**OE Watch Commentary:** On 9 December 2015 liberal-oriented *Echo Moskvy* (*Moscow's Echo*) published an open letter signed by nine human rights activists in support for Russian parliamentarian Dmitry Gudkov. According to the letter, the current Duma (parliament) “has turned into a gathering of people managed by and subordinate to the supreme power, [people] whose function has reduced to approval, praising, and wild prolonged applause, not constructive lawmaking.” According to this letter, Gudkov has often been the only voice of reason and humanity in this assembly. Among his many activities have been a number of initiatives that called attention to Russia’s social problems. The letter lists a number of them, from the statute of limitations for checking theses for plagiarism to labelling nongovernmental organizations as “foreign agents.” It may seem odd to juxtapose these two, but there are several good reasons for this. Analysts widely believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin plagiarized the work of Western academics for the dissertation he wrote in the 1990s and, more broadly, education standards have been falling sharply in Russia in recent years, with corruption and plagiarism issues reaching a new level.

Gudkov also opposed a number of “frankly insane” laws, such as the “notorious” Dima Yakovlev law—a law that banned adoption of Russian children, which the Duma enacted in response to the Magnitsky Act. Named after Russian anti-corruption lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who was tortured and killed in prison in 2009 after he uncovered a \$230 million embezzlement scheme, the Magnitsky act sanctioned Russia’s worst human rights violators by denying them US visas and freezing their assets in US banks. While the logic of how an adoption ban is connected to US visa bans and asset freezes in response to embezzlement may seem elusive, from the Kremlin’s perspective, this was simply a tit for tat. Since the US denied something to Russia’s citizens, the Kremlin denied something to American citizens—even if ultimately this act hurt Russian citizens, most vulnerable children. Even if the Duma had not adopted Gudkov’s proposed legislation throughout his time in the Duma, according to the letter, it had “important symbolic character” because it attracted attention to issues critical for Russian citizens.

Another issue on which Gudkov has been vocal about is Putin’s actions in Syria. The open letter does not mention this point, perhaps as it is primarily focused on the Duma. On 7 September 2015 Gudkov sent an official request to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. “Two things interest me,” Gudkov wrote in his Facebook page where he reposted the official request he sent to Shoigu, “First, are our soldiers really fighting for Assad, and second, if yes, why is this done in secret, without the parliament’s approval?” In May Putin amended an existing decree on state secrets. Among other changes, he put Russia’s military losses on the list of state secrets even in peacetime, “during special operations.” Recalling this incident, Gudkov wrote, “We thought this is about Donbass [in Ukraine]—but it turned out about Syria too.”

The open letter says that Gudkov has “acted the way an honest, thinking citizen of Russia ought to act,” and “proved that even a single intelligent and courageous deputy can be very useful and his voice can resonate.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Borshchevskaya)**

**Source:** “Открытое письмо в поддержку Дмитрия Гудкова” (“Open Letter in Support of Dmitry Gudkov”), *Echo Moskvy*, 9 December 2015. <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/echomsk/1673620-echo/>

*The 6th State Duma has turned into a gathering of people managed by and subordinate to the supreme power, [people] whose function has reduced to approval, praising, and wild prolonged applause, not constructive lawmaking.*

*One of the few, and often the only deputy who has consistently resisted this majority was Dmitri Gudkov... Over the past two years he, in his parliamentary work took a truly humane position and acted the way an honest, thinking citizen of Russia ought to act.*

*The young, talented, energetic Dmitry Gudkov, again and again resisted Duma’s odious initiatives, wrote an enormous number of parliamentary inquiries in various complex and sometimes dramatic situations. He initiated many bills that even without being adopted by the current Duma, had an important symbolic character, attracted attention of our fellow citizens to major social problems. These were the bills, in particular, on the direct election of mayors of Russian cities, to abolish the statute of limitations for checking theses for plagiarism...on the protection of non-governmental organizations from prosecution by the state as “foreign agents” and others. Dmitry Gudkov protested against a variety of cannibalistic and frankly insane laws adopted by the Duma, beginning with the notorious “Dima Yakovlev law,” also known as the “law of crooks.”*

*And in general, he proved that even a single intelligent and courageous deputy can be very useful and his voice can resonate.*

*... We consider it our duty to support Dmitry Gudkov.*

*Alekseeva Lyudmila*

*Vladimir Voinovich*

*Svetlana A. Gannushkina*

*Vladimir E. Zakharov*

*Dmitry B. Zimin*

*Yury A. Ryzhov*

*Lyudmila Ulitskaya*

*Sheynis Viktor Leonidovich*

*Yevgeny G. Yasin*



## Growing Domestic Tension?

**OE Watch Commentary:** Since Vladimir Putin's return to the presidency in May 2012, one of the primary vectors of Russian defense has been against the perceived threat of internal dissent fomented by Western influence. From the Kremlin's perspective the West (the US in particular) has been exploiting the notion of "democracy promotion" by sponsoring various "color revolutions" within the post-Soviet space and elsewhere. In the Kremlin's distrustful interpretation, any opposition to its policy is immediately labeled as traitorous. Its anxiety has increased over the past three years to the point where today any legitimate domestic protest may now be regarded as a Western plot to weaken Russia.

This fear of being labeled a traitor partially helps to explain why, despite the more challenging domestic economic conditions, the overwhelming majority of Russians still firmly support the Kremlin leadership. As the first excerpt points out, even with rising inflation and unemployment, more than 85% of Russians approve of Putin's performance. A significant portion of this strong public support likely stems from the Kremlin's control over the national media, where President Putin and the country's leadership are portrayed as defending the country against an increasing array of foreign threats. Russia's higher inflation and unemployment rates, along with a number of other social problems, are often blamed on the West.

Still, some Russian commentators understand that the West is not responsible for all of the country's domestic ills. In the second excerpt, Russian military expert Konstantin Sivkov describes the findings at a recent conference dealing with geopolitical challenges facing Russia. The majority of the article praises the Kremlin's more robust foreign policy and why Russia must pursue a non-Western strategy. However, Sivkov also includes a summary of one speaker who warns that domestic tension within Russia is rising, caused not by Western meddling, but by more "unemployment, falling living standards (against a background of increasing income for state officials and upper classes), a sense of instability and a growing awareness among a large portion of the population of the striking discrepancy between the country's foreign policies and those policies dealing with the domestic economy, education and health care." This speaker goes on to posit that if fundamental socio-economic reforms are not enacted soon, "by 2018-2020, the domestic tension could reach a critical level."

As in the Soviet period, when authors were careful to couch any criticism of the Communist Party in ambiguous or Aesopian language, so today a commentator like Sivkov must be careful to not directly criticize the Kremlin leadership. To avoid being labeled as a traitor or a member of the fifth column, he uses the remarks of a conference speaker to point out that some of the Kremlin's internal policies are fueling dissatisfaction. By construing any domestic protest action as a "foreign threat," the Kremlin leadership may be inclined to look for solutions where they do not exist. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

**Source:** "Putin's Approval Rating Grew Most among Russians with Low Income — Poll," TASS, 24 November 2015.

*The approval rating of Russian President Vladimir Putin is at the peak level of 87-88% and has remained high for 18 months, the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) said....*

*...According to VTsIOM, the largest increase in Putin's approval ratings over the past two years has been registered among the least well off citizens - from 45% in November 2013 to 82% in May 2015. Among respondents with average income Putin's approval rating grew from 63 to 88%.*

**Source:** Konstantin Sivkov, "Под высоким напряжением," [Under high voltage], *Voennoye Promishlennoye Kurier*, 9 December 2015. <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28390>

*The recent VI International-Geopolitical Congress held in Moscow was dedicated to "Scientific Paradigm of Civilization in the XXI Century," where attendees discussed the problems of mankind in the conditions of formation of the 6th technological structure and ways of overcoming existing conflicts. The focus dealt with the theoretical and methodological foundations of a multipolar world order, and its appearance in the near future....*

*...The presentations of almost all foreign participants sounded unconditional support of Russia's actions in Syria.... Foreign representatives, particularly from Europe, emphasized the exceptional importance of Russia in preserving the traditional values of society and the spiritual foundation of Christianity....*

*..Great response and heated debate was aroused by the Director of the Center of Political Science... Stepan Sulakshina.... He tried to simulate the prospects of development of our state for the next decade. According to the forecast over the next two or three years, domestic tension will increase. ...While the authority of the president continues to grow, internal stress is also rising. This domestic tension is caused by "unemployment, falling living standards (against a background of increasing income for state officials and upper classes), a sense of instability and a growing awareness among a large portion of the population of the striking discrepancy between the country's foreign policies and those policies dealing with the domestic economy, education and health care.... By 2018-2020 the tension could reach a critical level."*



Revising Serdyukov’s History

**OE Watch Commentary:** As the *OE Watch* has covered in the past, there has been no end to the speculation regarding the reforms of former Russian Defense Minister A. Serdyukov and why he was removed from office (for more information, see Special Essay, “Russian TV Media and the Removal of the Russian Defense Minister,” OEW, November 2012). Most commentators suggest that this unpopular minister lost his position over corruption allegations, personal indiscretions and general dissatisfaction regarding his reforms among many within the military. A recent article, however, in one of Russia’s more authoritative military journals (*Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*) posits that Serdyukov’s appointment as defense minister and subsequent removal were part of a grand deception campaign to lull the West into complacency.

The author first spells out many of the successful weapon contracts and acquisitions initiated while Serdyukov was defense minister, ranging from new naval ships and armored vehicles to advanced fighter aircraft and attack submarines. He points out that this new arsenal has allowed Russia to better defend its interests today, particularly “on an impressive scale in the current Mid East [Syrian] conflict.”

The author then questions why, given this notable list of achievements, Serdyukov became the target of so much damaging publicity. He comes up with a novel answer, suggesting that the Russian special services unleashed a negative PR campaign against Serdyukov to camouflage or distract Western observers from his many accomplishments. These “phony scandals” created a “very soothing portrayal of Russia’s further military degradation” for Western observers. In reality, according to the author, “systematic and highly productive work” was being conducted to resurrect Russia’s military potential after the “failure of the 1990s.”

This attempt at revising history may have less to do with reforming Serdyukov’s image than with assuring readers that Russia’s secret services are always one step ahead of their Western counterparts. Under wise and crafty Kremlin leadership, even scandals involving corruption and high-level malfeasance are really part of a plan to strengthen Russia. It may have been too soon, however, to try and airbrush this murky chapter of Russia’s recent military history. In the comment section for this article, one reader responded, “the author should be ashamed to write such nonsense.”

**End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

**Source:** Yuri Selivanov, “Who is Mister Serdyukov: Похоже, грандиозная операция российских спецслужб по мистификации Запада полностью удалась,” [Who is Mister Serdyukov: It appears that the grand operation by Russian special services to fool West was completely successful] *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 9 December 2015. <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28388>

*Former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov was in the past, almost unanimously condemned as rabid pest, the most incompetent military defense minister, eventually wearing the infamous nickname “Taburetkin” [stool-man], who, under the terrible pressure of “public opinion” was sent into resignation in disgrace....However, it’s completely obvious that the work of any government figure should not be measured by the blather of analysts or even by one’s own announcements, but rather by concrete results....*

*It is with this measure we come to the assessment of the activities of the minister Anatoly Serdyukov....Almost all the modern weapons, which now account for a promising basis for the development of the Russian Armed Forces were either developed or contracted, or actually taken into service at precisely the time when the incompetent “Taburetkin” was Minister of Defense. What is your evidence, you ask. Consider...*

- 1. ...“Buyan-M”, which represent a fundamentally new type of warship, armed with complex now famous cruise missiles “Calibre”..
- 2. The escort ships (frigates) 11356M upgrade projects for the Black Sea Fleet had begun construction on request of the Ministry of Defence 18.12.2010
- 5. Strategic bomber Tu-160. Start of modernization - in 2008.
- 6. long-range bomber Tu-22M3 - in February 2012, the Russian Defense Ministry has ordered the modernization of 30 Tu-22M3 to version Tu-22M3M.
- 7. Multi-purpose fighter Su-30 SM. The first flight of the production aircraft - 21.09.2012....
- 8. The Su-35. The first flight in 2008....
- 9. PAK FA T-50 - the newest fifth-generation fighter. First flight - 29.01.2010 Mr.
- 10. The T-14 “Armata”. Development of the model began in 2009...
- 11. The operational-tactical missile complex “Iskander-M”. In November 2011...
- 12. The newest anti-aircraft missile system S-400 “Triumph” adopted for 28.04.2007
- 13. Modernization of heavy nuclear missile cruiser “Admiral Nakhimov”. Formally -- since late 2008.
- 14. The strategic nuclear submarine (APRKSН) “Yury Dolgoruky”....
- 21. Completion of the testing of RK “Dagestan”, the first warship equipped with the missile system ZM-14 “Calibre” - 2012....
- 22. Completion of the latest tests of cruise missiles airborne X-101/102...

*Moreover, due to the fact that these weapons were launched in those years, Russia has demonstrated its combat power on such an impressive scale in the current Middle East conflict....So why then was the work of Serdyukov was so negatively perceived by his contemporaries? Why, was he awarded with the most unflattering reviews in the press and ultimately forced, in unprecedented disgrace, to leave his post?*

*I think - not sure a hundred percent, but it I think it was a planned action .... The Russian government has sought to ensure the most favorable* (continued)



Continued: Revising Serdyukov’s History

*international conditions for the long overdue and most rapid rearmament. This required, as much as possible, not attracting attention of our Western “partners” to these rearmament plans. Easy concealment was not possible – this would only stimulate the activation of suspicion and Western intelligence. Then they devised the “stupid Taburetkin” plan which supposedly would ruin the Russian Armed Forces. The press publicized all his absurd and sometimes obviously flimsy “initiatives” such as the collection of all the country’s air force assets at eight locations, mostly phony scandals of various kinds, and the disbandment of various staffs. In general, it created a very soothing portrayal of Russia’s further military degradation, which in turn, would lead to the country’s ruin.*

*All the while, as Serdyukov was diligently portrayed as a scapegoat, real defense reforms, invisible to the general public and even more foreign countries, were taking place. This entailed systematic and highly productive work to overcome the serious gap which had arisen due to the failure of the ‘90s....*

*...Today it is already possible to speak openly. Because the secret is out: Russia has showed their new armed teeth in all splendor.... Everything fell into place. Russia has regained its status as a world superpower. And to Anatoly Serdyukov, in fact - one must give great thanks!*

Reader comment to article: **Sergey, 2:18, December 10, 2015**

*The collapse of the armed forces and the stain of Serdyukov’s looting female gang will always remain in the history of Russia. The author should be ashamed to write such nonsense....*

An Ominous Leak

**OE Watch Commentary:** Over the past decade Russian security officials have expressed their concern over both European missile defense plans and the proposed American prompt global strike weapon system. From the Kremlin’s perspective, these systems have the potential to weaken Russia’s strategic nuclear retaliatory capability. Western assurances that neither of these systems is directed against Russia have fallen on deaf ears.

In early November 2015 Russian officials unveiled a new strategy to express their displeasure at these weapon systems. As the excerpt points out, “at a meeting discussing developments in the defense industry, held by Vladimir Putin in Sochi... the president said... that Russia was going to develop offensive weapons capable of passing through any missile defense system.” During the meeting TV cameras were allowed to inadvertently film one of the Russian weapons supposedly under development. The camera focused on one of the participant’s briefing books and viewers were treated to a “top secret design, namely, that of the Status-6 multipurpose oceanic system.”

This system purportedly consists of a specially equipped submarine which would release a submarine drone or torpedo fitted with a large nuclear warhead. This project, which was initially proposed during the 1950s, posited that the nuclear-equipped sub-drone would be deployed somewhere close to the shore of the nominal enemy. According to the excerpt, at the proper time, the powerful sub-drone would detonate, causing a tsunami which would destroy “naval bases, ports, and other coastal assets, including cities.”

As the excerpt concludes, “the super secret system’s blueprint was exposed to the cameras in order to frighten and to baffle Western ‘partners.’” This incident reveals not only Russia’s ability to respond asymmetrically to a perceived threat, but also the Kremlin’s talent in exploiting their media in ever more imaginative ways. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

**Source:** Anton Mardasov, “Статус-6”: Генштаб пугает Запад апокалипсисом [Status-6: General Staff Threatens West With Apocalypse] *Svobodnaya Pressa*, 11 November 2015.

*It would be no exaggeration to say that a truly sensational document was caught on camera by two federal TV channels at a meeting discussing developments in the defense industry, held by Vladimir Putin in Sochi on 9 November 2015. Let us remind you that the president said at the meeting that Russia was going to develop offensive weapons capable of passing through any missile defense system.*

*NTV and Channel One broadcast footage (subsequently removed), which was allegedly filmed by accident, behind the back of presumably Chief of the Russian Federation General Staff Main Operations Directorate Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov, featuring the blueprint and the lead times for a “top secret” design, namely, that of the Status-6 multipurpose oceanic system....*

*...The purpose of the system is “to destroy the enemy’s key economic assets in coastal areas and to cause guaranteed unacceptable damage to the country’s territory by creating wide areas of radioactive contamination, rendering them unusable for military, economic or other activity for a long time.”*

*...A carrier secretly delivers a mini submarine (a nuclear deep-water station), which has a low speed, to a designated area, after which it detaches it for autonomous operation.*

*...Its fuse could remain in the standby mode for a long time, waiting for a signal from an aircraft or a ship, which would trigger the charge. The idea was that naval bases, ports, and other coastal assets, including cities, would be damaged by a powerful shock wave -- a tsunami caused by a nuclear explosion... The deputy director of the Political and Military Analysis Institute, Aleksandr Khranchikhin, believes that a scenario in which information on top secret developments would leak to the media is impossible in principle.*

*“There can be no doubt that this was done deliberately. The goal was to make a certain enemy to reconsider its actions. Frankly, however, I doubt that the design in question will ever be built. That is, this leak is most probably pure disinformation.... Thus, the super secret system’s blueprint was exposed to the cameras in order to frighten and to baffle Western “partners.”*



## Problems with Russia's State Defense Order

**OE Watch Commentary:** Shortly after he was appointed deputy prime minister and chairman of the Military-Industrial Commission (VPK) in 2012, Dmitry Rogozin began implementing procedures to tighten control over the state's defense order, which spells out the military equipment which will be procured during any given year. Prior to his appointment there had been a host of problems with Russian defense industries providing the requisite equipment to the military. While some progress has been made in streamlining Russia's defense acquisition process, an excerpt from *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, one of Russia's more authoritative military-industrial publications, suggests that serious problems remain within Russia's weapon procurement system.

The article points out that some suppliers to defense manufacturers are simply unable to comply with the norms proscribed in the state defense order and "will simply quit the component suppliers' market, so as not to operate at a loss to themselves." It goes on to point out that suppliers will not be reimbursed until the "principal contractor has fulfilled the contract (from one to seven or more years)." The author rightly asks, "Who will compensate the losses through inflation? Where can one obtain the finance to renew the main funds?"

The excerpt goes on to describe the impossibility, or extreme difficulty, of complying with taxation, civil, and labor legislation associated with defense contracting. The intricacies of navigating and complying with the state defense order will demand a large increase in the amount of bookkeeping, and elaborate, separate accounting procedures for defense manufacturing companies. The author claims that to comply fully with the law a plant with 170 employees will need to "recruit 50-60 specialists to work in the above-mentioned sub-departments." Such large overhead costs will almost guarantee the company would operate at a loss.

Besides these legal and accounting challenges, the author points out that the country's weak infrastructure (from roads to Internet availability), combined with significant increases in the cost of utilities (water, electricity, gas, etc.), makes compliance with the demands of the state defense order almost impossible. Smaller, private companies cannot make a profit with such obstacles. The author points out that the situation has only been exacerbated by restrictions on using foreign-made machinery in defense manufacturing.

The Kremlin has made military modernization a high priority, allocating trillions of rubles over the next few years to train and equip the country's armed forces. Real progress has been made, but, as this article points out, significant challenges remain in strengthening both Russia's military-industrial complex, and its broader business, technical and social infrastructure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

**Source:** Oleg Koshkur, "Разгромный спецсчет," [A Scathing Special Account] *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* Online, 25 November 2015. <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/28162>

*The new law on the state defense order has brought defense industry complex enterprises nothing but trouble....*

*...After one has read through the law, the first thought that arises is: On the basis of what concept and ideology was it written? The declared objectives are good, without a doubt – strengthening control, reducing product prices, raising the productivity of enterprises that fulfill the state defense order. But we shall talk not about the objective, but about the way that leads to it. And the way chosen is clearly not the optimal one.*

*I shall list the most obvious problems that arise over the law's implementation.*

- 1. The destruction of real cooperation, since the proposed conditions carry a high probability that some suppliers will refuse to work in compliance with the norms that are being introduced. It is impossible to force them by legislation to adhere to the letter of this law – they will simply quit the component suppliers' market, so as not to operate at a loss to themselves.*
- 2. The collapse of real production through financial manipulation with special accounts and the monies held in them. For example, profits are locked in special accounts until the principal contractor has fulfilled the contract (from one to seven or more years). Who will compensate the losses through inflation? Where can one obtain the finance to renew the main funds?...*
- 3. The impossibility, or extreme difficulty, of complying with taxation, civil, and labor legislation. As a consequence, the enterprise has corresponding problems....*
- 4. A large increase in the amount of bookkeeping, the creation of economic departments, labor and wages departments, and other sub-departments for maintaining separate accounting of contract-related financial and economic activities. Calculations show that, in order to comply fully with the law, we need to recruit 50-60 specialists to work in the above-mentioned sub-departments. (Fact: The plant has 170 employees. Does this mean that more than 30 percent of the personnel are engaged in the non-production sector?)*
- 5. A large increase in expenditure on bureaucracy in connection with servicing hundreds of special accounts in several banks. Our nearest bank is 35 kilometers away and, besides, one must always allow for the absence of an electronic management and document-processing "customer - special account - bank system, and for the extremely limited Internet traffic (people in Moscow may be surprised to learn that there are still many places in the country which optical fiber has not yet reached, and where the Internet may be unavailable for several days at a time)....In the end, I would like some laws that will stimulate the development of enterprises, not complicate their lives. But, for that to happen, those who initiate and elaborate such instruments should, sometimes at least, listen to the people who have to be guided by those laws and to apply them in their practical work.*



## Strengthening Russian-Serbian Military Ties

**OE Watch Commentary:** Some 20 years ago, while working as a “journalist,” nationalist politician and now Vice Premier in charge of Russia’s defense industry Dmitry Rogozin was on the front lines covering the civil wars in former Yugoslavia. There were no questions as to which side he supported, and in the intervening years he has repeatedly expressed his support for his Orthodox brethren in Serbia. Having assumed an important position within the Kremlin, Rogozin is now in a position to provide the Serbian leadership with much more than moral support.

The brief accompanying excerpt considers possible Russian weapon sales which will be discussed during Rogozin’s planned visit to Belgrade in January. According to the author, his mission is to “provide maximum help in outfitting the Serbian Army,” to include outfitting Serbia’s own defense industry to manufacture “complex combat systems.” The list of proposed weapons is impressive and includes MIG-29s, Mi-17 Transport helicopters, Kamaz trucks, advanced AD S-300 missile systems and the possibility of joint development of a long-range ballistic missile. The author goes on to suggest that the Russian president has “given Rogozin strict orders to help Serbia as much as possible in equipping [the army] and to present all the details of what Moscow is offering.”

The article provides two possible reasons for this apparent Kremlin largesse: distrust of NATO and/or expanding Russian weapon sales. According to one Serbian military analyst quoted in the article, “Russia and NATO see each other as enemies. That holds true for every NATO member country and Serbia must have that in mind.” By providing extensive military support to Serbia, the Kremlin leadership likely hopes to secure Belgrade’s loyalty. Maintaining a well-armed ally in NATO’s backyard could provide the Kremlin with additional strategic options. Another Serbian analyst suspects that, despite Rogozin’s previous support for the Serb cause, “money is money and there are no favors or emotions.” He goes on to question whether Serbia has enough purchasing power to clinch this deal, maintaining that the Russians are not about to hand over the equipment for free.

Rogozin’s upcoming visit to Belgrade will take place amidst increased tension between Russia and NATO (note Moscow’s recent loud objections to Montenegro’s possible inclusion within the alliance). The Kremlin leadership has repeatedly announced that it will react asymmetrically to what it perceives as a growing threat from NATO. Given Rogozin’s previous, strong support for Serbian national interests, his visit in January and the details of this potential weapons deal merit close attention. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

**Source:** M. Dobromirovic, “Putin Sending Weapons to Serbia,” *Informer*, 7 December 2015.

*The historic military agreement between Serbia and Russia, which, when implemented would make our army definitely the strongest force in the region, could be signed just after the New Year!*

*As we have learned from well informed diplomatic sources, Dmitry Rogozin, the Russian deputy prime minister in charge of the military industry, will be coming in Belgrade in January 2016 with the assignment of providing maximum help in outfitting the Serbian Army. Rogozin is coming to Serbia as an envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and accompanying him will be the leading people of the Russian military industry, who will present the details of Russia’s offer. It also means that new complex combat systems would be manufactured in Serbian factories....*

*“...Putin has given Rogozin strict orders to help Serbia as much as possible in equipping [the army] and to present all the details of what Moscow is offering. We will have at our disposal the most modern Russian helicopters. MIG-29 airplanes, missiles and missile systems . . . This equipment is very expensive, but Putin has prepared serious privileges and benefits for Serbia . . .” said our source, who has always given us very reliable information from the Russian capital.*

*Serbian Defense Minister Bratislav Gasic was not available for comments yesterday, and no official response came from the defense ministry either. On the other hand, military analyst Miroslav Lazanski said that, according to his information, Russia was preparing to help us without setting any conditions. However, Lazanski pointed out that Russia regards the NATO Pact as an enemy . . . Look, Russia and NATO see each other as enemies. That holds true for every NATO member country and Serbia must have that in mind.”*

*His colleague Aleksandar Radic also pointed out that Russia never set any conditions to country to which it sold weapons. “Even though military-economic cooperation goes in hand with the political process, money is money and there are no favors or emotions there. We can achieve a common ground with the Russians and I believe that all of those things would be resolved. The question is, however, does Serbia have enough purchasing power to clinch this deal, because I believe that the prices will not be naive at all....”*

*Serbian Defense Minister Bratislav Gasic said that after Romania, Serbia will be the biggest military power in the region and said that in 2016 he would continue developing and modernizing the army and increasing exports.*

*What Are the Russian Preparing for Us:*

*-- MIG-29 planes; Mi-17 Transport helicopters; “Kamaz” trucks and “nora” howitzers; Guns for “Lazar 2” armored vehicles; “S-300” missile systems; joint development of long-range ballistic missiles.*

Generating Electricity at 50 Below

*“One of the important characteristics of the gas turbine engine is its ability to work under Arctic conditions despite the extreme cold....It is clear that complex infrastructure and a variety of equipment require a significant amount of energy which is available only from mobile generators of varying capacities. In these extreme temperatures, gasoline and diesel generators do not always function effectively below -50 degrees Celsius.”*

**OE Watch Commentary:** Russia is deploying the S-400 Triumf [SA-21 GROWLER] medium-to-long-range (120-400 kilometer) air defense system, and the 9K720 Iskandr [SS-26 STONE] short-range (500 kilometer) ballistic missile to the Arctic. They join the Pantsir S-1 [SA-22 GREYHOUND] short-to-medium-range (20 kilometers) air defense system. All of these are mobile, high-precision systems that require an independent power source when deployed.

Traditional diesel and gasoline-powered generators do not work well in the cold. Normal diesel gels at 17.5°Fahrenheit [-8.1° Centigrade] and special Arctic diesel gels at -40° F/C. Gasoline freezes at -40° F/C, and natural gas freezes at -296.7° Fahrenheit.

A natural gas turbine generator is ideal for Arctic use. The natural gas in use in the field will probably be liquid natural gas, since it is more portable. Other vehicles, such as tanks, weapons carriers and aircraft, will be hooked up to a generator when out in the cold. The micro gas turbine generator will prove invaluable for Russian military systems in winter field conditions.

**End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm, *Military-Industrial Courier VPK*, [www.vpk-news.ru](http://www.vpk-news.ru), 9-15 December 2015.

***One’s Own Generator: “Iskander” and the S-400 Systems need an electric impulse to Work***

*Until recently, the leading manufacturer of gas turbine generators in the world was the American firm, Capstone Industries, which produces a wide number of these generators. But now, the Chelyabinsk “Turbine” Design Bureau has constructed a micro gas turbine, the MTTU-100 with an output of 100 kilowatts using natural gas. The MTTU-100 has interested potential customers and will enter the market in 2016. The Chelyabinsk design bureau is also offering the PZA-18 startup charger designed specifically to work in the Arctic. It provides the initial electrical impulse to the engine and powers the onboard electrical systems for aviation and ground systems.*

Naval Infantry Preparing for Arctic Winter Amphibious Assaults

*“General Major Dmitri Krayev, the Northern Fleet Coastal Troops Commander reviewed the progress of the Kirkenes Red Banner Independent Naval Infantry Brigade. ‘Summing up the results of the 2015 training year, all the missions assigned were successfully accomplished. Not all of the combat-training elements received “good” or “excellent” evaluations, but the formation’s subunits performed the assigned tasks confidently, and the overall outcome – a solid, satisfactory evaluation – is a wholly deserved result.”*

**OE Watch Commentary:** The 61st Naval Infantry Brigade is well known for its hand-to-hand combat demonstrations given for distinguished visitors to Murmansk. However, the tough naval infantry does more than break bottles on each other’s heads, leap over bayonets and through flaming hoops. Last summer a battalion tactical group from the 61st packed up all its combat gear and moved to the Molino Training Center for seven weeks of intensive training. Molino is located near Nizhnii Novgorod, some 420 kilometers East of Moscow. It is the training center where the combined US/Russian “Torgau” Peacekeeping Exercises were held from 2004-2007. The 600-man battalion tactical group did well in the warmer climes.

*(continued)*

**Source:** Vladimir Levchuk, *Na Strazhe Zapolyarya*, 27 November 2015.

***Russia’s Naval Infantry Is 310 Years Old; the ‘Black Berets’ Certificate***

*Each of the tasks that face the naval infantrymen is important, but, the general singled out an exercise performed at the Western Military District’s combat training center in Mulino settlement, Nizhnigorodskaya Oblast, by a Naval Infantry battalion tactical group.*

*The exercise was preceded by a seven-week training course at the center. To get there, the Naval Infantry conducted a 2,000 kilometer train and vehicle movement accompanied by 150 vehicles and crew-served weapons.*

*The Northern Fleet naval infantry subunits were training on unfamiliar ground. The training cycle included development of teamwork and coordination, training on simulator systems, company- and battalion-level tactical*

*(continued)*



## Continued: Naval Infantry Preparing for Arctic Winter Amphibious Assaults

It is not going to be as pleasant this winter, as the 61st will conduct joint amphibious and air landings with elements of the neighboring 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and the Saint Petersburg-based 98th Guards Airborne Division. These landings will use Army helicopters, ships and assault landing craft. Of further interest is the exercise planned for the Ob River. In the summer of 2015 the Northern Fleet conducted a riverine landing of the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade at Dubinka, on the north-flowing Yenisei River. 2016 will also include an exercise on the world's seventh longest river, the north-flowing Ob. Amphibious and riverine operations are key to moving forces effectively in the far north and the Northern Fleet is training hard to master these difficult skills. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

*exercises -- including force-on-force -- and live fire. They also trained in urban combat and combat in forested terrain, neither of which is characteristic of the Arctic region.*

*During the training, the command personnel acquired skills in using information obtained via unmanned aerial vehicles and in organizing interaction with close support aircraft and helicopter gunships for the purpose of inflicting massed air strikes on an enemy. They also worked on tactical assault force landing operations.*

*The training culminated in an exercise after which the Northern Fleet men were awarded certificates of training. The Northern Fleet battalion tactical group was awarded the certificate bearing the honorable 001 insignia.*

### **From both the air and the sea**

*The "black berets" are currently completing preparations for the new training year. The main scheduled events, for both the naval infantry and the coastal troops overall, include consecutive subunit training according to the customary scheme: individual training, formation -- crew, platoon, company -- battery,*

*battalion -- squadron. The result will be exercises conducted jointly with assault paratroop subunits of the Airborne Troops and the Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade.*

*During the winter training period, the "white bears" will have to perform assault landings onto polar sea islands from air and sea, using army aviation helicopters, anchored vessels and from amphibious warfare ships.*

*During a command post exercise, the naval infantrymen will again come up against unfamiliar conditions and, jointly with Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade and Airborne Troops subunits, will conduct operations on the Ob River flood plain.*

*Maj Gen Krayev stated that his naval infantry brigade's structure is in a development phase, and that proposals for its reorganization have been forwarded to higher command. In addition, deliveries of new models of equipment and arms to the coastal troops are ongoing, not only to the new Arctic brigade that was formed last year, but also to other subunits.*

*"Russia's naval infantry has always been an independent component service of the Navy, and it is now required that its subunits must be, if not superior, then at least equal to a likely enemy's equivalent subunits," Dmitriy Vladimirovich explained. "The Chief of the General Staff has charged us with that task, and it will be fulfilled."*

*Housing for the contract seaman and sergeants within the naval infantry garrison is scarce, particularly service apartments. The proportion of the formation's servicemen in that category has increased, but no construction of housing for them is taking place. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of personnel have an understanding attitude toward these difficulties and are discharging their military duty with honor.*



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

## Nuclear Energy to Power the Arctic

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Kurchatov Institute is Russia's leading nuclear energy research and development institute. Founded in 1943 in Moscow for the development of nuclear weapons, the bulk of Soviet nuclear reactors were designed here. It is also the coordinating agency for Russia's nanotechnology efforts.

Nuclear energy is a vital component of Russia's development of the Arctic. The seven existing Russian heavy ice breakers, as well as the three under development, are nuclear-powered. Many medium icebreakers are also nuclear-powered due to heavy icebreaker fuel consumption. Russia is developing floating nuclear reactors for Arctic use that can power Arctic ports and towns. The construction of the nuclear environmental center at Zapolyarny, near Murmansk, makes sense. Murmansk has long been powered by nuclear energy. Although Murmansk is now experimenting with a wind-power-generation field, Russia is reportedly building 20 new nuclear reactors to meet the country's energy needs. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

*“Director of the Kurchatov Institute, Mikhail Kovalchuk, stated that the creation of a powerful center for the development of nuclear energy in Zapolyarny has been completed in the Arctic.”*

**Source:** Interfax, <http://www.interfax.com>, research and development, 7 December 2015.

### ***Environmental center allowing for development of nuclear technologies created in Arctic***

*Kovalchuk, in a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on 7 December stated that “in accordance with your decisions, a powerful environmental center has been created in the Arctic, which will help us to develop nuclear technologies and nuclear energy beyond the Polar Circle for the exploration of the Arctic. This unique complex has been completed.” He further said that the center was created by the Kurchatov Institute and was transferred to Rosatom for its operation. Kovalchuk recalled that a document on the cleanup of the Arctic's radioactive waste was signed ten years ago and that a “huge zone” in this region was turned into “a unique center for the disposal, processing and storage of radioactive waste” over the past few years. “A whole set of measures have been built here, which are processing solid waste, that is, everything that was once contaminated by radiation is being fully processed.”*

## Russian 2015 Arctic Construction Wraps Up

*“Russian Deputy Defense Minister Dmitri Bulgakov announced that ‘a total of 437 military infrastructure facilities will be built and equipped in the village of Rogachevo (Novaya Zemlya Archipelago), Alexandra Land (Franz-Joseph Archipelago), Sredii Island (Severnaya Zemlya Archipelago), Kotelnny Island (Novosibirsk Island Archipelago), Vrangeli Island and Cape Schmidt (Chukotka Autonomous District) by the New Year holidays.’”*

**OE Watch Commentary:** 2015 was a busy year for Russian Arctic military construction as airfields, housing and support facilities have been built or improved to support the growing Russian military presence in the Arctic. The Russian military has clearly returned to an area that Russia considers vital. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

**Source:** Interfax, <http://www.interfax.com>, 11 December 2015.

### ***Russia will finish construction of over 430 military infrastructure facilities in Arctic before end of this year - Russian Defense Ministry***

*Bulgakov continued “to ensure [this] and other construction work in 2015, sea and air transport delivered over 106,000 tons of construction materials, which is almost three times more than was delivered in 2014. In addition, the Russian Defense Ministry's logistics services have delivered over 140,000 tons of supplies to the remote garrisons of the Far North, Siberia and the Far East during 2015.*

*On 11 December, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced the completion of the construction and added “measures for environmental cleanup of the Arctic have removed over 65,000 tons of accumulated scrap metal.”*



## Remote-Controlled Cyber Weapons are Essentially Flying Combat Robots

**OE Watch Commentary:** A recent Russian military article described development trends of modern weapons. It suggested that a future war would be among not only machines but also robots.

To this end the author attempted to describe design concepts for remote-controlled cyber weapons. The main advantages of such weaponry included rapid delivery with maximum accuracy; the rational use of subsonic winged flying vehicles; the ability to overcome any counteractions from adversary systems; the means to bypass surveillance zones and engagement areas; and the ability of nonnuclear weapons to destroy strategically important facilities. It was noted that this type of weaponry also would be effective for deterrence, warning, and preemption and retribution purposes. **End OE Watch Commentary (Thomas)**

*“The remote control of cruise warheads in adjustable trajectories from some kind of center is not inconceivable. This is a more remote prospect, however. Cruise warheads are evidently the prototype of future weapons. They will perform strategic-level combat tasks at intercontinental distances from the point of launch and are essentially flying robots. The high-precision delivery of a charge to the destruction objective via adaptable aeroballistic flight trajectories is ensured with the aid of highly intelligent control systems.”*

**Source:** Grigoriy Vokin, “Remote Custodian. Warheads with Artificial Intelligence Could Be Used for Reconnaissance, Guaranteed Destruction of Targets, and Human Rescue,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 10 November 2015.

*In combat robots, the main components of traditional weapons are combined with intelligent systems and subsystems that ensure the performance of a number of adaptive behavioral functions in the target area. These functions include the supplementary reconnaissance and identification of targets, the ability to seek out the most vulnerable parts, bypassing resistance zones and barricades, the ability to make the decision to explode a warhead, and so forth. All this is ultimately aimed at improving the effectiveness and reliability of a strike using (primarily conventionally armed) lower-capacity munitions. In the long term, the designs of the platforms of these robots must ensure the latter the capability, depending on the assignment, of flying, of moving along the surface of the earth, or of cruising on the surface of a body of water or in an underwater position.*

*A cruise warhead consists of a heatproof shell, close in shape to the traditional warhead, inside which a cruise subwarhead [krylatyy boyevoy subblok] with folded wings is located. In the general case, the cruise warhead should be fitted with a nuclear or conventional charge; a propulsion device (for example, an air-breathing jet engine with a certain reserve of fuel); an inertial control system in combination with GLONASS [Global Navigation Satellite System] and subsystems for correction according to relief and on the basis of optical and radar terrain maps; a terminal radiation-homing system; and a system for supplementary reconnaissance of targets on the basis of anomalies formed against the background of the underlying surface.*

*The strategic missile is launched, for example, from a stationary or mobile launcher in the direction of a predefined target from an aiming point unknown to the adversary located before the approach to the engagement zone of counter weapons or away from them. With the aid of steering flaps, the cruise warheads are switched to horizontal flight mode at an altitude of two or three kilometers; then, after dropping their speed to subsonic levels, they detach the bottom of the heatproof shell and educe the cruise subwarheads with the aid of pyrorods, unfurl the wings, start the engine, and activate all parts of the control system. The cruise subwarhead emerges from the heatproof shell cold and flies at subsonic speed; this is why everything that modifies the inertial structure is able to function. The aforementioned correction subsystems use external information in the target zone (optical and radar terrain and relief maps, magnetic, radiation, chemical, and other anomalies). The cruise subwarhead is capable of flying in terrain-following mode at a low altitude (20-30 meters) and with high accuracy, and also of approaching the target from any direction, while remaining outside the field of vision of surveillance systems. The GLONASS and the optical and radar correction systems make it possible to achieve control with an accuracy of up to 10-20 meters, given, of course, timely prepared reference maps, and the radiation- or image-based terminal self-homing systems ensure a direct hit (with a margin of error of not more than 3-5 meters).*

# The Russian General Staff System

## Role of the Russian General Staff

An important and often misunderstood aspect of the Russian General Staff—and other armies of the post-Soviet Union—when compared to those of the West is the presence of a Prussian-style General Staff.

The US Joint Chiefs of Staff is often equated with the Russian General Staff, but this is a great understatement of the Russian General Staff's functions and importance. The Russian Chief of the General Staff is imbued with far more authority and scope of responsibility than any flag grade officer in the US military. In terms of equivalency, the Russian General Staff is responsible for the long-term planning duties of the US Office of the Secretary of Defense and Unified Combatant Commanders; elements of strategic transportation performed by USTRANSCOM; and doctrinal and capabilities development. In addition, it oversees equipment procurement for all branches of the Ministry of Defense and even has an Inspector General-like function for ensuring that its standards and regulations are adhered to.<sup>1</sup>

In the Russian system the General Staff is responsible for operational-strategic level planning. Russia has a fairly nuanced view of the differences among the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of military science, believing that the difference among these levels is based upon the scope of mission, not simply the echelon of the unit. For example, a brigade fighting under an army group would be considered a tactical asset, but the same brigade fighting independently in a different situation could be considered an operational asset. Generally speaking, however, the General Staff's operational planning duties typically involve echelons above brigade level, or in Russian parlance “operational art.” Renowned Soviet operational art scholar COL (ret.) David Glantz gives the following definition:

Operational art encompasses the theory and practice of preparing for and conducting operations by large units (fronts, armies) of the armed forces. It occupies an intermediate between strategy and tactics. ‘Stemming from strategic requirements, operational art determines methods of preparing for and conducting to achieve strategic goals.’ Operational art in turn ‘establishes the tasks and direction for the development of tactics.’ Soviet operational art provides a context for studying, understanding, preparing for, and conducting war...<sup>2</sup>

Proponency for strategic planning resides with the Russian Security Council, which is an interministerial body that is chaired by high-level officials, weighted heavily with the intelligence and security services. Although the Russian Security Council is the chief proponent of Russian strategy, the Chief of the Russian General Staff does sit on council, bridging operational art to the national security strategy.

The General Staff does far more than just plan operations. It also has responsibility for the use of “foresight” to develop the theory and practice of future war. In Russian military thought foresight is directly linked to military science, with military science being the science of future war.<sup>3</sup> The General Staff's responsibility to predict the nature of future war makes it the logical place (in the Soviet/Russian system) for doctrine and capability development for the entire Ministry of Defense.

Just as important as what the General Staff does is what the General Staff does not do. It does not have operational control of the force. Although there were Goldwater-Nichols-like reforms that removed operational control from the branch chiefs (Ground Forces, Air Force,

etc.) and placed the operational control of most forces with regional commands, little has changed with the General Staff's role as operational planners and capability and doctrine developers since Soviet times. Probably the biggest change in the General Staff in the last several years has been downsizing to better align it to the size of the military that it plans for, and the removal of some financial responsibilities, due to a few high profile corruption gaffes.<sup>4</sup> The Chief of the General Staff does have day-to-day control of the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), a directorate of the General Staff which, in turn, controls the GRU spetsnaz brigades and several strategic assets, including the Russian Airborne, which functions as a strategic reserve. In combat operations, however, these warfighting assets would be operationally controlled by the appropriate field commander, not by the Chief of the General Staff.

## How Russia Does “Joint” and the General Staff Personnel System

The Russian General Staff system is based upon the Prussian-style general staff system, and so has retained its personnel system. Unlike the US military, officers do not rotate through “joint” assignments. In the Russian system “joint” matters, such as operational-strategic level planning and capabilities and doctrine development, are handled exclusively by General Staff personnel. Officers who serve in the prestigious General Staff are usually selected at the major/lieutenant colonel level (late twenties/early thirties). These officers permanently replace their branch insignia with general staff insignia and become General Staff personnel. Since matters of military doctrine and procurement are decided by the General Staff, it is considered essential that officers break their fixation with their branch of service and branch of arms in order to avoid the “trade union mentality” that hinders military doctrine and procurement matters in Western armies.<sup>5</sup> Once selected for the General Staff, a Ground Forces officer will usually spend the remainder of his career doing staff work at the Army Group, Military District, and General Staff Headquarters in Moscow. (Officers in other branches of service will have slightly different assignments.) These officers are subject matter experts about the branches of service and specialties in which they have previously served, and will be closely associated with these specialties as planners for the remainder of their careers (e.g., a signal officer in the General Staff will typically always work signal issues.) High-level positions of leadership within the General Staff (for example, Chief of the Main Operations Directorate) are exclusively held by officers from maneuver (tank, motorized rifle, artillery, missile) branches, but specialty directorates, such as topography and electronic warfare, will be led by an officer of the appropriate specialty.<sup>6</sup>

This system develops a caste of professional planners for handling operational-strategic matters, while freeing the remainder of the Russian Armed Forces officer corps to continue to specialize in their particular branch of service and arms at the tactical level. An obvious implication of this system is that there are different career paths for officer advancement. Although selection for the General Staff is prestigious, it is not the desired path for all officers. Maneuver officers who enjoy command may best serve by not pursuing assignment to the General Staff. On this path officers get a chance to hone their tactical skills, since there is no necessity for service in joint or out-of-branch assignments, but there are still educational requirements, such as attendance of a combined arms academy. Promotions typically happen much faster in the Russian military than in the US *(continued)*



## Continued: The Russian General Staff System

(it is not uncommon to see a 32-year-old battalion commander), and command tours have been known to last up to six years. In this system a brigade commander (on the tactical path) would have more years of command experience than his US counterpart, due to the ability to specialize in tactical leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Chief of the General Staff is in charge of the General Staff, he does not necessarily need to be brought up through the general staff career path. Whatever career path an officer is on, if he reaches the highest ranks in the Russian military invariably he will

have several assignments in the General Staff. An interesting example of how career progression can occur in the Russian Armed Forces is to look at the last three Chiefs of the General Staff, noting the differences in assignments between General Gerasimov (command path) and General Makarov (command path) in contrast to General Baluyevsky (General Staff path). These officers all reached the apex of a Russian military career by becoming the Chief of the General Staff. Although there are two different ways of achieving this end, in no way is either path considered better or worse, just different.



### General Gerasimov<sup>8</sup>

1977-1984	Commander of a Platoon, Company, and Battalion
1984-1987	Student at the Malinovskiy Armor Academy
1987-1993	Chief Of Staff of a Regiment, Division
1993-1995	Commander of a Division
1995-1997	Student at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy
1997-2001	First Deputy Commander of the Moscow Military District
2001-2003	Deputy Commander, Chief of Staff, and Commander of an Army Group
2003-2005	Chief of Staff of the East Military District.
2005-2006	Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff
2006-2009	Commander of the Leningrad Military District
2009-2010	Commander of the Moscow Military District.
2010-2012	Deputy Chief of the General Staff.
2012-2012	Commander of the Central Military District
2012-Present	Chief of the General Staff & Member of the Russian Security Council



### General Makarov<sup>9</sup>

1971-1977	Commander of a Platoon, Company, and Battalion
1977-1979	Student at the Frunze Academy
1979-1980	Deputy Commander of a Regiment
1980-1981	Commander of a Regiment
1981-1991	Deputy Commander of a Division, Commander of Two Divisions
1991-1993	Student at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy (graduated with Gold Medal)
1993-1993	Chief of Staff of the Russian Peacekeeping Forces in Tajikistan
1993-1996	Deputy Commander of an Army Group
1996-1998	Commander of an Army Group (2nd Tank Army)
1998-1999	Deputy Commander (for Coastal Defense) of the Baltic Fleet
1999-2002	Chief of Staff, Deputy Commander, of the Moscow Military District
2002-2007	Commander of the Siberian Military District
2007-2008	Armaments Directorate Chief of the General Staff
2008-2012	Chief of the General Staff & Member of the Russian Security Council
2013-Present	Inspector General of the Ministry of Defense



### General Baluyevsky<sup>10</sup>

1970-1972	Commander of a Platoon, Company
1972-1974	Operations Officer on an Army Group Staff
1974-1976	A Senior Operations Officer on an Army Group Staff
1977-1980	Student at the Frunze Academy
1980-1982	A Senior Officer in the Operations Directorate of the Leningrad Military District
1982-1988	A Senior Officer, then Chief, of the Operations Branch of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff
1988-1990	Student at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy (graduated with Gold Medal)
1990-1991	Special Assistant to Deputy Defense Minister Colonel-General Achalova
1992-1993	Deputy Chief of the Operations Department of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff
1992-1993	Chief of the Operations Department of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff
1993-1995	Deputy Commander of Russian Ground Forces in the Transcaucasia
1995-1997	Deputy Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff
1997-2001	First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces & Chief of the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff
1997-2004	First Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces
2004-2008	Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces & Member of the Russian Security Council
2005-2006	Chief of the Joint Staff of the Collective Security Treaty Organization
2008-2012	Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council
2012-present	Retirement

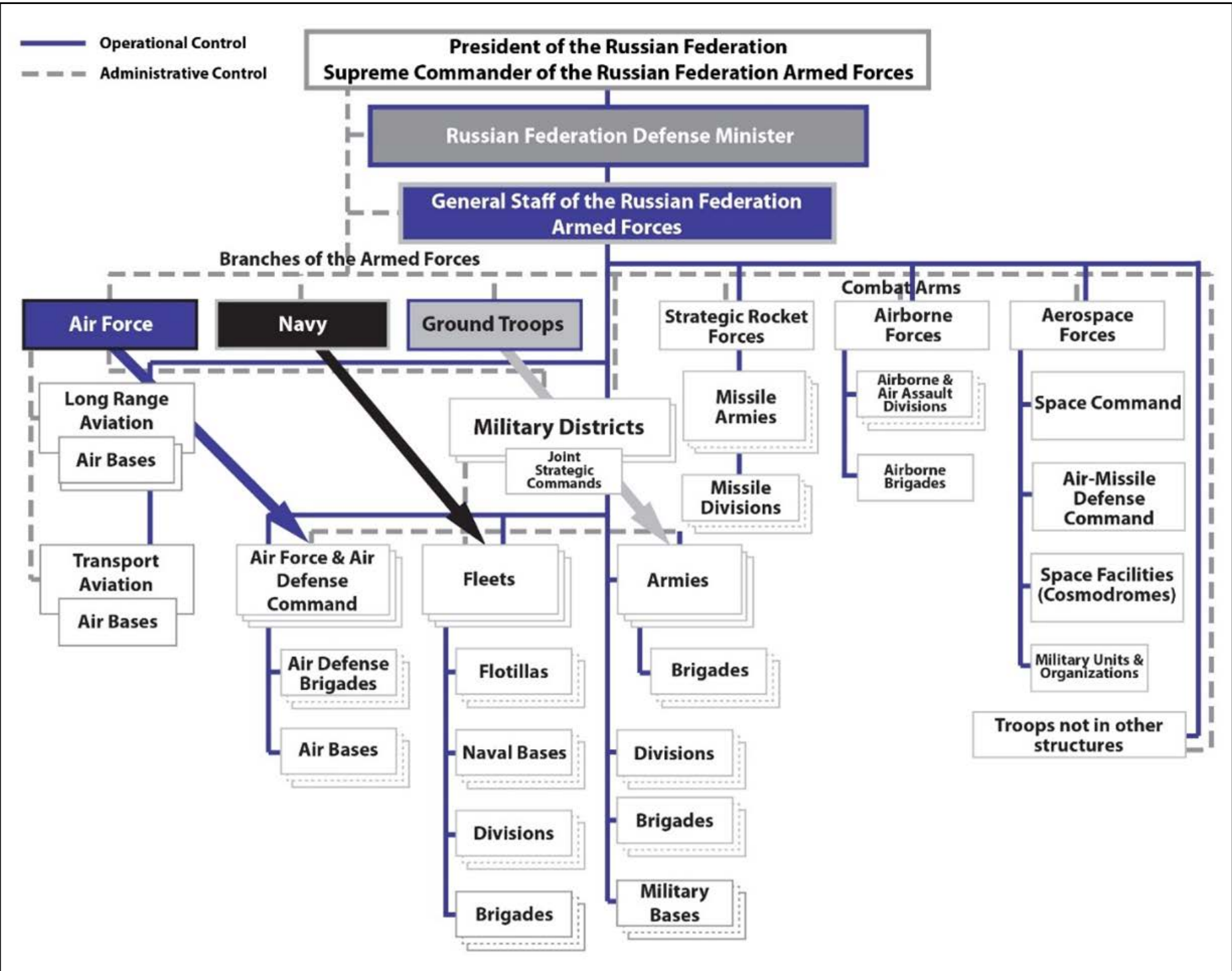
(continued)

Continued: The Russian General Staff System

Regardless of career path, the selection process for the absolute highest levels of the Russian officer corps is very much predicated upon the officer’s performance at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy. The top graduates receive the coveted “Gold Medal,” and, although not a prerequisite, the top military positions are often held by former Gold Medal winners. Any mention of General Gerasimov being a Gold Medal winner is conspicuously absent from his posted biographical information, and in this aspect he differs from many of his predecessors. However, his combat experience and success at a volatile time in the North Caucasus apparently made up for any academic slights.<sup>11</sup>

In conclusion, the role of the General Staff in the Russian system is far more important than the role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the US system. The Russian General Staff is much more than a general’s per-

sonal staff, they are an elite caste of operational-strategic planners that also guide doctrine and capability development, freeing the remainder of the Russian Armed Forces officer corps to continue to specialize in their particular branch of service and arms at the tactical level. The Russian General Staff system allows officers to specialize as operational or tactical planners, these officers are not required to divide their time between both of these challenging endeavors as done by officers in the West. Selection for service in the General Staff is considered prestigious and means that an officer is one of the best in his field; there is no stigma for “staff work” in the Russian system. This is best exemplified by the fact that the most coveted position in the Russian Armed Forces is not a senior command, but instead that of Russia’s senior operational planner, the Chief of the General Staff.



Structure of the Russian Federation Armed Forces and variant of delimiting command and control functions as of 2012 (In 2015, The Air Force and Aerospace Forces were merged together in a single branch) Although the graphic depicts operational control of the Armed Forces by the General Staff, the command and control relationship is a bit more complex.  
Source: I recreated and translated this graphic; Translation and graphic based upon graphic found at: Vladimir Ostankov and Petr Lapynov, "The ZigZags of Organizational Reform," *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer Online*, 13 February 2013, <[http://vpk.name/news/84251\\_zigzagi\\_organizacionnogo\\_stroitelstva.html](http://vpk.name/news/84251_zigzagi_organizacionnogo_stroitelstva.html)>, accessed 28 October 2015.

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## Continued: The Russian General Staff System

### Endnotes

1. The term “doctrine” in this paper refers exclusively to doctrine at the tactical and operational levels. The General Staff publishes field manuals (*Boevoi ustav po podgotovke i vedeniiu obshchevoiskobogo boiia*) covering these activities. Russia’s official “Military Doctrine,” as was published in December of 2014, much more closely resembles a US “National Security Strategy” document than US military documents such as “AirLand Battle.” Russia’s official military doctrines are produced by the Russian Security Council, albeit likely with input from the General Staff.
2. David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle*. London, England: F. Cass, 1991.
3. Dr. Jacob Kipp, “The Methodology of Foresight and Forecasting in Soviet Military Affairs,” Soviet Army Studies Office, 1988, <[www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a196677.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a196677.pdf)>, accessed 30 October 2015.
4. Charles K. Bartles, “Defense Reforms of Russian Defense Minister Anatolii Serdyukov,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 1 (2011).
5. Although this system does alleviate many resource allocation problems within the Ministry of Defense, there are still significant battles for economic resources with which the Ministry of Defense must contend. Due to its Soviet heritage, Russia has powerful militarized intelligence and security services (FSB, Border Troops, MVD-VV, etc.), which directly compete with Ministry of Defense for resources. This resource competition is especially acute now, because Russia no longer believes that the primary threat to its sovereignty stems from overt military invasion, but instead from social movements in the flavor of the “color revolutions,” the Arab Spring, and the Maidan movement. This perception of threat could increasingly divert certain funds away from the Ministry of Defense to militarized security forces with more of a dedicated internal security mission.
6. Christopher Donnelly, *Red Banner: The Soviet Military System in Peace and War*, Coulsdon, Surrey: Jane’s Information Group, 1988, 139-145.
7. Dr. Lester Grau and Charles K. Bartles, “Tactical Combined Arms Leadership in the Russian Army: Operational Flexibility Through Tactical Rigidity,” publication forthcoming.
8. “Biographical Information on Russia’s New Military Chiefs,” *Interfax*, 9 November 2012.
9. “Commander of Siberian Military District,” *Interfax*, 21 September 2005. “Armed Forces General Staff chief says Russia to conscript 700,000 annually,” *Interfax*, 17 December 2009.
10. “Colonel-General Yuri Baluyevsky Appointed Chief of Russia’s General Staff,” *ITAR-TASS*, 19 July 2004.
11. Insights from author’s conversation with noted Russian military scholar, Dr. Jacob Kipp on 30 October 2015.



Emblem of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces.  
Source: <https://ru.wikipedia.org/>