

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH



Volume 8
Issue #2
February 2018

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



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Operational Environment Watch provides translated selections and commentary from a diverse range of foreign media that our analysts and expert contributors believe will give security professionals an added dimension to their critical thinking about the Operational Environment.

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ON THE COVER:

Flag of Iran.

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Ali Khamenei with the Revolutionary Guard Corps and Basij - Mashhad, 1999.

Source: By Khamenei.ir (<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/photo-album?id=23801>) [CC BY 4.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)], via Wikimedia Commons.

OEWATCH

Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

Volume 8 | Issue 2

February | 2018

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Iran: Revolutionary Guard Crowdsourcing Protestor Identification

OE Watch Commentary: The protests which erupted on 28 December in Mashhad and spread across Iran caught security forces by surprise. While protestors used social media to rally each other and spread word of events in other cities, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and its associated media turned to social media to crowdsource identification of protest leaders.

In the accompanying highlighted tweet from the IRGC-affiliated *Tasnim*, the news agency is asking its twitter followers to identify suspects. Other IRGC-related websites like *Gerdab.ir* also engaged in similar campaigns to identify protestors. While the Iranian government has gradually improved its facial recognition capabilities, efforts to mobilize regime supporters to inform on other Iranians suggests that holes still exist in Iranian security force capabilities. It also suggests that the government seeks to create a dynamic by which Iranians must prove themselves and their loyalty by informing on others. Such crowdsourcing also highlights a disincentive for the Iranian government to completely close off access to social media platforms.

The tweet's associated hashtags—all translated from the original Persian—give insight into how the regime seeks both to rally Iranian nationalism to the “#Flag_of_Iran” and to spin the protests as an external plot. They also demonstrate how the IRGC uses the narrative of chaos in Syria to justify strict security and crack down on demands for reform or democracy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“#Iran_is_not_Syria.”

Source: “Tasaviri Sardesteh-haye Aghteshashgeran-e Tehran (Photos of the Agitators of the Unrest in Tehran),” @Tasnimnews_Fa, 3 January 2018. https://twitter.com/Tasnimnews_Fa/status/948507708684161024

Pictures of the Agitators

Pictures of the Agitators of the Unrest in Tehran. Do you know them?

#Uprising_against_Chaos

#Flag_of_Iran

#Trump

#The_Overthrow

#National_Turmoil

#New_Sedition

#We_must_be_Alert

#Iran_is_not_Syria



The Official Seal of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Source: By MrInfo2012 - This vector image was created with Inkscape. (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASeal_of_the_Army_of_the_Guardians_of_the_Islamic_Revolution.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0.

Iran: Was America Behind Uprising?

OE Watch Commentary: Conspiracy theories run deep in Iranian society. Iranian television shows poke fun at the Iranian penchant for conspiracy and *Encyclopedia Iranica*, the leading international academic reference about Iran, dedicates an entry to the history of conspiracy theories in Iran. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's speeches regularly reference alleged American, Israeli, Saudi or British plots. Therefore, it is not surprising that Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei would blame the protests which began on 28 December on foreign governments, external enemies, and conspirators. As the first accompanying tweet from Khamenei's twitter feed shows, Khamenei points to "Americans and Zionists" with the "money for these asinine governments [being] Persian Gulf [Arab state] money." What is surprising, however, is that other regime officials publicly denied any external hand in the unrest. As the second passage demonstrates, Mahmoud Sadeghi, a parliamentarian and political ally of former President Mohammad Khatami, tweeted that there was no evidence of "external stewardship" of the protests. Within a week, his tweet had received over 9,000 likes and over 1,000 retweets, more than double that of Khamenei's conspiratorial tweet. Most of these 'liking' and 'retweeting' accounts appear to be originating in Iran, suggesting that at least some elements of the Iranian public are cynical and increasingly reject the conspiracies projected by the supreme leader and his government.

The direct contradiction of the Supreme Leader's line (it does not matter in the Iranian context that Sadeghi's tweet came before Khamenei's because Khamenei's word is retroactive) may also provoke a new regime crackdown on allies and supporters of Khatami and the so-called 'reformist' camp. Many reformist politicians remain in prison despite promises made five years ago by President Hassan Rouhani to seek their release. The outbreak of unrest and the support some reformists appear to have given to the protestors' demands suggests that imprisoned reformist leaders will not be freed anytime soon. There could also be an accelerating crackdown on those like Sadeghi who so vocally sought to neuter the position they understood Khamenei would take to delegitimize the protestors. If enough Iranian officials internalize Khamenei's perspective, the regime may see the protestors' economic demands as illegitimate. This in turn would mean that the grievances which exploded on the streets in late December will continue to build.

End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)

“There has been no stewardship by any foreign agent.”

Source: “Khamenei.ir (Farsi),” @Khamenei_fa, 9 January 2018. https://twitter.com/Khamenei_fa/status/950669951005839360

@khamenei_ir “In these cases, a triangle has been organized for these activities.” This map, it is about Americans and Zionists. The money for these asinine governments is Persian Gulf [Arab state] money. Its podium is also related to the murderous organization of the hypocrites [the Mujahedin al-Khalq]. 5:05 AM - 9 Jan 2018

Source: “Mahmoud Sadeghi,” @mah_sadeghi, 7 January 2018. https://twitter.com/mah_sadeghi/status/950092749306585088

@mah_sadeghi “According to intelligence officials, in recent unrest there has been no stewardship by any foreign agent.” 2:52 PM - 7 Jan 2018





Iran: Lifting the Ban on Instagram was Illegal

OE Watch Commentary: The protests that erupted in Mashhad, Iran's second largest city, on 28 December and which quickly spread across the country caught the Iranian government by surprise. While Iran largely restricts foreign journalists and almost all diplomats to Tehran, videos and photos of demonstrations quickly began circulating as Iranians uploaded cell phone camera footage. Significantly, many showed protestors in provincial towns and cities chanting anti-regime slogans. On 31 December, Iran banned Telegram, a popular social networking application, and the photo-sharing application Instagram.

In the excerpted article from the *Mehr News Agency*, a hardline news agency affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Deputy Attorney General Abdol Samad Khorramabadi, chair of the Committee for Identifying Criminal Content, excoriated the Ministry of Communications for failing to block Instagram before the unrest began. Khorramabadi has long campaigned against social media access. In July 2017, for example, he declared that Twitter was a "platform for terrorists" and justified banning it even though many Iranian parliamentarians, the Supreme Leader, president, and foreign minister all maintain twitter accounts.

Khorramabadi has long been a crusader for a "national internet" whereby the Iranian government would cut off access to all social media applications and websites which it does not control. While it is doubtful that the Islamic Republic has the technical capacity to create a giant, impenetrable firewall, it has demonstrated the capacity to shut down social media access on a temporary basis. The embarrassment social media accounts have caused the Iranian government by exposing widespread anti-regime animus, however, will likely bolster Khorramabadi and his political allies in their quest to roll back Internet freedom.

End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)

"Instagram is, in fact, an unmanageable spy network."

Source: "Rafa'e Filtir Instagram Khalaf Qanun Bud (Lifting the Ban on Instagram was Illegal)," *Mehr News Agency*, 10 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/JRJx8W>

Abdol Samad Khorramabadi provided an answer in a note to a question about "Why has the order for censorship been removed despite the fact that Instagram is actually an uncontrollable espionage network containing millions [of pages] of criminal content against the country's security, Islamic morality, and morality? Do the judicial authorities not want to prevent these illegal activities?"

"Yes, it's quite right," he said, "that the Instagram social network appears to be an informational network. Yet, it is in fact an unmanageable spy network that publishes millions [of pages] of criminal content against the country's internal and external security, and immoral content against Islamic sanctities. Information about millions of Iranians are stored, analyzed, and exploited by Instagram servers located in America. Instagram's guidance and management are in the hands of the Great Satan's espionage services...."



Deputy Prosecutor General Abdol Samad Khorramabadi.

Source: Islamic Republic News Agency, <http://img8.irna.ir/1395/13950617/82221138/82221138-71000023.jpg>, Public Domain.



Iranian Authorities Block Internet Access to Citizens Amid Protests

OE Watch Commentary: The protests in Iran have prompted the country's leaders to censor news and deny citizens access to the Internet. As protests escalated across major Iranian cities, Iranians were denied access to popular applications like the messaging app Telegram and social media site Instagram. The accompanying passages from Iranian sources discuss the Iranian government's view on this censorship.

Whenever there is unrest in the country, it is routine for the government to shut down popular media outlets and slow down the Internet to prevent domestic and international communication. Iranian officials claim that the government ought to control the Internet, particularly during times of turmoil. As the first two passages from Iranian dailies *Ettelaat* and *Hamshari* discuss, Iranian authorities believe that popular applications may lead to greater numbers of protestors, who may turn violent. *Hamshari* interviewed Iran's Attorney General, Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, who stated that the government of Iran does not want to deny the people access to the Internet, but should nonetheless be in complete control of it because mass messages and videos can lead to violence and destruction, citing the current protests as an example. Montazeri explained that individuals will use applications to send mass messages to incite violence in parts of the country that are experiencing protests and may encourage people to destroy property. As such, according to Montazeri, it is the government's responsibility to temporarily block the Internet to prevent protests from spreading.

Information regarding censoring, blocking applications, and shutting down the Internet in Iran has been consistent with what has been reported in state media outlets, which includes *Jomhuri Eslami*, a hardline newspaper linked directly to the Supreme Leader, Shargh, a reformist newspaper, and *Javan*, a daily newspaper affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Reports overall indicate an admission by the Iranian government of blocking access to the Internet stating that restrictions apply to times of civil unrest in the country, without any further explanation.

Note: Telegram and Instagram are Internet-based social networking and photo-sharing applications that protestors can utilize to obtain uncensored information and news. Telegram is the more important of the two applications, with its encryption capability and use for coordinating protests in Iranian cities.

End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)

“... the decision to censor news, block Telegram, Instagram, and deny access to the Internet is only temporary and services will be restored when protests lighten. The government wants to ‘maintain peace’ and social media pages are inciting violence.”

Source: “Jabe See-ya Havades Akheer-ra Bahz Mekoneem (Protests Will Open a Black Box),” *Ettelaat*, 2 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/ggy8E7>

The government should have control over access of the Internet in the country because when there is unrest, people will take advantage of spreading messages of violence.

Source: “Barkhord Ghateh ba Avamele Eejadeh Naamnee (Deep Clashes and Insecurity Rise in Society),” *Hamshahri*, 2 January 2018. <http://www.hamshahronline.ir/details/394362/Iran/estate>

Montazeri said: People should not engage in violence so that the government takes away their Internet access. The government should have 100% control over the Internet.

Source: Twitter post by Iranian daily newspaper *Jamee Farda*, 1 January 2018. <https://twitter.com/jameefarda?lang=en>

“Mohammad Javad Azara Jahromi [Minister of Information and Communications Technology] explained that the decision to censor news, block Telegram, Instagram, and deny access to the Internet is only temporary and services will be restored when protests lighten. The government wants to ‘maintain peace’ and social media pages are inciting violence.”



Screenshot of Twitter post by Iranian daily newspaper *Jamee Farda*, 1 January 2018.
Source: <https://twitter.com/jameefarda/status/947797043128434688>.



Turkish Perspectives on Iran

OE Watch Commentary: The recent events in Iran have sparked a debate in neighboring Turkey, where many have compared them to Turkey's Gezi Park protests of spring 2013. The accompanying passages from Turkish sources shed light on this debate, which centers upon the question of whether external powers are "stirring up trouble" in Iran. While some newspapers argue that this is the case, others caution against such conspiracy theories, saying that the public's demands should be heard.

As the first passage from pro-government daily *Sabah* claims, the events have turned bloody due to the intervention of "external powers" and "false news," and are reminiscent of the Gezi park protests in Turkey. The second accompanying passage from Turkish pro-government *Yeni Safak* news source goes even farther and points to the US and Israel as being behind the protests. Other similar opinions have also blamed foreign powers, suggesting that they are trying to contain Iran's expansionist policies in Yemen, Iraq and Syria.

However, there have been others who have cautioned against such conspiracy theories. The third passage features an analysis by Taha Kılınç, who claims that it would be incorrect to view the protests as "America is stirring up trouble in Iran." Kılınç notes that the people on the streets in Iran are simply "exhausted from poverty and being politically let down, [and] are protesting issues that have accumulated over decades..." He also notes that Iran's expansionist policies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon have placed a financial burden on the Iranian public, which is frustrated that the "mullah class is getting richer" while they suffer in poverty.

The final passage by academic Mensur Akgün points out how the instability in Iran is likely to impact Turkey negatively. He argues that an unstable Iran will make the Syrian crisis harder to resolve, and will increase tensions in the Gulf. It will also make the situation in Yemen more difficult, and possibly increase chaos in the Middle East.

The Gezi Park protests of May 2013 were sparked following a police raid on a peaceful sit-in by about 500 environmentalists against the planned demolition of Gezi Park in central Istanbul. Police used pepper spray, tear gas, and water cannons to break up the demonstrators, after which tens of thousands of protesters all over Turkey joined together in peaceful demonstrations. Over the course of two months, two and a half million people engaged in peaceful demonstrations in 67 of Turkey's 81 cities. Their frustration was fueled by concern that their individual liberties were eroding; and concern that freedoms of speech, media, assembly, minority rights and the rule of law were breaking down at an alarming rate. The Turkish government pointed to "foreign powers" and their collaborators for instigating the protests. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

"... not every protest is a 'conspiracy.' In fact, using the word conspiracy for every event might be a conspiracy itself."

Source: "Gezi provokasyonu şimdi İran'da sahnede (The Gezi provocation is now on stage in Iran)," *Sabah.com.tr*, 3 January 2018. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2018/01/03/gezi-provokasyonu-simdi-iranda-sahne>

The demonstrations in Iran which started as a protest against rising prices, have turned into a bloody event which spread all over the country due to false news and external powers' intervention. The events are reminiscent of the Gezi provocation.

Source: Tamer Korkmaz, "İran'daki ateşi kimler yaktı? (Who lit the fire in Iran?)," *Yeni Safak*, 3 January 2018. <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/tamerkorkmaz/irandaki-atesi-kimler-yakti-2041834>

The chaos plan, whose scenario was written in Washington, is being implemented in Iran. The events in Iran these days are a close relative of the Gezi Protests that we had five years ago!

The US-Israel axis is what has cause the protest in Iran. In other words, the CIA has taken part in the deep operation in Iran, along with the MOSSAD.

Source: Taha Kılınç, "İran'ı kim karıştırıyor? (Who is stirring up trouble in Iran?)," *Yeni Safak*, 3 January 2018. <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/tahakilinc/irani-kim-karistiriyor-2041825>

...Iran is once again experiencing protests. At this stage, it would not be correct to paint the protests as "America is stirring up trouble in Iran." Because what we have here are people who, exhausted from poverty and being politically let down, are protesting issues that have accumulated over decades...

Iran is currently ruled by an administration that finances conflict/war in at least four countries (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon) and organizes the opposition in at least two countries (Bahrein, Nigeria). Of course, this expansionist policy of a country where the "Islamic Revolution" claim has been expeditiously turning into a Shia fanaticism puts a financial burden on ordinary people. Adding in the factors of the mullah class, which has been getting richer, the restriction of freedoms under the pretext of religion and the corruptions that have been revealed; the revolt of masses, whose only share in all this was poverty, is inevitable. We should consider this before saying "Foreign powers are stirring up trouble in Iran."

Interpreting the situation as "foreign powers who wish to take advantage of this situation anytime anything happens in a Muslim country" might cause us to miss the bigger picture....

... not every protest is a "conspiracy." In fact, using the word conspiracy for every event might be a "conspiracy" itself.

Source: Mensur Akgün, "İran'in sorunu aslında bizim de sorunumuz (Iran's problem is actually also our problem)," *Karar.com.tr*, 3 January 2018. <http://www.karar.com/yazarlar/mensur-akgun/iranin-sorunu-aslinda-bizim-de-sorunumuz-5856>

"If Iran becomes unstable... we as Turkey will also be impacted. If Iran is destabilized, the solution to the Syria problem will become more difficult, and tensions will increase in the Persian Gulf. The Yemen problem will become unsolvable. The new Saudi leadership will target Lebanon, and maybe Jordan.... the Middle East will face chaos... The already sensitive balances in the region will be disrupted...."



The Sino-Iranian Relationship: Stronger than Ever

OE Watch Commentary: Since the 1950s, China has maintained deep economic, political, and social relations with Iran. The accompanying article highlights recent Western concern over demonstrations in Iran, and makes the point that China will likely not back any actions that the UN might take against the Middle Eastern country. The article offers some specifics on business ties between the two nations. For example, Chinese investments in Iran include a \$538 million railway deal; and a \$10 billion credit line extended to Iranian banks to finance water, energy, and transport projects. In addition, China National Petroleum Corporation may take over French company Total's stake to develop Iran's South Pars gas field, should Total comply with any imposed sanctions and leave the country. Iran is clearly an important source of energy and a major hub in China's Belt and Road initiative. With so much already invested between the two countries, it would go against China's interests to support any UN-imposed sanctions.

End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)

“China would not be affected by anything the US decided to push at the UN. China and Russia would also not agree to penalties for the Iranian government...”

“...unrest (in Iran) was unlikely to deter the country's biggest foreign investor, China..”

Source: “Why China Could Double Down on its Support for Iran Despite US Calls for Action Over Freedom Protests,” *South China Morning Post*, 4 January 2018.
<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2126729/why-china-could-double-down-its-support-iran-despite-us#comments>

...unrest (in Iran) was unlikely to deter the country's biggest foreign investor, China, and could see it moving even closer to Iran...

Iran is a key player in China's “Belt and Road Initiative”, a massive plan to link China to Africa and Europe through trade and infrastructure.

One sign of this continued investment is state-owned China Railway Construction Corporation's announcement on Wednesday that it had sealed a 3.5 billion yuan (US\$538 million) railway deal with Iran.

... Chinese state-owned investment firm CITIC extended a US\$10 billion credit line to Iranian banks to finance water, energy and transport projects. China Development Bank followed that with another US\$15 billion loan.

China National Petroleum Corporation is also reportedly considering taking over French company Total's stake in a project to develop Iran's South Pars gas field if Total leaves Iran to comply with sanctions.

Yin Gang, a Middle East specialist at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said China would not be affected by anything the US decided to push at the UN. China and Russia would also not agree to penalties for the Iranian government, he said.



A 2016 meeting between Xi Jinping and Ali Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran.

Source: Official website of Ali Khamenei, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China%E2%80%93Iran_relations#/media/File:Ali_Khamenei_receives_Xi_Jinping_in_his_house_\(3\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China%E2%80%93Iran_relations#/media/File:Ali_Khamenei_receives_Xi_Jinping_in_his_house_(3).jpg), CC BY 4.0.



China Limits Internet Exposure to Iran Protests

OE Watch Commentary: On 2 January, *tuidang.org*, an anti-government Chinese-language website banned in China, posted the excerpted article about Chinese media coverage of the protests in Iran. According to the article, the Chinese government has been careful to cover only official news and narratives about the protests. Nevertheless, many Internet users in China have praised the protesters.

The news reports that do get disseminated on the protests reflect the Iranian government's position. However, discussion of the Iranian revolution of 1979 is not mentioned in Chinese media at all. According to the article, the coverage of the protests in Iran was part of a broader policy of China to control the ideologies that surface on the Internet and track, shut down, and forbid content that relates to revolutions. The article also points out that protests much closer to mainland China, such as in Hong Kong, have been censored from media reports in China.

Tuidang.org's own view is that the protests were small-scale at the start and were caused by discontent over the economy and corruption in Iran. However, as the protests spread to the cities they transformed into anti-government protests which demanded that President Rouhani step down.

End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)

Source: “伊朗反政府示威 中共禁报导? (Were the Iranian Anti-Government Protests Censored by the Chinese Communist Party?),” *tuidang.org*, 2 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/ohYQeA>

The Iranian people are currently carrying out large-scale anti-government demonstrations. It is reported that at least 12 people have been killed and hundreds have been arrested so far. Many Chinese netizens “praise” Iranian protesters, but the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) official media only reports the Iranian government’s position and deliberately conceals the truth about the Iranian public protests. On January 1, a special order circulated by the Central Propaganda Department that was also circulated on the mainland networks. An urgent directive ordered a plan for controlling the ideologies on the Internet and paying close attention to and tracking mentions of the Iranian revolutionaries, and if necessary, taking coercive measures such as shutting down networks. “

“Many Chinese netizens praise Iranian protesters but the Chinese Communist Party’s official media only reports the Iranian government’s position.”

Indonesian Perspectives on the Iran Protests

OE Watch Commentary: On 3 January, Indonesia's *detik.com* posted the excerpted article which discusses how Indonesians in Iran view the protests. From the perspective of the approximately 370 Indonesian students in Iran and the Indonesian ambassador to Iran, the protests were neither as potentially destabilizing as some media in the West had considered, nor did they signal an end to the government.

According to the Indonesian ambassador in Iran, many of the protests began with a small crowd and then moved to parks or universities where they grew. Police then typically used water cannons to drive away the protesters. The Indonesian ambassador also said that there was little discussion about who was behind the protests within diplomatic circles, and no rumors of Western backing for them, as Iran alleged.

In addition, the ambassador said the protests had not halted trading and academic activities for Indonesians in the country, with the exception of areas directly surrounding the protests. Nonetheless, the Indonesian ambassador urged its citizens in the country to avoid crowded areas as a security precaution. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “Di Balik Gelombang Protes Iran: Ketidakpuasan pada Pemerintahan Mullah (Behind Protests in Iran: Dissatisfaction for the Government of Mullahs),” *detik.com*, 3 January 2018. <https://news.detik.com/bbc/3796510/di-balik-gelombang-protes-iran-ketidakpuasan-pada-pemerintahan-mullah>

Ambassador Octavino Alimudin said, “The protests may begin with a crowd, then move on to the park or to the front of the university. “The security situation in Iran is generally reported to be better, although the security forces appear to be on guard at key points. Asep Nasrullah, an Indonesian student at Gorgan, for example, about 400 km from Tehran, said, “I went to the market and saw many policemen securing the city points. Two days ago there was a water cannon to drive them out.” According to Octavino Alimudin, diplomats share information, especially regarding security conditions, and we have not yet focused on finding out who is behind this all. “So far the demonstration have not forced daily activities to stop, including trade, except the shops around the demonstration sites.”

“Diplomats share information, especially regarding security conditions, and we have not yet focused on finding out who is behind this all.”

A Malaysian Perspective on US-Iran Relations

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpt from the Malaysian website *newstraitstimesonline.com* discusses a Malaysian perspective on US-Iran relations. The author expresses concern over a potential US initiative to create regime change in Iran, which he claims would destabilize the Middle East.

The article notes that the recent Iranian protests were spontaneous and not manipulated by an external power, while the 2009 protests were due to fraudulent elections. The author faults Iran for not creating better economic conditions for the Iranian people following a decrease in economic sanctions from the nuclear deal.

The author considers Iran a net positive in the region, claiming that Iran's coordination with Russia helped roll back the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). He claims that it was Saudi Arabia's ideology that led to the rise of ISIS, not Iran's. The author also suggests that even though the Iranian people may begrudge their own government, they would resent any attempt to interfere in their country's internal affairs. Furthermore, the author suggests that the US has a poor record in nation-building and there is no reason to think there would be any improvement if there was a regime change in Iran.

The author recommends that the US develop people-to-people ties with Iran and focus its efforts on winning Iranian hearts and minds instead of on issues related to the government. According to the author, reshaping Iran depends on empowering the people, including financially, thus suggesting that greater economic engagement would be key to improved relations between the US and Iranian citizens. He claims that "an approach akin to the Marshall Plan that won over Japan post-World War II through broad reconstruction programs will yield far better results than habitually threatening Iran's sovereignty." **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

"An approach akin to the Marshall Plan that won over Japan post-World War II through broad reconstruction programs will yield far better results than habitually threatening Iran's sovereignty."

Source: "Invading Iran will further Inflamm the Middle East," *Newstraitstimesonline.com*, 9 January 2018. <https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2018/01/323192/invading-iran-will-further-inflame-middle-east>

Whereas ordinary Iranians in 2009 were galvanized by a stolen election and led by intellectuals, these protests are spontaneous, rudderless and consequently more dangerous. A US-led military intervention to topple the Ayatollahs, however, is a terrible idea and will permanently destabilize the Middle East. Nevertheless, contrary to US anxieties, it is worth examining why Iran is a net positive for the Middle East. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) and its affiliated Shia militias, in cooperation with the Russian army, have been instrumental in breaking the back of global terrorists the Islamic State (IS). ...the reason IS had so effortlessly blitzed the Middle East in the first place was largely thanks to the web of radical thought spun across the region by Saudi Arabia.

When Trump begins... a foreign policy that does not fixate on sharpening contradictions, he will realize the key to reshaping Iran is by empowering its people and not further emptying their wallets.



Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif meeting Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman, May 2016.

Source: Tasnim News Agency, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AFM_Zarif_meets_Malaysian_FM_Anifah_Aman_08.jpg, CC BY 4.0.



India's Interest in Stability in Iran

OE Watch Commentary: The governments in South Asia have been closely watching the civil unrest in Iran as it has unfolded. As the excerpted articles demonstrate, India has a particular interest in the outcome. The first article comes from *The Wire*, an independent English news website in India, and offers some analysis of the situation from an Indian perspective. It notes that the unrest is “nowhere as big as what occurred during the Green Movement” and that “what is going on presently is not a revolutionary process, especially because it is unorganized and leaderless.” The author believes that “it is highly doubtful that the current Iranian unrest will somehow blossom into a flame that burns away Iran’s theocratic regime,” but that “once again, as in 2009, the Iranian regime finds itself thrown into an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy.”



Chabahar Port.
Source: Alireza numberone via Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3A%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%86%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%B1.jpg>, CC BY-SA 4.0.

While *The Wire* article does not necessarily advocate for any particular outcome of the situation in Iran, the article from the *Maharashtra Times*, a Marathi language newspaper with a large readership in Mumbai, discusses how India does have a vested interest in Iran. The article notes that on December 3, “the President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani inaugurated Chabahar port” and that “India has invested \$500 million in the project.” India has already sent a well-publicized shipment of grain to Afghanistan through Chabahar Port and the article notes that one of the goals of the port is to “control the ambitions of China (CPEC and Gwadar).” CPEC refers to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and Gwadar (Port) now serves as a waypoint in the corridor after significant Chinese investments. The author warns that “mismanagement in [Iran’s] Chabahar port will lead to benefits for Pakistan’s Gwadar port.” As the unrest and its aftermath continues to unfold in Iran, India will be closely watching what happens, particularly as it looks to compete with China. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“India has invested \$500 million in the project, while Indian companies have invested Rs 1 trillion [\$15.6 billion] in the ‘Chabahar finance center’...”

Source: Jahanbegloo, Ramin. “As Unrest Grips Iran for a Fifth Day, the Regime Is Once Again Locked in a Crisis of Legitimacy,” *The Wire*, 2 January 2018. <https://thewire.in/209899/iran-protest-corruption-supreme-leader-mashhad/>

...though the new riots in Iran are general and intense, thus far they are nowhere as big as what occurred during the Green Movement, in which millions took part. What is going on presently is not a revolutionary process, especially because it is unorganized and leaderless. Also, in contrast to 2009, these protests seem to be a direct challenge to the rule of the Supreme Leader Khamenei...

Most of the demonstrators who have been questioning the entire legitimacy of Iran’s supreme leader and the Islamic regime in the past week are, unlike their parents, children of the Iranian revolution. They belong to a new generation who did not experience the revolution of 1979 and want another Iran...Having said this, one needs to also add that Islamic Iran is more divided than at any time since 1979, a divide between the Rouhani government and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) that have the monopoly of violence in the country...But one way or another, it is highly doubtful that the current Iranian unrest will somehow blossom into a flame that burns away Iran’s theocratic regime. However, once again, as in 2009, the Iranian regime finds itself thrown into an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy...

Source: “चीन व पाकला शह देण्याची सागरी संधी (A Maritime Opportunity To Deal With China and Pakistan),” *Maharashtra Times*, 26 December 2017. <https://maharashtratimes.indiatimes.com/editorial/article/iranian-president-hassan-rouhani-inaugurates-chabahar-port/articleshow/62245802.cms>

On 3 December, the President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani inaugurated Chabahar port... welcom[ing] a new era [in the] tripartite relationship of Iran, India, and Afghanistan. India has invested \$500 million in the project, while Indian companies have invested Rs 1 trillion [\$15.6 billion] in the ‘Chabahar finance center’...All three countries will be getting individual benefits through this marine transport and will also control the ambitions of China (Sipak and Gwadar ports)...

Along with the Chabahar port formation, India needs to build a railway line of 500 km Zaheden in Iran. This route will help getting direct entry into Afghanistan...Around 218 km railway line work of the project has completed. The port and railway line needed to start at the same time to take the maximum financial benefit out of it. But the work delayed due to insufficient funds...

The mismanagement in Chabahar port will lead to benefits for Pakistan’s Gwadar port. This port is just 72 km away from Chabahar port. It is true that India has planned Chabahar port to challenge Gwadar port, but the development and survival capacity of port depends on its lucrative capacity of international trade...



Iran Approaches the Syria-Jordan Border

OE Watch Commentary: In the early stages of the Syrian conflict, President Bashar al-Assad famously quipped that Daraa Province, on the Syria-Jordan border, was as much a Jordanian problem as it was a Syrian one. Since November 2017, a growing number of Arabic-language media reports have highlighted Iran's growing influence in Daraa, something that inevitably affects Jordan. As the first accompanying excerpt suggests, "Iran does not aim to reach the Israel border with the Golan as much it wants to reach the Jordanian border."

A key element of Iran's strategy for gaining a foothold in Daraa involves establishing strong links with reliable allies on the ground. As the second article discusses, this effort predates the current conflict by several years and includes as its methods "spreading Shi'ism" and "gain[ing] loyalty in exchange for money and influence" in several parts of Daraa Province. Most recently, according to the article, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has established a new militia called the "Brigade 313" based in the Daraa town of Izraa. The article claims this group is present in one of the provincial capital's neighborhoods and that its members "have different security ID cards than those of the regime and have vast powers." Syrian army fighters, according to the article, are not allowed "into the neighborhoods they control without permission from the unit commander."

Iran's strategy for gaining a foothold in this area also includes diplomatic outreach. As the third accompanying article notes, recent geopolitical shifts have left the Jordanian government and people feeling "politically isolated [with] deep differences with our traditional allies." In response, "pundits have called on the leadership to react to such realities and open channels with perceived foes, including Iran." The article explains how several influential Jordanian writers have recently called on the kingdom to respond to Iranian overtures, with one of them noting: "We have to open the door for new players, especially those who stand with us... Iran is offering us economic partnership and we should accept." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

"...[Jordanian] pundits have called on the leadership to react to such realities and open channels with perceived foes, including Iran..."

Source:

سيناريوهات عسكرية تنتظر الجنوب السوري

Dhiaa Awada. "Military Scenarios Awaiting Southern Syria," *Enab Baladi*, 24 December 2017. <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/193437>

... Iran has become a prominent player in southern Syria... According to [Military Analyst Colonel Abdullah] al-Asaad, Iran does not aim to reach the Israel border with the Golan as much it wants to reach the Jordanian border and is currently focused on rural western Suwaida, of which it recently gained control. Al-Assad attributes this to the fact that Israel will not allow Iran to reach this border, which is confirmed by recent Israeli attacks and strikes on Iranian positions. Influential countries in southern Syria consider the arrival of Iranian militias to the Syria-Jordan border and the border with the occupied Golan as a "regional red line"...

Source:

اللواء 313 والتدخل الإيراني في درعا

Samir al-Saadi. "Brigade 313 and Iranian Intervention in Daraa," *al-Modon*, 11 November 2017. <https://goo.gl/Pf5gDL>

Iranian intervention in southern Syria began more than 10 years ago by spreading Shi'ism in the towns and villages of Shaykh Maskin, Nawa, Izraa, Qarfa and Bosra. Iran was also able to gain loyalty in exchange for money and influence. From this period until the Syrian Revolution was launched in 2011 many [Shi'a Mosques] were built in the region... In mid-2014 Iran began to organize its loyalists as the "Brigade 313" led by Mohammed Khodor (Abu Kazem) and numbering 75 members, with unlimited support and powers... "The Shi'a militiamen are based in the regime-controlled neighborhood of Dara'a al-Mahata and number no more than 100 members. They have different security ID cards than those of the regime and have vast powers." A [defected] officer also said that their clothing and food were also different, adding "They did not allow us into the neighborhoods they control without permission from the unit commander."

Source: Osama al-Sharif. "Amid shifting regional alliances, will Jordan open up to Iran?" *Al-Monitor*, 2 January 2018. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/01/jordan-iran-alliance-jerusalem-israel.html>

Still, there is a feeling of growing isolation and perhaps even marginalization by Jordan in light of shifting alliances and new geopolitical realities in the region. As such, pundits have called on the leadership to react to such realities and open channels with perceived foes, including Iran...

Amid such solemn developments, calls for Jordan to respond by improving ties with Tehran have been made by a number of influential pundits... Writing in the daily Al-Ghad on December 26, political commentator Mohammad Abu Rumman also called on the government to open up to Iran "especially now that Tehran is the gateway to Iraq with its vast market and standing offer to provide us with cheap oil." But, he added, "Such a move should not mean that we must change our alliances but to give us the chance to protect our national interests." Abu Rumman said, "We should be aware that we are politically isolated and that we have deep differences with our traditional allies." The editor of Al-Ghad, Jumana Ghuneimat, also called on Jordan to "review its traditional alliances at a time when Tehran is sending positive messages to Jordan." Writing on December 19, she said, "We have to open the door for new players, especially those who stand with us. ... Iran is offering us economic partnership and we should accept"...



Saudi-Iran Tensions Seen in Nigerian Crackdown on Shia Group

OE Watch Commentary: In December 2015, the Nigerian army clashed with the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), Nigeria's largest Shia group in northern Nigeria, killing hundreds of the Shia group's members. On the two-year anniversary of this incident, the excerpted article from Nigeria's *newtelegraphonline.com* offered perspectives on the reasons for the clash and subsequent killings. According to one perspective, Nigeria's crackdown on the group was due to the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran; and eliminating the Shia group was intended to please Saudi Arabia. According to this perspective Nigeria is loyal to Saudi Arabia.

The article claims that, after the incident, Nigerian president Mohammed Buhari spoke with Iranian president Rouhani and said he would safeguard all Muslim lives. While some in the Nigerian government saw that call as Iranian interference in Nigeria's internal affairs, the article suggests otherwise. It notes that despite a court order demanding the release of Ibrahim al-Zakzaky (the group's leader, who disappeared following the incident but recently resurfaced) from a hospital where has been receiving treatment for injuries sustained in the clashes, the Nigerian government has still not let him go free. The article points to this as evidence that the Nigerian government is not intending to assuage any of Iran's concerns about the incident. As such, the article claims that the crushing of the group's members may be connected to "an expression of Nigeria's loyalty to Saudi Arabia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: "El-Zakzaky: Hurting memories of a massacre (II)," *Newtelegraphonline.com*, 28 December 2017. <https://newtelegraphonline.com/2017/12/el-zakzaky-hurting-memories-massacre-ii/>

The diplomatic row between Saudi Arabia and Iran is a possible factor fueling the IMN [Islamic Movement of Nigeria] massacre in Nigeria. The standoff between the Sunni populated Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite populated Iran is already impacting the country, saying the crushing of the members by the military might not be unconnected with an expression of Nigeria's loyalty to Saudi Arabia. This view may have been affirmed by the reported phone call to Nigeria's President Mohammadu Buhari by the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani who was quoted by the IRNA, just two days after the incident, telling Buhari to ensure that "minor disputes must not be allowed to turn into deep differences." However, investigations by New Telegraph revealed that the Federal Government had seen the phone call as interference in its local affairs. This belief may be reinforced by the government's decision not to obey its own court order as regards the release El-Zakzaky..."

"The standoff between the Sunni populated Saudi Arabia and Shi'ite populated Iran is already impacting [Nigeria]."



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Understanding Turkey's Air and Missile Defense Deals

OE Watch Commentary: On 29 December, Turkey and Russia finalized a deal for Moscow to supply Ankara with S-400 surface-to-air missiles, that the two countries had been working on for over a year. Just as the details of that deal were becoming clear, on 5 January, Turkey also took the first step towards a deal with the Franco-Italian group EUROSAM to develop and produce a long-range air and missile defense system. While this development caused some confusion about Turkey's motivations, the accompanying passages from Turkish sources shed light on Turkey's calculations for each of these deals. The passages highlight that the S-400s will fulfill Turkey's need for air defense, while the EUROSAM deal will fulfill Turkey's need for missile defense.

The first accompanying passage discusses the EUROSAM deal, which "aims to defend against threats from stealth aircraft, drones and missiles..." The passage also quotes a EUROSAM statement which says, "The joint development activity is expected to support Turkey's indigenous air and missile development program in addition to opening up prospects for exports and longer-term co-operation of Turkey, Italy and France."

This is crucial, because the S-400 deal with Russia would not be able to satisfy this need. The second and third accompanying passages highlight the assessments of two Turkish experts on weapons systems and military strategy who have analyzed the technical and political/strategic aspects of the S-400 purchase. The second passage, from a report by Can Kasapoğlu, defense analyst at the Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research, highlights his core military assessment of the S-400 deal, which is that "Ankara's immediate aim is to procure the system primarily for air defense missions as a surface-to-air missile (SAM) asset, rather than performing ballistic missile defense (BMD) functions. This priority largely stems from the Turkish Air Force's currently low pilot-to-cockpit ratio (0.8:1 by open-source 2016 estimates)... Turkey will first and foremost operate the S-400s as a stopgap measure to augment its air superiority calculus over geo-strategically crucial areas."

In the third accompanying passage, Sıtkı Egeli, one of Turkey's foremost experts on weapons, defense and strategy, notes that "a modern air defense concept is based on many receptive, weapons and communications systems working in an integrated way that close the gaps in each other's vulnerabilities and that complement each other..." The author then continues by saying that otherwise, enemies will target the weakest point of the defense chain to destroy the air defense architecture that way. He notes, for example, that "the S-400, which is known to be effective in long-range and mid/high altitude settings, should be expected to be targeted with low-altitude reconnaissance missiles or mid-range ballistic missiles that the S-400 can't address."

This is where the EUROSAM deal comes in. As the final passage discusses, "in the aftermath of 15 July... there was a reduction in the number of F-16 pilots, creating a need to develop [Turkey's own] air defense. This is the reason for the S-400 purchase." However, since the S-400 is not compatible with NATO infrastructure, it will not be able to protect against missile defense. For this reason, Sinan Ülgen, President of the Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research, calls this system "half-blind." The author says that this is why Turkey is buying its missile defense system from EUROSAM, which is compatible with the NATO infrastructure. Thus, a much more effective defense system is established.

End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)

"We are actually buying two separate missile defense systems. Turkey has two needs to ensure its security. One is air defense, and the second is missile defense. The S-400s will fulfill the first, and the EUROSAM [deal] will fulfill the second."

Source: "Turkey awards missile system study to Franco-Italian group, Turkish firms," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 5 January 2018. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-awards-missile-system-study-to-franco-italian-group-turkish-firms-125304>

Turkey took a step on January 5 toward closer defense cooperation with France and Italy with a contract for a study into the development and production of a long-range air and missile defense system.... Turkey awarded the 18-month contract to the Franco-Italian Eurosam consortium and its Turkish partners Aselsan and Roketsan, Eurosam said in statement.

... The three-country missile program ... aims to defend against threats from stealth aircraft, drones and missiles, Eurosam said.

"The joint development activity is expected to support Turkey's indigenous air and missile development program in addition to opening up prospects for exports and longer-term co-operation of Turkey, Italy and France," Eurosam said.

Source: Can Kasapoğlu, "Turkey's S-400 Dilemma," [Turkey] Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research (EDAM), July 2017. <http://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/s400en.pdf>

This report's core military assessment of a possible S-400 deal concludes that Ankara's immediate aim is to procure the system primarily for air defense missions as a surface-to-air missile (SAM) asset, rather than performing ballistic missile defense (BMD) functions. This priority largely stems from the Turkish Air Force's currently low pilot-to-cockpit ratio (0.8:1 by open-source 2016 estimates). Thus, ... Turkey will first and foremost operate the S-400s as a stopgap measure to augment its air superiority calculus over geo-strategically crucial areas.

Although it is not a combat-tested system, not only Russian sources but also many Western military analysts evaluate that the S-400 is a robust anti-access & area-denial (A2/AD) asset. Therefore, if SAM configuration is planned correctly, the system could theoretically give a boost to Turkey's air defense capabilities. However, it would be unrealistic to portray the S-400 solution as a panacea for protecting the Turkish territory and population against ballistic missiles. In the absence of a robust network of satellites, radars, early-warning aircraft, and sensors connected with a tactical data link, as well as without a layered interception capacity including exo-atmospheric coverage, the S-400s' BMD role would be very limited."

(continued)

Continued: Understanding Turkey's Air and Missile Defense Deals

Source: Sıtkı Egeli, "S-400 alımı, hava savunması, füze savunması, NATO: Mitler ve Gerçekler (The S-400 purchase, air defense, missile defense, NATO: Myths and Realities)," *Kokpit.aero*, 2 August 2017. <http://www.kokpit.aero/s400-sitki-egeli>

"... a modern air defense concept is based on many receptive, weapons and communications systems working in an integrated way that closes the gaps in each other's vulnerabilities and that complement each other; as opposed to a single system. Otherwise, enemies will target the weakest point of the defense chain and try to destroy the air defense architecture that way. For example, the S-400, which is known to be effective in long-range and mid/high altitude settings, should be expected to be targeted with low-altitude reconnaissance missiles or mid-range ballistic missiles that the S-400 can't address."

Source: Verda Özer, "Füzeler Rusya'dan mı Batı'dan mı? (Are the Missiles from Russia or from the West?)," *Milliyet.com.tr*, 6 January 2018. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/verda-ozer/fuzeler-rusya-dan-mi-bati-dan-mi--2585992/>

Right as all the details about the S-400 missile system from Russia were revealed.... All of a sudden, the news that President Erdogan would sign a missile agreement with joint French-Italian EUROSAM comes out. Now people are confused: Are we buying the missile system from Russia? If so, then where are we putting this European defense system?...

The answer is simple. We are actually buying two separate missile defense systems. Turkey has two needs to ensure its security. One is air defense, and the second is missile defense. The S-400s will fulfill the first, and the EUROSAM [deal] will fulfill the second.

The air defense system's mission is to identify the planes that violate our air space and take them out of Turkish territory or when necessary, to shoot them down. Traditionally, this was done by Turkey's own national air defense infrastructure. But, in the aftermath of 15 July, with the operations against the Turkish Armed Forces, there was a reduction in the number of F-16 pilots, creating a need to develop our air defense. This is the reason for the S-400 purchase.

....Now, since the Russian S-400 system cannot be integrated into this NATO infrastructure, it cannot be used to protect against missile defense. For this reason, Sinan Ülgen, President of the Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Research, says that this system is "half-blind." And that is why Turkey is buying its missile defense system from EUROSAM, which is compatible with the NATO infrastructure. Thus, a much more effective defense system is established, that can use NATO's "signals intelligence," which the S-400's wouldn't be able to access.

What is the strategic meaning of this dual defense system? Is Turkey trying to balance its alliances with Russia and the West? Sinan Ülgen's answer is critical: Turkey is cooperating with Russia to alleviate the gap in its air defense in the aftermath of 15 July. So this is a short-term, pragmatic cooperation. The alliance with the West is long-term, permanent and is continuing as it always has. So, the two are not alternatives to each other."



S-400 Triumf air defence system transporter erector launcher.

Source: Vitaly V. Kuzmin via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AS-400_Triumf-34.jpg, CC BY SA 4.0.



Turkey to Establish S-400 Missile Defense Regiment Command

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from Turkish daily *HaberTurk* discusses plans for an “S-400 Missile Defense Regiment Command” to be established within the Turkish Armed Forces, to handle the S-400s that are being purchased from Russia. According to the passage, the regiment will consist of two battalions and four squadrons, and will have 36 launchers, each with the capacity to fire four missiles, for a total capacity of 144 missiles. In addition to discussing the components of the system, the passage also notes that the system will integrate a “friend-enemy recognition system.” As the passage notes, Turkey is the first country to purchase the system from Russia, in a deal worth \$2.5 billion. Delivery of the first system is planned for the first quarter of 2020.

End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)

“The ‘S-400 Missile Defense Regiment Command’... will consist of two battalions and four squadrons. The Turkish Armed Forces will deploy an S-400 battalion at two different points across the country, each having 72 missiles, for a total of 144 missiles.”

Source: “S-400 sistemi için ‘S-400 Füze Savunma Alay Komutanlığı’ kurulacak (S-400 Missile Defense Regiment Command to be established for the S-400 system),” *Haberturk.com.tr*, 4 January 2018. <http://www.haberturk.com/s-400-sistemi-icin-s-400-fuze-savunma-alay-komutanligi-kurulacak-1781973>

The two S-400 systems purchased from Russia will be organized in the Turkish Armed Forces under a “S-400 Missile Defense Regiment Command.” The regiment command will consist of two battalions and four squadrons. The Turkish Armed Forces will deploy an S-400 battalion at two different points across the country, each having 72 missiles, for a total of 144 missiles.

... Each S-400 system will include missile ramps called “launchers,” along with long-range missiles called “Big Bird,” an engagement radar which guides missiles called “Grave Stone,” and a command-control tool named “55K6E.” Each of the elements that make up the system are placed on a vehicle with wheels. As such, they can be transported to whichever region needs it during a crisis.

.... According to the current plans, ...there will be a total of 36 launchers in the regiment. Each launcher has the capacity to fire four missiles [at once]. Thus, there will be a capacity to fire 144 missiles at once.

Turkey will be the first NATO member to purchase S-400s from Russia. According to the agreement, Russia will be paid \$2.5 billion,... the payment will be made in rubles. 45% of the total will be made up front. The other 55% will be credited by Russia.... Delivery of the first system is planned for the first quarter of 2020.

The S-400 system’s control will be completely in the hands of the Turkish Armed Forces. While it will not be integrated into the NATO system, it will also not be in Russia’s control. The system will integrate a “friend-enemy recognition system.” ... With the system, each squadron will be able to recognize 36 separate enemy threats and respond.





Egypt-Russia Strategic Cooperation Goes Nuclear

OE Watch Commentary: Russian-Egyptian strategic cooperation continues to deepen, most recently with a December 2017 agreement for Russia's state-owned nuclear power company Rosatom to build Egypt's first ever nuclear power plant in al-Dabaa, along the Mediterranean coast. The accompanying excerpts highlight foreign perspectives on the impact of deepening Russian-Egypt strategic cooperation and the nuclear agreement in particular.

The first article, from the Saudi daily *Elaph*, notes Israeli concerns with Egypt's nascent nuclear program, which some in Israel fear could eventually become weaponized. However, the article also cites two Arab experts, one of whom downplays Israeli concerns as "not based on reality," while the other points to a plan by "regional and international powers [who seek] to plunge the region into an arms race in order to exhaust its resources."

The second article, from the magazine of Egypt's semi-official daily *al-Ahram*, is an enthusiastic overview of the burgeoning strategic alliance between Egypt and Russia. The article characterizes the al-Dabaa nuclear deal as the start of "100 new years of strategic partnership." The article adds that Egypt chose Rosatom from among 6 bidders because "the Russian offer stated that al-Dabaa remained the property of the Egyptian Arab Republic and that Egypt had the right to collaborate with other countries in the subsequent stages for the plant," in addition to the fact that "the Russian offer did not impose any political conditions on Egypt to build the nuclear plant." More broadly, the article celebrates Russian support for Egypt and argues that the countries face similar foreign and domestic challenges "targeting their political stability and threatening their national security."

The third article is written by Abdel-Halim Qandil, a prominent Egyptian intellectual who was among the most outspoken critics of ex-president Hosni Mubarak. Qandil praises the deepening strategic cooperation with Russia as a way for Egypt to free itself from "the shackles of American occupation... on [Egypt's] political, economic and military decision-making." For the past four decades, he argues, Cairo's regional policies "were nothing but a translation from English to Arabic of Washington's decisions." He claims that the past four years have changed this and that we are now in the "heart of the American autumn in Egypt," with the al-Dabaa nuclear plant project marking a major turning point in America's fading influence in Egypt.

End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)

"...Russia helped Egypt return with strength to the regional and international stage and supports its participation in all regional initiatives while also fighting against any attempts to marginalize Egypt's role..."

Source:

البرنامج النووي المصري يثير قلق إسرائيل

Sabri Abdel Hafidh. "Egyptian Nuclear Program Worries Israel," *Elaph*, 11 January 2018. <http://elaph.com/Web/News/2018/1/1185489.html>

Israel expressed concern with the possibility of Egypt expanding its nuclear program beyond the reason for its establishment - electricity generation - and to include nuclear weapons. According to Rafael Ofek, an Israeli nuclear technology expert, "Israel's intelligence agencies have had doubts, for several years, that Egypt does not only seek to possess nuclear energy but wants to secretly build nuclear military capabilities, especially since Cairo has allocated enormous sums to strengthening and arming its military"... Egyptian production, in particular the military, has progressed significantly in recent decades. Nuclear weapons are back on the agenda for Egypt and Saudi Arabia, after the agreement with Iran in July 2015... Military expert, Gen. Fouad Hussein, said that Israeli concerns are not based on reality, noting that the Egyptian nuclear program has well known goals ever since the agreement was signed with Russia... Dr. Mohammed Yosri, an expert in nuclear engineering... said that Egypt has fought against the spread of nuclear weapons and adopted an initiative for the Middle East to be a nuclear weapons-free zone. However, several regional and international powers seek to plunge the region into an arms race in order to exhaust its resources. Egypt will not fall into this quagmire... This is not the first time Israel has expressed concern regarding Egypt's nuclear program, which is to be established with Russian help.

Source: من السد العالي إلى محطة الضبعة النووية: 100 عام من التحالف الإستراتيجي بين روسيا ومصر
"Ayman Samir. "From the High Aswan Dam to the al-Dabaa Nuclear Plant: 100 Years of Strategic Alliance between Russia and Egypt," *al-Ahram al-Arabi*, 13 December 2017. <http://arabi.ahram.org.eg/News/129443.aspx>

The Egyptian-Russian "Achievements Summit" which brought together Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi launched 100 new years of strategic partnership between the two countries, following the signing of the Dabaa Agreement which is in force for 90 years beginning 2026. This adds to more than 250 years of strong relationships between the Egyptian and Russian people... Russia helped Egypt return with strength to the regional and international stage and supports its participation in all regional initiatives while also fighting against any attempts to marginalize Egypt's role... Russia sees Egypt as an "Axis of Stability" in the Middle East and investing in Egypt as "Investing in Stability" ... Egypt chose the Russian offer out of 6 offers, considering that the Russian offer stated that al-Dabaa remained the property of the Egyptian Arab Republic and that Egypt had the right to collaborate with other countries in the subsequent stages for the plant. It also lines up with Egypt's political, technical and social interests... The Russian offer did not impose any political conditions on Egypt to build the nuclear plant... The political relationship between the two countries has boomed since the 30 June Revolution, resulting in visits by Russia's foreign and defense ministers to Egypt on 14 November 2013 and a visit by Egypt's foreign and defense ministers to Russia on 12-13 February 2014. The political discussions took place under the "2+2" model, making Egypt the only Arab country with which Moscow follows this model, which it employs with five other countries: the United States, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Japan... a commitment by both countries to support one another politically at the regional and international levels, in light of the foreign and domestic challenges faced by both countries targeting their political stability and threatening their national security.

(continued)



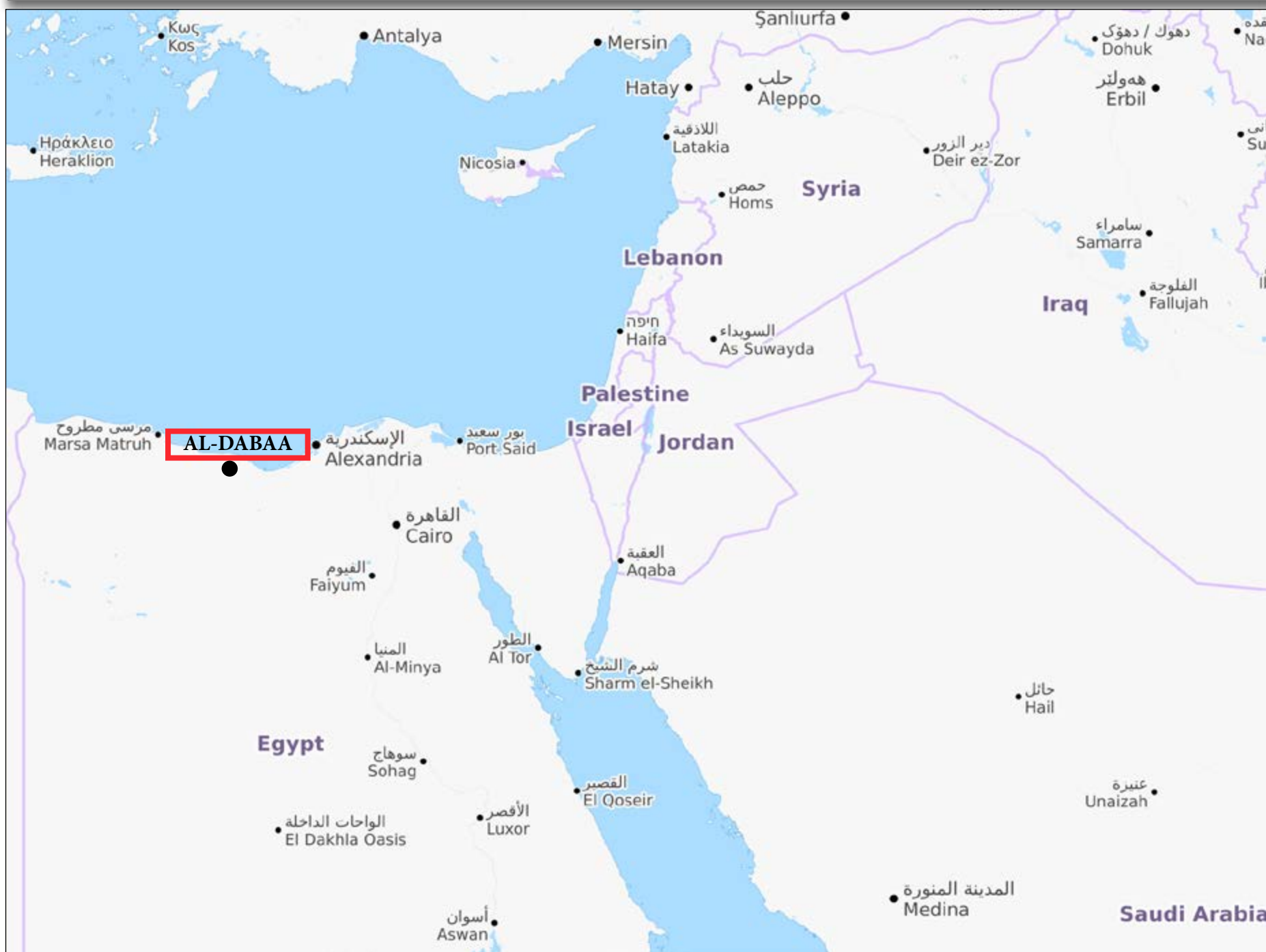
Continued: Egypt-Russia Strategic Cooperation Goes Nuclear

Source:

Abdel-Halim Qandil. "America's Autumn in Egypt," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18 December 2017. <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=846230>

خريف أمريكا في مصر

... the shackles of American occupation for four decades on our political, economic and military decision-making are being broken... Relations with the United States became a heavy burden and have been lightened to the extent possible over the past four years. All that remains of them are ghostly shadows and persistent crises... the years of flourishing Egypt-US relations were also years of Egyptian decline... Cairo became nothing, a lost echo without a voice of its own. Its regional policies were nothing but a translation from English to Arabic of Washington's decisions... Today we are in the heart of the American autumn in Egypt. The launch of the al-Dabaa nuclear plant, in collaboration with Russia, may constitute the fall of the major autumn leaf in the American tree in Egypt... It is no coincidence that the political environment that led to the al-Dabaa project resembles in many ways what happened in Egypt in the mid-1950s, when the monopoly of Western weapons for the Egyptian military was broken and weapons procurement was diversified, including an increased reliance on Soviet weapons... something similar has happened over the past four years, with Egypt breaking its near-total reliance on American weapons and the development of a comprehensive policy of diversified weapons sources and a major leap in local military production capabilities... Egyptian interest in the Palestinian issue has increased, with "Tight Link" policies with all Palestinian factions. This bothers Israel and angers Washington, which attempted to punish Egypt by withholding aid and limiting the weapons provided to the Egyptian military and opening its appetite to put additional pressure on Egypt. This does not seem to have had an effect for Washington, as Egypt made its decision and appears more committed than at any point in the past to end the American occupation on Egyptian decision-making.



Location of El Dabaa.

Source: Author using OpenStreetMap © OpenStreetMap contributors, <https://www.openstreetmap.org/search?query=dabaa%20egypt#map=6/32.036/30.872&layers=T>, CC BY-SA 2.0 (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/copyright>).



ISIS Goes Underground... in the Desert

OE Watch Commentary: The desert of al-Anbar Province, along with the adjacent areas north of the Euphrates River and across the border with Syria, constitute the key remaining safe haven for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The area's physical environment is challenging, partly because the natural caves dotting the vast and sparsely populated landscape make concealment relatively easy for insurgents. As the first accompanying article notes, the terrain "is difficult for tanks and military equipment to enter, with the exception of soldiers, who in the past have turned into easy targets for al-Qaeda and later ISIS gunmen." The area includes several wadis (dry riverbeds), including Wadi Hawran which stretches over 300 miles, and "a vast mountain range with tens of caves and earthen cavities, in addition to those dug by the group itself."

Locating subterranean shelters can be painstaking, "as they are below ground and have been carefully camouflaged." An Iraqi tribal leader fighting ISIS (cited in the third accompanying excerpt) notes how the "primitive method" of "traversing long distances looking for [the tunnels]" is the only way to comb the area. As the second passage notes, even when cave and tunnel entrances are found, their occupants may be absent, as ISIS informants within the military and security apparatus are believed to tip off the militants, who are then able to slip away for the duration of the operation only to return shortly thereafter. Either way, tunnels or caves often remain only partially explored; for as a source quoted in the second excerpt notes, "Security forces do not know the end of these conduits, since in some of the clearing operations they go in for a single kilometer but then turn back, fearing collapse of the tunnel or coming under attack." The second excerpt also recounts the case of an occupied tunnel being destroyed by airstrikes, to which an influential tribal leader in al-Anbar objected, as "it would have been preferable to have sprayed something to drug them rather than killing them, to know where these tunnels led and who had paid for them."

The third accompanying passage highlights the large number of tunnels across the Syria-Iraq desert border, including one recently found that was up to a mile long. The article cites a colonel in the Iraqi Border Guard Force who claims that "ISIS has a map of tunnels dug professionally over the past years, which we believe are as many as 100 along the border. That is what we are now looking for and they must be destroyed no matter what the cost." **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source:

معارك الصحراء العراقية... الدبابات لا تصل إلى كل الأماكن

Mohammed Ali. "Iraqi Desert Battle... Tanks Cannot Reach Every Place," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 25 November 2017. <https://goo.gl/2D1XMY>

...*"Around 2,000 fighters from ISIS are believed to be in the desert following their withdrawal from the cities that were liberated in Iraq, as well as in [the Syrian cities of] Deir Ezzor, al-Raqqa and Albu Kamal. This is due to the desert's expansive area, the ease of hiding there, and its difficult topography, which provided and continues to provide safe haven to armed groups ever since the occupation of Iraq in 2003 and up until now"...*

The difficulty of the operations stems from the presence of terrain that is hard for tanks and military equipment to enter, with the exception of soldiers who in the past have turned into easy targets for al-Qaeda and later ISIS gunmen. During the occupation of Iraq, American forces lost tens of soldiers in operations launched to control this very desert, which had become a haven for gunmen and outlaws in Iraq. The desert has 16 wadis, most prominent among them Wadi Hawran... as well as a vast mountain range with tens of caves and earthen cavities, in addition to those dug by the group itself. It is hard to find them as they are below ground and have been carefully camouflaged. The desert is also hot and dry in the summer, and extremely cold in the winter.

Source:

الأنبار تبحث عن مملكة داعش السرية تحت الأرض

Wael Na'ima. "Anabar Seeks ISIS Secret Underground Kingdom," *al-Mada*, 14 December 2017. <https://goo.gl/vA1TVb>

Since the liberation of the districts of Rawa and al-Waqa'in in western Anbar last month, local officials have begun warning about the Sahara Desert and the danger that it poses to cities. These warnings returned despite Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's announcement early this week that the entirety of Iraq had been liberated from ISIS. The fighters have disappeared in vast areas that contain large geological folds and bends, which make it harder to find them. Most prominent among these areas are the wadis (dry riverbeds) and the largest among them is Wadi Hawran, which extends for 540 kilometers... According to Qatri al-Obaidi, the Popular Mobilization leader in western al-Anbar, "the al-Anbar desert represents 51% of Iraq's territory and it cannot be controlled in one or two months... The operations have not and will not stop. We need constant raids and clearing operations before we can say that the wadis are clear of ISIS"... Officials in al-Anbar believe that "ISIS spies" within security institutions notify the organization on the timing of military operations so they can hide for a temporary period...

According to an anonymous military source in al-Anbar: "The Tribal Mobilizations and army units were fired upon from a hidden spot in northwest Hit, resulting in one soldier being killed. The remaining attackers fled into a tunnel at the mountain foothills. Security forces tried to dig into the tunnel but were unable due to the rocky nature, which precluded the option of widening it. They relied on the American side, which confirmed the presence of 22 militants inside the tunnel. At midnight on Tuesday, aircraft struck the tunnel with a missile, destroying it completely. We discovered that it was 60 meters long." Naim al-Kau'd, for his part, objected to the killing of the gunmen, arguing instead for detaining them to know how they had hid in tunnels for two and half years since Hit had been liberated, saying that "It would have been preferable to have sprayed something to drug them rather than killing them, to know where these tunnels led and who had paid for them." The security source in al-Anbar added that ISIS relies on natural tunnels to hide and then digs and expands them for kilometers. He added: "Security forces do not know the end of these conduits, since in some of the clearing operations they go in for a single kilometer but then turn back, fearing collapse of the tunnel or coming under attack."

(continued)



Continued: ISIS Goes Underground... in the Desert

Source:

١٠٠ نفق تؤخر غلق الحدود العراقية السورية... وخشية من غدر نظام الأسد

Mohammed Ali, "100 Tunnels Delay Sealing the Iraq-Syria Border... and Fears of Assad Regime Perfidy," *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 2 January 2018.

<https://goo.gl/WhPPLn>

The greatest challenge in [sealing the border] are the tunnels dug by [ISIS] between Syria and Iraq, of which there are approximately 100 according to Haqqi Muahid al-Janabi, a colonel in the border guard forces. He added that his forces had discovered 4 tunnels in the past month, some up to 1.5 kilometers long and via which ISIS members moved to and from Iraq... "ISIS has a map of tunnels dug professionally over the past years, which we believe are as many as 100 along the border. That is what we are now looking for and they must be destroyed no matter what the cost"... Shaykh Fawwaz al-Awada, head of one of the tribes fighting against ISIS, noted that finding these tunnels would be among their priorities, explaining that they would resort to primitive methods, which involve "traversing long distances looking for [the tunnels], even if this takes two or three more months."

“The fighters have disappeared in vast areas that contain large geological folds and bends, which make it harder to find them.”



Bedouin, Syrian Desert (2010).

Source: By yeowatzup (Bedouin, Syrian Desert), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABedouin%2C_Syrian_Desert_\(5080529920\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ABedouin%2C_Syrian_Desert_(5080529920).jpg), CC BY 2.0.

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<http://online.fliphtml5.com/tqvn/mcja/#p=32>



EGYPT AND ISRAEL TUNNEL NEUTRALIZATION EFFORTS IN GAZA

by LUCAS WINTER, FMSO



The ISIS Economy: Will Losing Territory Cripple Islamic State?

by Ludovico Carlino

Republished in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor, Vol. 15, Issue 23, dated 9 December 2017, Edited for OE Watch.
For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/economy-will-losing-territory-cripple-islamic-state/>

OE Watch Commentary: Two recent offensives in Syria against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have squeezed its so-called caliphate into a small pocket of territory between the Syrian and the Iraqi border. More crucially, these two successful operations have almost ended the group's ability to generate the revenue necessary to sustain its operations. As the first accompanying passage notes, on 12 November 2017, the SDF, a coalition of Sunni/Kurdish fighters spearheading the offensive against ISIS in eastern Syria, seized the al-Tanak oilfield in Deir al-Zour province from the group. Just a few weeks earlier, on 21 October, the Syrian army wrested control of the al-Omar oilfield, also in Deir al-Zour province, from ISIS. The ground operation, supported by air power, ultimately deprived the terrorist group of the most important energy asset under its control since 2014.

Since the establishment of its self-proclaimed caliphate in 2014, ISIS had effectively reached economic self-sufficiency through the illegal exploitation of energy, business, agricultural and commercial assets in territory under its control in Syria and Iraq. As such, it was frequently described as the richest terrorist organization in history. Without that constant flow of cash replenishing its coffers and underpinning the attempts at governance and the highly bureaucratic structure it set up, its caliphate (used in this article to refer to the administrative body of ISIS) would probably never have reached the semblance of a functioning entity.

At the time, ISIS's finances were based on four pillars. The first was the production and smuggling of energy-related products, such as oil, natural gas and gasoline. Second, ISIS had a pervasive system of taxation on the population and on the profits of all commercial activities held in areas under its control as well as the confiscation of commercial assets and properties. Third, ISIS conducted a range of illegal activities, including bank robberies, drug and antique smuggling, kidnappings for ransom and the exploitation of local resources such as agriculture. Finally, ISIS managed state-run businesses, including small enterprises such as transport companies or real estate agencies.

At the peak of ISIS territorial strength in Syria and Iraq, around late 2014, the group was exploiting more than 360 oil and gas fields in the two countries, including those in the oil-rich Deir al-Zour province, home to two-thirds of Syria's energy assets. Meanwhile, about nine million people were living in the caliphate and were compelled to pay taxes and fines to the group or face brutal punishments. Major population centers — including Mosul, Ramadi and Tal Afar in Iraq, and Raqqa, Deir al-Zour and Mayadin in Syria — provided the group with crowded markets from which a share of the profits ended up in its own treasury. This strict control over populace and territory, coupled with the lawlessness in Syria and western Iraq, ultimately enabled ISIS to create a parallel economy to sustain its territorial gains and fund its war machine.

However, providing basic services to the local population, running militant training camps and supporting thousands of fighters and their families who had migrated from different parts of the world to pursue their dream of living in a state “truly governed by Islamic law” all required regular funds. As this system was largely dependent on the exploitation of territory, ISIS' ability to generate money has always been strictly correlated to its level of territorial control.

By about mid-2015, for instance, when its caliphate still encompassed large swaths of territory in both Syria and Iraq, ISIS' overall monthly revenue was estimated at around \$80 million. Approximately 50% of this came from taxation and confiscation, while some 43% came from oil revenue. In early 2016, as its territorial control started to decline rapidly, the group's monthly revenues dropped by about 30 percent— as the population living within the caliphate declined to around six million people, leaving it with fewer people and businesses to tax and less property and land to confiscate. Meanwhile, oil production also went down from 33,000 barrels to 21,000 barrels per day. This was the result of energy assets being retaken from ISIS' control, especially in Iraq, and the increased military efforts of the US-led coalition to degrade the group's ability to produce energy-related products. Almost all of the main oilfields operated by the group were targeted by airstrikes, resulting in reports of extensive structural damage and the slowing of oil production.

By June 2017, three years after ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the caliphate, the group had lost more than 60 percent of its territory and 80 percent of its revenues. There was a steady decline in the group's financial streams: oil production and smuggling, taxation, confiscation and other illicit activities. As the second accompanying passage notes, average monthly oil revenue went down by 80%, and income from taxation and confiscation has fallen by 79 percent. Territorial losses have played a key role in contributing to this loss of revenue. In particular, the group has been hurt by the recapturing of heavily populated Iraqi cities, such as Mosul, and oil-rich areas in the Syrian provinces of Raqqa and Homs.

As the group's strategic priority will now be waging a guerrilla style insurgency in both Syria and Iraq, the group will likely channel the money it has stockpiled over the years to fund its future campaigns. This is a considerable amount, and will be sufficient for ISIS to remain relevant in the years to come, even without territory under its control to exploit. **End OE Watch Commentary (Carlino)**

“The sharp decline in territory has also damaged IS's ability to collect revenue from oil production and smuggling, taxation, confiscation, and other similar activities.”

(continued)

Continued: The ISIS Economy: Will Losing Territory Cripple Islamic State?

Source: عاصفة الجزيرة تحرر حقل التنك النفطي وقرية البصيرة (Al-Jazeera Storm liberates the al-Tanak oilfield and the town of al-Busayrah), *Hawarnews*, 12 November 2017. <https://goo.gl/9Ubivs>

Al-Jazeera storm [the name of the SDF operation] today liberated the Al-Tanak oil field and the village of Al-Basira in the countryside of Deir Al-Zour from the hands of mercenaries."

Source: "IS has lost 60% of territory, 80% of revenue: analysts," *Al Monitor*, 29 June 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/afp/2017/06/syria-conflict-iraq-is.html#ixzz54Nq6Lt4H>

"The sharp decline in territory has also damaged IS's ability to collect revenue from oil production and smuggling, taxation, confiscation, and other similar activities.

IHS Markit said IS's average monthly revenue has plummeted by 80 percent, from \$81 million in the second quarter of 2015 to just \$16 million in the second quarter of 2017."



Flags of the Syrian Democratic Forces, People's Protection Units, and Women's Protection Units at the center of the city of Raqqa after its complete capture by the SDF. Source: By Voice of America Kurdish via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ASDF%2C_YPG%2C_and_YPJ_flags_in_Raqqa_centre.png, Public Domain.



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Somalia: Anger at AMISOM following al-Shabaab Attacks

OE Watch Commentary: On 14 October 2017, a truck bomb exploded in the center of Mogadishu, claiming the lives of over 500 people. This shattered any thoughts that the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) had finally secured the city, or at least made it safe enough that no major attacks by al-Shabaab could occur. Al-Shabaab never claimed responsibility, but as noted in the accompanying article, the attack featured the group's signature traits. In the aftermath of the destruction, much of the people's anger is directed at the very organization tasked with protecting them: AMISOM.

According to the article, AMISOM has secured the major towns – though the 14 October explosion calls that into question – but has failed to dominate large swaths of territory outside Mogadishu and the regional/state capitals. One expert quoted in the article relays that AMISOM is ill-equipped to take the fight into rural areas or to embark on a counterinsurgency campaign. Furthermore, as the accompanying article demonstrates, AMISOM is sometimes thought of as part of the problem, accused of selling weapons to the very terrorist organization it is supposed to be combating. Still, despite its numerous flaws, it is thought that the planned and ongoing withdrawal of AMISOM forces will only make matters worse for the country as the Somali armed forces are not considered capable enough to replace them.

As the accompanying article details, there are numerous other problems hindering Somalia's fight against al-Shabaab. These include a lack of Somali forensic labs and the requisite skills within the Somali security apparatus to conduct investigations on attacks involving explosives. Without such equipment and capabilities the Somalis are often dependent on foreign governments for significant investigative assistance when a truck bomb goes off in Mogadishu or a suicide vest at a checkpoint. This has led to claims that the findings from such incidents are not always readily shared with the Somalis.

There are ongoing training efforts directed at the Somali forces, if not in forensic investigations at least in basic soldiering. However with that training occurring in Uganda, Sudan, and Djibouti, as well as in Somalia itself by several foreign militaries, there is concern that a lack of uniformity and/or cohesion could occur. Such fractures within the Somali military might become particularly apparent when AMISOM withdraws.

The numerous problems Somalia faces in its fight against al-Shabaab, brought to the forefront by the 14 October truck bombing, are forcing many to reassess the best way to defeat the terrorist organization. This includes the idea of possibly further loosening the arms embargo that adversely impacts government forces. Meanwhile many in the country will continue to feel under siege as al-Shabaab continues to prove it is not defeated. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“With the October 14, 2017 truck bombing in Mogadishu, the local terrorist group Al Shabaab... served notice.. that it was still capable of striking panic into the nation's heart, despite its territorial loss.”



Brigadier General Kayanja Muhanga, the African Union Mission in Somalia's Ugandan Contingent Commander, visits the site of a VBIED attack conducted by the militant group al-Shabaab in the Somali capital of Mogadishu.

Source: AMISOM, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2017_10_15_VBIED-3_\(37714449661\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2017_10_15_VBIED-3_(37714449661).jpg), Public Domain.

Source: Nurddin Farah, “Why Somalia is Al Shabaab playground,” *The East African*, 30 December 2017. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/magazine/foreign-factor-in-the-siege-of-Somalia/434746-4246234-hu28v0z/index.html>

And with the Somali National Army not equipped to take over from AMISOM, and AMISOM engaged in corruption and selling weapons to Al Shabaab, Kenya accused of exporting charcoal, Ethiopia suspected of having its own designs, the US, Britain and the UN's information-sharing not forthcoming, is there any wonder why there has been no tangible progress in the fight against the terrorists in Somalia?

Under Siad Barre, Somalia had been a secular state, quite unlike any other Muslim nation. Now the Arabs had a free rein to impose their language, harden the Somalis' moderate way of worship and change the traditional manner in which our people dressed.

With the October 14, 2017 truck bombing in Mogadishu, the local terrorist group Al Shabaab had just served notice on everyone that it was still capable of striking panic into the nation's heart, despite its territorial loss.



ISIS Grows in the Sahel

OE Watch Commentary: The good news is that the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has been dislodged from large areas in Iraq and Syria; the bad news is that it is trying to make up for that lost ground in Africa. As the accompanying article relates, ISIS's African territorial push has been deadly, with the losses including four US and five Nigerien soldiers from an October clash with the jihadists on the Mali border. Unfortunately, Mali and Niger are not the only countries where ISIS has a foothold, making them a dangerous threat across a significant portion of the Sahel. Even more discouraging, as the article continues, is that the prospects of defeating ISIS and/or neutralizing its radical ideology are far from assured.

French and other western troops, in conjunction with local forces, are determined to defeat the group, but there have been very few clear victories against the terrorists. A Middle East and Africa analyst for the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* has predicted that the Western troops' commitment to the mission would wane over time, with a significant factor for this decline being a loss of trust in local partners. Meanwhile, those local partners feel marginalized, as they are instructed what to do by their western protectors, who they feel do not understand the local conditions such as tribal politics and how to deal with clans. The analyst claims that "Mali is our Afghanistan," pointing out the two countries are following similar patterns: "first a military triumph, then a failed reconstruction and then a gradual spread of new insurrection, more brutal and more politically shrewd than the previous one."

A think-tank study has provided a series of reasons for why jihadism has spread in the Sahel. One may think the area would be rather difficult for such a movement to take root, given that the people traditionally have not been known for religious zealotry. However, the spread of Wahhabism, the strict interpretation of Sunni Islam that originated in Saudi Arabia, has disseminated throughout the region, and with it the violence of jihadism.

Another major factor allowing for the rise of terrorism in the region has been the presence of essentially ungoverned spaces. These voids are sometimes filled with terrorist organizations such as ISIS or al-Qaeda that provide services and/or opportunities absent governments that do not. Further compounding the problem is that these ungoverned spaces do not lend themselves to creating any sense of national identity.

As the article points out, French President Macron has called for urgent action to combat Islamic extremism in Africa. However, while speed is required to meet the challenge of terrorism, it will take a long time to defeat it. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“‘Mali is our Afghanistan’ ... both countries [are] following similar patterns: first a military triumph, then a failed reconstruction and then a gradual spread of new insurrection, more brutal and more politically shrewd than the previous one.”



International terrorists on their way to fight in northern Mali.

Source: Magharebia, <https://goo.gl/WK11Fz>, CC By 2.0

Source: "Islamic State seeks new foothold in Africa," *Deutsche Welle*, 2 January 2018. <http://www.dw.com/en/islamic-state-seeks-new-foothold-in-africa/a-41977922>

After the terrorist organization al Qaeda, now the so-called "Islamic State" is trying to expand its influence in Africa. Military means alone are not enough to fight it.

It's not yet clear whether money or military aid will be enough to stop the expansion of jihadism in the region, or indeed to drive it back. The challenges facing the alliance are immense.

[A] Middle East and Africa analyst for French daily newspaper Le Monde wrote in November: "Mali is our Afghanistan." He said both countries were following similar patterns: first a military triumph, then a failed reconstruction and then a gradual spread of new insurrection, more brutal and more politically shrewd than the previous one...

All this has prompted French President Emmanuel Macron to call for international and urgent action against Islamist extremism in Africa. But he surely knows that speed is but one factor in the fight against terrorism. Paradoxically, what he might need most of all to win this battle is time. A lot of time.



Cameroon: Angry Anglophones, Government Forces, and a Deteriorating Situation

OE Watch Commentary: In October 2016, a group of Anglophone lawyers went on strike to reject the appointment of French-educated judges to their courts. Back then, few would have predicted that this modest initiative would eventually lead to the present state of violent affairs between the English-speaking minority and the Francophone dominated government in Cameroon. Indeed, as the accompanying article relates, this is now Cameroon's most alarming internal conflict since it gained independence from France in 1960, with scores of civilians and at least sixteen army and police officers dead. Thousands have fled to Nigeria for safety, and the country's elite Rapid Intervention Battalion, normally used to fight Boko Haram, has been deployed to the country's English-speaking regions.

The government's initial instinct to respond to protests and grievances with force – the first demonstrations in the latter part of 2016 were met with security forces and mass arrests – along with later measures such as cutting off the Internet for periods of several months have been characterized as counterproductive. There were talks at one time, but they ended when the government not only banned the negotiating group representing the Anglophones, but also detained its leaders. Thus, what had once been mainly grievances against the perceived imposition of French in the judicial system has now escalated into demands for more autonomy and even secession among some. In fact, on 1 October 2017 that last demand played out when the Southern Cameroonian Ambazonia Consortium United Front declared the independence of the Federal Republic of Ambazonia. The Cameroonian government responded to the declaration with what the UN described as “excessive use of force.” Since then the separatists have struck back, launching attacks that have resulted in several casualties.

These tensions between the government and the Anglophone community come at a particularly bad time for Cameroon. The northern part of the country is combating Boko Haram and trying to deal with the thousands of refugees that the insurgency has created. In the east, there are refugees as well as rebels from the ongoing troubles in the Central African Republic. All of this is playing out against the backdrop of the country's economy suffering from a precipitous drop in commodity prices. There is yet one more factor to throw into the mix: multiple sets of elections, including for president, this year. These elections could help decide whether the country continues to emphasize a military solution to the issue of Anglophone grievances or, as the UN has been pushing, engage in talks to find a peaceful one.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)

“Even moderate voices have been pushed to more extreme positions, and Cameroon has seen attacks on security forces and growing threats of a violent insurrection.”



Ambazonia is the name given to the area in dark orange which some Anglophones in Cameroon want to secede.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southern_cameroon_map.JPG, Originated CIA World Factbook, Public Domain.

Source: Amindeh Blaise Atabong, “Pushed to extremes: Cameroon’s escalating Anglophone crisis,” *African Arguments*, 8 January 2018. <http://africanarguments.org/2018/01/08/pushed-to-extremes-camerouns-anglophone-crisis-escalates/>

What began as more specific grievances regarding the perceived imposition of French in courts and schools has escalated into demands for greater autonomy, federalization and even secession. Meanwhile, the repression of largely peaceful protests has contributed to the emergence of armed groups calling for secession. Even moderate voices have been pushed to more extreme positions, and Cameroon has seen attacks on security forces and growing threats of a violent insurrection.

However, many Cameroonians are concerned that the conflict will deepen and spread. As the government’s crackdown continues, there are suggestions that militant elements within the secessionist groups are gaining in strength, number and resolve.

In December, Brigadier General Donatien Melingui Nouma, commander of the troops in the South West region, revealed that some of his troops had defected to the separatists. He also claimed: “We know that they are trained by foreigners, including some white mercenaries whose nationality I would not mention.”



Counterinsurgency in the Sahel

OE Watch Commentary: As the accompanying article relates, several African countries had warned against the potential consequences of a military intervention in Libya, but the intervention proceeded anyway, successfully toppling Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. However, the spillover from that operation bolstered Mali's Tuareg rebellion, which in turn led to a jihadist incursion. France launched Operation Serval in January 2013 to provide military support to their former colony, but soon the radical Islamists spread to neighboring countries. France then launched Operation Barkhane in August 2014 to combat the threat that was now engulfing much of the Sahel. Other counterinsurgency forces have since joined France in the fight. The accompanying article provides insight into who is present in this heavily militarized region.

The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) consists of about 13,000 troops. Its original mission in 2013 was to stabilize northern Mali following France's devastating attacks on the jihadists there. Unfortunately for MINUSMA the jihadists quickly rebounded and, as the article relates, the UN peacekeeping force found itself incapable of adequately dealing with the mobile and experienced guerrillas. Repeated revisions of its mandate and heavy funding still have not rendered MINUSMA capable of completing its core missions of protecting civilians and defending human rights.

The newest arrival among the international contingents is the Group of Five Sahel joint force (FC-G5 S). While its 5,000 troops are from the African countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, much but not all of its funding comes from outside the continent, including France, the European Union (EU), Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. FC-G5 S is expected to reach its full capacity in March 2018, but that date may be overly ambitious given that the force still faces numerous challenges, including the question of long-term funding. Another force comprised of African troops – the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) – has also struggled with budgetary issues, degrading its combat effectiveness.

The EU and the United States are also involved in counterinsurgency operations in the Sahel. With so many different forces, there are concerns about coordinating activities. In addition, as the article points out, errant bombs and mistaken actions could risk driving the locals to side with the jihadists. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

Source: Fabien Offner, "A Dozen Shades of Khaki: Counter-insurgency Operations in the Sahel," *IRIN*, 11 January 2018. <http://www.irinnews.org/analysis/2018/01/11/dozen-shades-khaki-counter-insurgency-operations-sahel>

In 2011, several African states warned about the likely consequences of an international military intervention in Libya aimed at toppling Muammar Gaddafi. Now, six years after his death, security in the Sahel region has never been worse.

"Mali's roots were rotten, it just needed a breeze to make it collapse," summarized a former Malian minister recently.

France never fully left Africa when it ceased to be a colonial power, and it keeps making new appearances.

"This is exactly what we never wanted to see in West Africa: very powerful bombs which, despite their reputed precision, cause dozens of civilian casualties, and provide armed, anti-Western jihadist groups with hundreds of new candidates for recruitment," warned Gilles Yabi of the Wathi think-tank.

"Now, six years after [Gaddafi's] death, security in the Sahel region has never been worse."



A Dutch soldier with MINUSMA, one of several military forces in the Sahel.

Source: Ministry of Defense, Netherlands, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dutch_MINUSMA_troops_UN_mission_Mali_01.jpg, Public Domain.



Hiding Terrorist Funding Flows with Mobile Money Systems

OE Watch Commentary: “Follow the money” has long been an aphorism to combat crime, but as communications technology has become increasingly sophisticated, following the money has become markedly more difficult. As the accompanying article relates, the rise of mobile money systems in Africa has enabled criminals and terrorists to readily hide their flow of illicit funds.

Regarding criminal or terrorist fund transfers, much of the money is moved in small amounts, often at less than \$1,000 per transaction, so that it does not garner unusual attention. As a result, the authorities are frequently unable to detect such transfers among a very large quantity of legitimate mobile transactions such as remittances home from workers abroad. A transaction where terrorists send \$300 using a mobile money system is very similar to \$300 sent for school fees and supplies, even if security services have the capability of reading the messages, which they frequently do not.

Law enforcement’s job of sifting through mobile traffic to find illicit fund transfers is further complicated by the fact that terrorist organizations often run legitimate businesses, or at least what outwardly appear to be legitimate businesses, such as small restaurants, gas stations, and transport companies. This results in money flows for terrorist activities and business expenses being comingled, making detection of the former difficult from the latter.

The increasing widespread use of cryptocurrencies has added yet another layer of difficulty to those trying to stem the tide of terrorism funding. Cryptocurrencies, whose encryption is essentially unbreakable, are increasingly being used on mobile devices, meaning that law enforcement is probably going to have to determine if illicit fund transfers are taking place through other means than just examining cell phones and similar devices.

According to one expert cited in the article regarding Uganda, the decline of suspicious transactions in that country’s financial sector probably reflects more of a way that terrorists are moving money, such as using virtual currencies, than an actual decline in terrorist funding. With terrorists exploiting technologies that make fund transfers almost invisible, security agencies will need to adopt more innovative strategies if they want to limit one of the main resources – money – fueling terrorist activities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Huge volumes of small transactions handled by mobile money services in the face of minimal surveillance have enabled swift movement of funds for terrorist groups.”



Mobile money systems have been a boon to many Africans for legitimate transactions, but terrorists also use them to make it difficult to detect fund transfers.

Source: Erik Hersman/Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/whiteafrican/2620808675/>, CC BY 2.0.

Source: Bernard Busuulwa, “Uganda: How Terror Groups Keep Cash Flows Under the Radar, *The East African*, 12 December 2017. <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/How-terror-groups-keep-cash-flows-under-the-radar-/2560-4224890-f4aqvznz/index.html>

Huge volumes of small transactions handled by mobile money services in the face of minimal surveillance have enabled swift movement of funds for terrorist groups.

Mobile money systems pose the biggest challenge to Ugandan agencies fighting illicit financial flows.

“Terrorism financing is harder to tackle, compared with money laundering, because it is channeled through legitimate channels like mobile money services and involves small amounts, estimated at less than \$1,000 per transaction,” said a senior manager at FIA [Financial Intelligence Authority].



Somaliland: Peaceful Elections in an Unrecognized Country

OE Watch Commentary: No country recognizes Somaliland's claim to sovereignty. However, as the accompanying article notes, with yet another "presidential election" just completed (the third in 14 years), the self-declared country is hoping its peaceful transition of power will garner additional international respect and perhaps even the recognition it so desires.

For many this Somaliland election was particularly noteworthy. Besides a successful voter registration effort that for the first time ever used an iris-scanner system in Africa, the unrecognized nation also held its first ever presidential debate. This is not to say that Somaliland's "democracy" is perfect. Its presidential election was postponed for two years, and personal tensions between the challengers, along with accusations of voter fraud, led to protests which led to three deaths. Despite these setbacks, the actual overall process was largely peaceful, and international observers declared there were no significant election day voting irregularities.

Clan loyalty, as has happened in previous elections, largely shaped the voting. Isaaq sub-clans Habar Awal and Habar Jeclo came together to provide Muse Bihi Abdi from the Peace, Unity, and Development Party, also known as the Kulmiye Party, with the presidency. While elections are successful in providing a relatively smooth transition in power, they are also divisive activities that can fuel clan anger. As the accompanying article relates, the new president must fulfill his promises to heal the divides and tamp down clan-based politics, or the democratic process could derail.

Somalia continues to claim Somaliland for itself, as one part of one nation. Somaliland, which has largely avoided the anarchy and violence that have plagued Somalia for decades, continues to press for independence. By showcasing warts and all during its successful democratic transition of power, Somaliland is hoping to convince the world that the time has come for it to be finally be recognized as a sovereign nation, and that it can serve as an example for other nations in the region to improve their stability and security. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

Source: Omar S. Mahmood, "Somaliland's New President Has Work to Do," *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 10 January 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/somalilands-new-president-has-work-to-do>

With the inauguration of Muse Bihi Abdi on 13 December 2017, Somaliland's oft-delayed presidential election process officially ended. The Kulmiye party retained power, but the president changed for the third time in 14 years – impressive for an unrecognized nation, all the more so considering the neighborhood it's in.

Divisions revealed by the highly contested election must be managed to avoid becoming entrenched.

Yet the vote also demonstrated the limits of Somaliland's current reach, and the continued divisions that characterize the east. Voting was ultimately cancelled in the town of Badhan, and the electoral process excluded the Puntland-occupied districts of Las Qoray and Dhahar.

“The Kulmiye party retained power, but the president changed for the third time in 14 years – impressive for an unrecognized nation, all the more so considering the neighborhood it's in.”



The House of Elders (Upper House of Parliament) in Hargeisa, capital of Somaliland (Somalia).
Source: Vincent van Zeijst via Wikipedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Somalia_\(Somaliland\),_Hargeisa,_House_of_Elders.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Somalia_(Somaliland),_Hargeisa,_House_of_Elders.JPG), CC 4.0.



Senegal Stops Terrorist Attacks

OE Watch Commentary: On 4 January, the excerpted French-language article in the Malian publication *kibaru.ml* reported on the ongoing terrorist trial in Dakar of Senegalese national, Makhtar Diokhané. A notable revelation in the article is that Diokhané had received money from the Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, to send 15 Senegalese fighters to join Boko Haram. Diokhané had also met with the aide to Mokhtar Belmokhtar (former military commander of al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, or “the Bin Laden of the Sahara” as the article refers to him) in Mali in 2011. Diokhané’s plans went wrong, however, when he was arrested in Niger on the way to receive the fighters who had fought for Boko Haram in 2016.

According to the article, another Senegalese cell planned to conduct a terrorist attack in Senegal on the country’s Independence Day on 4 April 2017 or on Eid Al Kabir on 1 September 2017. The Mali-based jihadist group, Ansar Dine, was directing the cell and provided its members with fake Senegalese passports. The cell was in southern Senegal awaiting orders to attack. Although the cell had taken precautions to avoid the fate of an imam arrested in 2015 for communicating with Boko Haram, the Senegalese security services were, according to the report, able to use cyber surveillance to track their communications. This is how that plot was broken up.

These two cases show that although Senegal has remained one of the few West African countries to not have suffered a terrorist attack in the last several decades, there are terrorists seeking to end this relative calm. In addition, the article shows that the terrorists are attempting to learn from past mistakes and are seeking to reach out to other groups in Mali and as far as Nigeria. Nonetheless, thus far Senegal has proven adept and shown its capabilities in cyber surveillance and coordinating counterterrorist activities with other countries in the region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“There was a cyber surveillance device capable of undermining any attempt to carry out subversive actions by jihadists on Senegalese soil.”

Source: “Les projets d’attentats d’Ansar Dine au Sénégal, la rencontre de Makhtar Diokhané avec Mokhtar Belmokhtar (The plans of Ansar Dine attacks in Senegal, the meeting of Makhtar Diokhan with Mokhtar Belmokhtar),” *kibaru.ml*, 4 January 2018. <https://kibaru.ml/fr/art/bzuvd>

Ansar Dine planned to attack specific targets in Senegal. The jihadists had chosen April 4, 2017, the independence day of Senegal, to carry out the assault. Their project failed, but they did not bury their desire to attack Senegal. A new date was fixed, September 1 coinciding with the celebration of Eid Al Kabir. These failures are explained by the increased surveillance of exchanges between jihadists by the Senegalese security services. Indeed, there was a cyber surveillance device capable of undermining any attempt to carry out subversive actions by jihadists on Senegalese soil.

In any case, it emerges from Makhtar Diokhané’s hearings that he had met one of the forefathers of jihad in the Sahara or the Bin Laden of the Sahara, Mokhtar Belmokhtar in 2011. It was agreed that Senegalese who would later join Boko Haram would do a fifteen-day military training and integrate with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. He was spotted in Handak after receiving funds from Abubakar Shekau in the amount of 6,000,000 naira (about 9 million FCFA), and he organized the return of Senegalese who fought for Boko Haram.

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Big Colombian Election Coming

OE Watch Commentary: The title of the accompanying source, “Crucial Elections in Colombia,” sums up a consequential political condition in Latin America right now. Colombians are facing particularly important presidential elections, the first round of which is scheduled for 27 May. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority in the first round, a runoff of the two top vote-getters will take place on 17 June. The winner will likely be inaugurated on 7 August. The accompanying passage gives a good summary of the candidate field, and provides insight into what exactly is at stake. The central issue by far is the fate of the FARC agreement, which many Colombians (apparently the majority, according to the reference) find intolerable. The polarization of opinions for and against the FARC agreement is palpable and is by far the main sentiment at issue in these elections.

The reference is from a perspective that is anti-FARC and dissatisfied with the power sharing agreement between the FARC and the government. Current President Juan Manuel Santos was apparently one of the intellectual authors of the FARC agreement, and is an active supporter of its implementation, but he cannot run for a third term. Organized electoral opposition to the FARC agreement is divided as to candidates. It appears that from among the ostensibly opposition candidates, the names to watch are Alejandro Ordóñez, Iván Duque, and Marta Lucía Ramírez. At this distance in time it is difficult to interpret from the accompanying reference (or other sources, for that matter) which of these has the greatest likelihood of becoming the opposition candidate for the second round, much less if one of them could win outright in the first. It seems from the reference that from among the opposition candidates, Alejandro Ordóñez is the most clearly anti-FARC/anti-agreement.

The other side of the ledger has more names to follow, but is less varied as to the likely policy course. These candidates would presumably protect and advance the FARC agreement enthusiastically. They include Gustavo Petro, Sergio Fajardo, Clara López, Humberto de la Calle and Piedad Córdoba. It is a bank of candidates clearly identifiable as ‘leftist’ in tone and record.

The reference also expresses a reappearing fear that the government will attempt to violate the integrity of the electoral process. Judging from the accompanying reference, as public decisions go, Colombia’s presidential election will be a significant decider of the region’s overall ideological azimuth. Colombia may continue to move toward socialism of the ‘Bolivarian’ variety, or, depending on the choice of candidates from within the opposition bank, move sharply away from it and back toward confrontation with the FARC and its allies. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“The immense majority of the population... is in disagreement with... what was signed...”



Alejandro Ordóñez, Candidate apparently most likely to dismantle FARC accords if elected president of Colombia.

Source: By Sdrotriquezt via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Alejandro_Ord%C3%B3%C3%B1ez_urosario.jpg, CC BY SA 4.0.

Source: Darío Acevedo Carmona, “Elecciones cruciales en Colombia (Crucial elections in Colombia),” *El Espectador, Bogotá and Periódico Debate, Bogotá*, 7 January 2018. <http://www.periodicodebate.com/index.php/opinion/columnistas-nacionales/item/17693-elecciones-cruciales-en-colombia/>

“...The immense majority of the population, according to numerous surveys, is in disagreement with a great part of what was signed...The immense majority of the population, according to numerous surveys, is in disagreement with a great part of what was signed and worried about the cost paid that rises in the bankruptcy of institutions, the demoralization of the armed forces, the arrogant management of the FARC, ...etc...”

Those who are trying to gather the discontent about the national disaster propose to create a grand alliance to which for now concur the Centro Democrático [party] with its presidential candidate Iván Duque..., sectors of conservatism and independents that support the candidacies of Marta Lucía Ramírez y Alejandro Ordóñez....

This would be one of the large blocks into which the electoral contest would be divided. The other group of parties, movements and candidates unify in the idea of defending the peace accord...”

Venezuelan Rebel Killed

OE Watch Commentary: On 15 January 2018, a Bolivarian unit (NFI) surrounded and killed a small group of armed men, including Oscar Pérez, a former Venezuelan police pilot who had mutinied earlier last year. He was leading what appears to have been an armed guerrilla resistance group. During the siege, Mr. Pérez posted videos onto the Internet which appear to confirm that he and his band were killed in spite of efforts to surrender. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“They are shooting at us....We said we were going to turn ourselves in. Venezuela, they do not want us to surrender. They literally want to kill us. They just said so....”

Source: Oscar Pérez, “[VIDEO] ¡UN CRIMEN DE GUERRA! Así fue perpetrado el asesinato de Oscar Perez ([Video] A War Crime! This is how the murder of Oscar Perez was perpetrated),” *DolarToday*, 16 January 2016. <https://dolartoday.com/video-un-crimen-de-guerra-asi-fue-perpetrado-el-asesinato-de-oscar-perez/>

“...The immense majority of the population, according to numerous surveys, is in disagreement with a great part of what was signed...The immense majority of the population, according to numerous surveys, is in disagreement with a great part of what was signed and worried about the cost paid that rises in the bankruptcy of institutions, the demoralization of the armed forces, the arrogant management of the FARC, ...etc...”

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This would be one of the large blocks into which the electoral contest would be divided. The other group of parties, movements and candidates unify in the idea of defending the peace accord...”

ELN Wants What the FARC Has

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying reference gives what appears to be a well-reasoned opinion regarding the National Liberation Army’s (ELN) negotiating strategy and position of advantage. As the passage indicates, the ELN has been conducting harmful attacks to show its power, after having demanded a bilateral cease-fire to off-foot government forces. It looks to the FARC agreement as its negotiating model, with its leadership in complete sanctuary, where it can plan moves on its own time. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...the State is at a disadvantage in the dialogues with the ELN...”



Statements on the second round of peace talks between the Colombian government and the ELN, July 2017.

Source: Juan David Morales Gaviria, “El Eln quiere poner en jaque al gobierno de Juan Manuel Santos (The ELN wants to put the government of Juan Manuel Santos in check),” *El Mundo*, Medellín, 10 January 2018. <http://www.elmundo.com/noticia/Eln-quiere-poner-en-jaque-al-Gobierno-de-Juan-Manuel-Santos/365554>

“The attacks perpetrated this Wednesday on the part of the Army of National Liberation (ELN) against the oil infrastructure of the country and against members of the Armed Forces obey, according to experts consulted by El Mundo, to another move in the political chess game that that guerrilla group conducted to show its power and expose how, at the point of ending its term, the administration of President Juan Manuel Santos is found to be weakened....Finally, the expert (retired Colonel John Marulanda, NFI) believes that the State is at a disadvantage in the dialogues with the ELN because the guerrilla group is managing timing of the negotiations at its whim. ‘Just as happened with the FARC, it is going to be very difficult to negotiate while the ELN heads are in Ecuador in a safe place and well-protected. The head of the snake continues there, safe and sound, cogitating what its next move will be in this political chess match.’”



The Dark Web Plagues Latin America and the Caribbean

OE Watch Commentary: Latin America currently represents 43% of the world's online community, with user connectivity having surged by 1300% over the last decade. However, as the accompanying passages discuss, progress comes at a high price. Increased user connectivity is also giving rise to cybercrimes and the dark web, which enables connections between terrorist organizations and organized crime groups. According to the Colombian Police Cyber Center report on cybercrime and related threats in Colombia in 2016 and 2017, cybercrime costs the world \$575 billion annually (equivalent to 0.5% of the global GDP). In Latin America and the Caribbean, cybercrime costs \$92 billion annually (16% of the cost of cybercrime worldwide).

Enhanced access to the cyber world leads to the empowerment of organized crime groups in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to Amado Philip de Andrés of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Central America and the Caribbean, the region is home to some of the world's most dominant criminal networks dedicated to running advanced cyber schemes. As the second accompanying source discusses, Brazil is the regional leader for creating and employing banking malware which entail malicious email campaigns that trick people into clicking corrupt website links. Cyber criminals are then able to steal login and financial data with ease. The source further indicates that Colombia is also highly prone to cyber attacks with 198 million reported as of September 2017.

In addition, increased connectivity has led to growing links between South American criminal networks and Islamic terrorist organizations. Transnational money laundering has at times brought organized crime groups into contact with such terrorist organizations. For example, as the third passage discusses, international prosecutors alleged that a suspected operative for the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah used encrypted communications to coordinate money laundering activities for Colombia's Office of Envigado (Oficina de Envigado) crime group.

To address the rising cyber threat environment, the UNODC recommends a four-point approach rooted in "prevention, partnerships, protection and investigation." The first step in this strategy is for regional governments to raise awareness and invest in resources to properly train cybercrime investigators. Since most countries do not have the means to do so, some nations such as Brazil, Chile, and Colombia are relying on their Armed Forces to help establish mechanisms to support the generation of solid cyber defense and security strategies. For instance, the Colombian War College (ESDEGUE, per its Spanish acronym) – the institution responsible for training military and civilian leaders on issues relating to defense and security in Colombia – developed the "Cyber attack Simulation Against Critical Infrastructure for Decision-Making" workshop. Participants studied how attacks to critical infrastructure can occur (for example, attacks against the power system, such as a pipeline) to learn about decision-making under pressure during a cyber crisis. In Colombia, capacity building is done within the defense sector at three levels: through the Colombian Ministry of National Defense and its cyber emergency response team; the National Police's Cyber Center; the Joint Cyber Command, which include the Colombian Army, Navy, and Air Force cyber units. Colombia is so focused on fighting cybercrime that its government introduced a bill to adhere to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, which, as the final source discusses, aims to tackle computer-related crime through cooperation among nations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

"... the Islamic group Hezbollah... is said to have ties to criminal groups in Latin America such as the Office of Envigado of Colombia which supposedly helps the extremist group in money laundering endeavors."

Source: "Mercados negros conectados: Cómo la web oscura ha potenciado el crimen organizado en Latinoamérica (The Connected Black Market: How the Dark Web Has Empowered LatAm Organized Crime)," *Insight Crime*, 17 September 2017. <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/mercados-negros-conectados-web-oscura-potenciado-crimen-organizado-latinoamerica/>

Internet user connectivity in Latin America alone has surged by 1,300 percent over the last 10 years and the region currently represents 43 percent of the world's online community.

Source: "Colombia ha registrado 198 millones de ataques cibernéticos durante 2017 (Colombia Recorded 198 Million Cyber-Attacks in 2017)," *NC Radio*, 26 September 2017. <http://www.rcnradio.com/nacional/colombia-ha-registrado-198-millones-de-ataques-ciberneticos-durante-2017/>

A private study released in Bogotá by Digiware monitored more than 13,000 devices in the region and reported that Colombia is impacted by an average of 542,465 cyber-attacks every day. Of these attacks 39.56 percent target the financial sector; 15.4 target the government and 25.5 target telecommunications.

Source: "Nexos entre Hezbolá y Oficina de Envigado (Links Between Hezbollah and Office of Envigado)," *El Espectador*, 07 December 2017. <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/elmundo/dea-revela-nexos-entre-hezbola-y-oficina-de-envigado-articulo-614167>

A report released on Monday [December 7th]... indicated that the Islamic group Hezbollah was responsible for trafficking large quantities of cocaine in the United States and Europe. Furthermore, the group is said to have ties to criminal groups in Latin America such as the Office of Envigado of Colombia which supposedly helps the extremist group in money laundering endeavors.

Source: "Colombia quiere unirse al Convenio de Budapest contra la ciberdelincuencia (Colombia Wants to Adhere to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime)," *Silicon Week*, 15 August 2017. <http://www.siliconweek.com/projects/public-sector/colombia-quiere-unirse-al-convenio-budapest-la-ciberdelincuencia-87084>

The Budapest Convention is an international agreement that aims to tackle computer-related crime through the harmonization of national laws, improvement of research techniques, and increasing cooperation between States and their relationship with the private sector, in order to prevent crimes in cyberspace.



ISIS Recruitment Represents Growing Trend in Trinidad and Tobago

OE Watch Commentary: Recruitment by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Trinidad and Tobago (TTO) is a growing concern. According to the first passage, “at least 125 Trinidadians have traveled to the Middle East to fight for the terrorist group over the past four years. This figure makes TTO, a country of 1.3 million people, the largest per-capita hub of ISIS recruits in the Western Hemisphere.”

Multiple questions come to mind when considering ISIS recruitment as an emerging threat in TTO. Will the Caribbean, and more specifically TTO, be ready to receive these fighters once they return home? Will the country be able to deal with lone wolf attacks? Will neighboring countries be targets of newly trained ISIS soldiers? Considering that a flight from TTO to Miami is only 3.5 hours, will this pose a threat to the United States?

It is also important to consider why TTO is a hotbed of recruitment and how so many individuals were able to leave and return to the country without any issues. The answer is surprisingly simple: state policy allows it. In other words, Trinidadians can travel and train with ISIS fighters, and then return to the country and still enjoy the rights and privileges as any other citizen who leaves and returns to the country would. This policy was enacted when the Syrian conflict first began in 2011 and is still in place.

As the second passage discusses, ISIS tends to target poverty stricken and unemployed males who have limited opportunities for success in an oil-rich country whose economy has suffered as a result of declining oil prices. To aid in recruitment, ISIS crafted a discourse that draws from structural conditions that have historically ostracized young Trinidadian Muslims, and speaks to the very same demographics that other terrorist organizations have targeted in the past.

TTO now openly recognizes that ISIS recruitment is an issue and authorities are taking steps to thwart this. As the third passage discusses, they plan to fight this trend through increased surveillance of homegrown terrorist groups and by closely monitoring any efforts by Trinidadians to send money that would support ISIS operations. The government has also discussed mechanisms that will help authorities recognize conditions that predispose individuals to radicalization. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“... an estimated 125 Trinidadians have traveled to the Middle East to fight for ISIS over the past four years. The figure makes Trinidad and Tobago, a country of 1.3 million people, the largest per-capita hub of ISIS recruitment in the Western Hemisphere.”

Source: “Como uma ilha caribenha virou o país com maior concentração de membros do EI (How Dia a Caribbean Island Became the Country with the Highest Concentration of ISIS Members),” *UOL Notícias*, 12 March 2017. <https://noticias.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/bbc/2017/03/12/como-uma-ilha-caribenha-virou-o-pais-com-maior-concentracao-de-membros-do-ei.htm>

According to the “Index of Global Terrorism,” published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, an estimated 125 Trinidadians have traveled to the Middle East to fight for ISIS over the past four years. The figure makes Trinidad and Tobago, a country of 1.3 million people, the largest per-capita hub of ISIS recruitment in the Western Hemisphere.

Source: “Por qué Trinidad y Tobago se convirtió en el país occidental con más yihadistas de Estado Islámico per cápita (Why Trinidad and Tobago Became the Western Country with More Jihadists of Islamic State per capita),” *BBC Mundo*, 08 March 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-internacional-39149454>

ISIS recruitment seems to have intensified with the falling price of oil in the country as it negatively affected the economy and increased poverty leaving limited economic opportunities for young adults. Local Muslim leaders indicated that the economic crisis prompted many young Muslim followers to join criminal gangs during which time they were radicalized. At this point, security officials and terrorism experts believe that as many as 125 fighters and their relatives have traveled from Trinidad and Tobago to Turkey and on to ISIS-controlled areas over the last four years.

Source: “Trinidad & Tobago, ¿semillero del Estado Islámico? (Trinidad & Tobago, Hotbed of the Islamic State?),” *El Espectador*, 22 February 2017. <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/el-mundo/trinidad-y-tobago-semillero-del-estado-islamico-articulo-681339>

Trinidadian state security officials have launched intensive surveillance and monitoring of the country’s homegrown Islamist movements, which have a history of militancy and crossover with the country’s violent criminal gangs. Saying their efforts are bearing fruit, Trinidad and Tobago officials have recently proposed legislation to crack down on the flow of money to Islamic State fighters overseas by establishing criminal penalties for those sending money to the group. “There’s always a concern in terms of money leaving Trinidad and Tobago that could be involved with terrorist activities,” National Security Minister Edmund Dillon said. “There is a minority in the Muslim community and there is a minority in the criminal community that is hellbent on committing these types of offenses.”



Bitcoin as a Response to Hyperinflation in Venezuela?

OE Watch Commentary: Venezuela's money is nearly worthless, and its cash crisis is only getting worse. In recent months, the bolivar has plunged in value while prices of basic necessities have skyrocketed. Furthermore, despite the fact that Venezuelans are paying more for basic necessities like food and medicine, shortages are consistently reported across the country. As the first passage discusses, Venezuela is now officially in a state of hyperinflation.

According to the second passage, the situation is leading Venezuelans to resort to the new – and according to some economists, extremely risky – world of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, to salvage what little value remains from their increasingly worthless bolivars. With this currency, they are paying for everything from doctor appointments and honeymoons to motorcycles and artisanal beer. At this point, the number of Venezuelans using cryptocurrencies remains unclear, but weekly Bitcoin trading volume through one popular website soared from about \$225,000 in early 2017 to nearly \$2.1 million by early December 2017.

The early Venezuelan Bitcoin adopters consisted largely of engineers and business leaders, but these days poor, and even elderly Venezuelans are making small Bitcoin purchases. While the price of Bitcoin has been highly volatile, Venezuelans with few or no other means of converting their bolivars into another currency believe it is a safer bet than the Venezuelan bills that are steadily depreciating. It is hard to predict what will happen with the hyperinflation crisis in Venezuela, but for now, Bitcoin appears to be an appealing alternative to the bolivar. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“As Venezuela’s national currency loses value at a catastrophic rate, thousands have begun turning to the world of cryptocurrency to salvage what little value remains of their increasingly worthless bolivars.”

Source: “Venezuela entra en hiperinflación por primera vez en su historia (Venezuela Registers Hyperinflation for the First Time in History),” *El Nacional*, 03 November 2017. http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/economia/venezuela-entra-hiperinflacion-por-primeravez-historia_210319

Venezuela’s opposition-led National Assembly said on Tuesday [October 31] that the country had entered a state of hyperinflation. The Assembly further reported that the country’s inflation rate was now at a staggering 826 percent – and could hit 1,400 percent by the end of the year.

Source: “Venezolanos ven al bitcoin como salvación mas no como inversion (Venezuelans See the Bitcoin as Salvation But Not as Investment),” *El Universal*, 13 December 2017. http://www.eluniversal.com/noticias/economia/venezolanos-ven-bitcoin-como-salvacion-mas-como-inversion_681015

As Venezuela’s national currency loses value at a catastrophic rate, thousands have begun turning to the world of cryptocurrency to salvage what little value remains of their increasingly worthless bolivars.



Back of 100,000 Venezuelan Bolivar Bill.
Source: By BCV (<http://www.venelogia.com/archivos/2050/>), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ARverso_de_billete_de_10_bol%C3%ADvares_fuertes_venezolanos.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Venezuelan Currency, Valencia, Casa Paez.

Source: By Andrea Mar Luna (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ABilletes_de_Venezuela.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Why Panga Vessels Continue to Thrive in the Drug Trafficking World

OE Watch Commentary: The vessels used by Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) have evolved over the last two decades. They also vary regionally based on distance travelled, size of the shipment transported, and ability to deceive authorities. For these reasons, traffickers use a gamut of vessels that range from fishing boats, yolas, pangas, go-fast vessels and even submarines. While all of these vessels play an important role in maritime drug trafficking, pangas appear to be the one that traffickers consistently turn to. The accompanying passages discuss why pangas are so popular in the drug trafficking world.

The original panga gained popularity in the 1960s at a time when they were primarily used for fishing. However, the panga style boat can be easily retrofitted into what is known in the drug trafficking world as a “go-fast” boat because of its design. As the first passage discusses, the original panga was built out of wood, but over time, producers realized that fiberglass versions could be mass-produced quickly and cheaply from molds rather than crafted from wood. The fiberglass models also proved to be incredibly durable and able to handle outboard engines.

For drug traffickers, the fiberglass feature is significant, as it provides pangas the ability to evade radar detection. Furthermore, as the second passage discusses, pangas tend to be very versatile, plane easily, have good stability in both deep and shallow water, and can be outfitted with multiple (up to five) 250-300 horsepower engines allowing them to travel up to 100 kilometers per hour in ideal open sea conditions. They are also relatively cheap to build, making them popular along the entire coast of Central America because fishermen as well as drug traffickers appreciate the attributes of the vessel.

Another feature of the newer pangas is the “Delta pad” which is a flat, slightly concave running surface that extends along the keel. According to the third passage, this feature is approximately two inches wide towards the bow and about 16 inches at the transom. It is beneficial to drug traffickers as it allows them to quickly pull their panga from the ocean into shallow waters, and onto the beach for a fast offload. Furthermore, the pad, combined with the narrow beam, influences the boat’s sea-keeping abilities. This means that the panga pops onto plane almost instantly and skips on top of a bay chop rather than cutting through it. For drug trafficking purposes, this is key because the hollowed out interiors of these vessels can carry up to 1,500 kilograms or more of cocaine in a single shipment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“Pangas utilized for drug trafficking purposes are generally outfitted with GPS equipment and satellite communications systems. They also possess night vision equipment and can carry 20 barrels of gas each containing 55 gallons which means they can travel long distances without having to re-fuel.”

Source: “The History of the Panga,” *Boating Magazine*, 10 August 2017. <https://www.boatingmag.com/boats/history-panga#page-10>

Here’s how modern fiberglass pangas changed the world: They could be mass-produced quickly and cheaply from molds rather than crafted from wood, were incredibly durable and could handle an outboard engine — like the 40 hp one that Yamaha happened to be marketing to indigenous commercial fishermen around the world. Furthermore, pangas can run in all kinds of conditions.

Source: “Los barcos de los narcos (Boats Used by Drug Trafficking Organizations),” *La Semana*, 12 December 2016. <http://www.semana.com/nacion/recuadro/los-barcos-narcos/127063-3>

Pangas utilized for drug trafficking purposes are generally outfitted with GPS equipment and satellite communications systems. They also possess night vision equipment and can carry 20 barrels of gas each containing 55 gallons which means they can travel long distances without having to re-fuel. Another important feature of drug trafficking pangas is that they are painted blue, black, or green in their interior to better camouflage themselves in open sea. The design of these vessels is also important as they are versatile, plane easily, have good stability in both deep and shallow water, and can be out-fitted with multiple (anywhere from 2-5) 250-300HP engines allowing them to travel up to 100 kilometers per hour.

Source: “About Pangas,” *H & H Boat Works*, 10 December 2017. <http://handhboatworks.com/about-pangas/>

The classic Panga style hull features a high length to beam ratio, with a sharp bow that transitions to a shallow dead rise at the stern. In addition, true Panga hulls will have a “delta pad” which is a flat running surface starting at the stern that transitions to a point toward bow. These hulls are exceptionally predictable in heavy seas, as they can be easily stay on plane to speeds much lower than today’s deep V hulls. The delta pad and narrow beam also allows for an easy transition to plane, without any sense of “plowing” as experienced in heavier deep V hulls at below planing speeds.



Colombian Cartels and the Importance of Cocaine Coordinators

OE Watch Commentary: Drug cartels and guerilla organizations in Colombia such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) are responsible for cultivating and processing cocaine shipments. Once this is done, how is the final product moved from Colombia to its final destination? Colombian news source *El Tiempo* recently interviewed a “cocaine coordinator,” the intermediary that connects the cocaine with the buyer, as well as the person who coordinates the movement of shipments from port to port. The first accompanying passage provides highlights from this interview, shedding light on the complex process behind the movement of cocaine shipments.

As the passage discusses, the coordinator first works to get the cocaine onto a cargo ship and into a container. Then the coordinator must work with logistical operators and anti-narcotics police in the country of departure. After that, the coordinator needs to find corrupt anti-narcotics police in the receiving country to ensure a smooth hand-off. Before moving cocaine in a certain container, the coordinator also needs to investigate the company responsible for carrying the shipment, because if drugs have been seized from their shipping containers on previous occasions, it is almost a certainty that their cargo will be searched at each port. The passage also points out that seizures from shipping containers are very rare because only 2-3% of all containers are searched and if a seizure does occur, it is likely because there was a mistake or an informant provided information to authorities.

The final passage from *El Colombiano* discusses why this practice is unlikely to ever end given that anti-narcotics police in Colombia earn approximately \$460 a month, as opposed to the potential to make up to \$3,300 for simply turning a blind eye to an outgoing shipment. Anti-narcotics police in other countries with ports of entry such as in Central America and Africa earn even less than their counterparts in Colombia, making them even more vulnerable to corruption. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “La guerrilla trae la coca a Cartagena y busca socios para sacarla (Guerilla Groups Bring Cocaine to Colombia and Seek Out Associates to Move it out of the Country),” *El Tiempo*, 07 November 2017.

<http://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/conflicto-y-narcotrafico/entrevista-de-salud-hernandez-mora-a-un-traqueto-encargado-de-sacar-droga-de-los-puertos-147230>

“I [the cocaine coordinator] work with logistical operators in customs. These individuals tell me which containers are available to receive shipments and where they are going. After receiving that information, I coordinate with corrupt counter-drug authorities in both the departure and receiving countries so I know what days they are working and to inform them which shipping company I plan on using to move the load. With that information, counter-narcotics authorities look at some of the following aspects of the company: has it been operational for a significant amount of time, does it have a history of moving illicit shipments, etc. If anything appears to be out of order, I am notified and must find another container and company to move the shipment”...

If a drug shipment is seized, those responsible must be found and the owner of the shipment will demand answers. Almost every time something is seized from a shipping container, it is because an informant told authorities because they only search 2-3% of all containers. Other errors could also raise red flags such as a noticeably altered seal on the container, poor construction of secret compartments in the containers or an inspector who has not been paid off and randomly chooses to search that container.

Source: “Los contenedores envenenados con la cocaína colombiana (Shipping Containers Contaminated with Colombian Cocaine Shipments),” *El Colombiano*, 17 November 2017.

<http://www.elcolombiano.com/colombia/los-contenedores-envenenados-con-la-cocaina-colombiana-MC7703934>

An anti-narcotics officer in Colombia earns \$460 monthly, so when they are offered \$3,300 to turn a blind eye and not check a container, they are usually willing to do it. If the containers leave the port successfully, there is also the promise that more offers will come which equates to an almost irresistible financial incentive to corrupt officials.

“An anti-narcotics officer in Colombia earns \$460 monthly, so when they are offered \$3,300 to turn a blind eye and not check a container, they are usually willing to do it.”



THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES

At any given time, assessments of the Russian Armed Forces vary between the idea of an incompetent and corrupt conscript army manning decrepit Soviet equipment and relying solely on brute force, to the idea of an elite military filled with Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were the “polite people” or “little green men” seen on the streets in Crimea. This book will attempt to split the difference between these radically different ideas by shedding some light on what the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

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Cuba Responds to Allegations of “Sonic Strike” at US Embassy Using Online Forum

OE Watch Commentary: In 2014, the United States announced plans to normalize relations with Cuba beginning with the opening of an American embassy in Havana. Full diplomatic relations were restored in July 2015. However, less than a year later, in February 2016, as the first excerpt from the official Communist Party of Cuba paper notes, Washington claimed that its “diplomatic personnel in Havana presented symptoms provoked by sonic attacks.” The excerpt continues that the American ambassador and staff experienced “nausea, headache, balance disorders, hearing loss, facial and abdominal pain, memory disorders, and concussion” from the alleged sonic strike on the US embassy in Havana.

In response, the Cuban government opened an online forum calling for discussion of the scientific probability of the attacks. As the first excerpt points out, “the online forum discussion focused on answering three basic questions: Can the symptoms described be a consequence of sonic agents? Could other diseases have caused such symptoms? Is there a probability of psychosocial causes?” There were over 300 respondents uniformly in support of the Cuban government’s position denying a sonic strike on the embassy.

The second excerpt, also from the official Communist Party of Cuba paper, points out that Cuba blames the Cuban Right Movement in the United States for instigating allegations of a strike to “build a new pretext that leads to a significant setback in relations between Cuba and the United States.” The article also suggests that the Cuban government “has never resorted to aggressive methods... not even during the periods of greatest tension and bilateral confrontation.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Kelsay)**

“For a sonic weapon to produce a concussion... it would have to behave like a shock wave, which is not the case.”

Source: “Expertos señalan incongruencias en la hipótesis de los ataques acústicos,” *Granma*, 16 November, 2017. <http://www.granma.cu/mundo/2017-11-16/expertos-senalan-incongruencias-en-la-hipotesis-de-los-ataques-acusticos-16-11-2017-00-11-14>

With more than 300 interventions and a broad consensus on the inconsistencies of the hypothesis of an acoustic attack against US diplomats in Cuba, the first day of the online forum was closed with the participation of scientists and experts from different scientific fields....

...According to the Washington version, its diplomatic personnel in Havana presented symptoms provoked by “sonic attacks”. Those affected report having felt noises within their residences and the following “symptoms”: nausea, headache, balance disorders, hearing loss, facial and abdominal pain, memory disorders, and concussion.

The online forum discussion focused on answering three basic questions: Can the symptoms described be a consequence of sonic agents? Could other diseases have caused such symptoms? Is there a probability of psycho-social causes?...

... “I can say, responsibly, that the sample of highest intensity reached 74.6 decibels (DB), which is not harmful to human health,” said the specialist, member of the Committee of Experts.

... Permanent damages only appear when there are high doses of exposure, above 85 decibels, for a long time, or acoustic traumas, often with impact sounds, such as blows, explosions ...

...Regarding one of the most unlikely symptoms reported by the US side and associated with acoustic incidents, the prominent Cuban neurologist, Dr. C. Nelson Gómez Viera, explained that the concussion (also called minor brain injury) is a neurological picture that arises as a result of a cranial trauma or a process of acceleration or sudden deceleration of the skull.... “For a sonic weapon to produce a concussion, he said, it would have to behave like a shock wave, which is not the case.”

Source: “Fabricando el pretext: una constant en la política de EE.UU. hacia Cuba,” *Granma*, 31 October, 2017. <http://www.granma.cu/cuba/2017-10-31/fabricando-el-pretexto-una-constante-en-la-politica-de-eeuu-hacia-cuba-31-10-2017-22-10-12>

All the previous historical elements help us to put in context the current situation created, where again the extreme right sectors of Cuban origin... are trying to generate pressure on the Trump administration, to build a new pretext that leads to a significant setback in relations between Cuba and the United States....

An excellent text by Cuban journalist Sergio Alejandro Gómez, published on the website of Cuba debate, has highlighted the seriousness and depth of the investigation carried out by the Cuban authorities since they were informed of the facts by the representatives of the United States government and how it has not been done so far. He has found no evidence to prove the causes and origin of the alleged health problems of United States diplomats. But Sergio also offers a very important argument that can only be understood if we know the history of the ethical attitude of the Cuban Revolution and its leadership. Never, nor in the worst moments of the relations between both countries, did Cuba perform any act that could be harmful to the physical integrity of US diplomats, on the contrary,

If the government of Cuba has never resorted to aggressive methods such as those alleged against US diplomats, not even during the periods of greatest tension and bilateral confrontation, much less would it make sense to do so after the sovereign decision of December 17, 2014, to restore diplomatic relations to initiate a process towards the normalization of ties with the United States....



China's Military Base in Djibouti: Features and Motivations

by John Fei

Republished in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, Vol. 17, Issue 17, dated 22 December 2017, Edited for OE Watch.
For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-overseas-military-base-djibouti-features-motivations-policy-implications/>

OE Watch Commentary: In November 2017, China's military conducted significant live-fire military exercises in Djibouti, marking an important turning point in the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) overseas activities by conducting ground-based exercises in a foreign territory independent of a United Nations command. The exercises took place around the time of Djibouti President Ismail Omar Guelleh's visit to Beijing, a visit that deepened China-Djibouti ties and saw economic and technical cooperation agreements inked between the two countries.

China's base in Djibouti, which is the country's first overseas military base, opened in July 2017 and represents China's deepening diplomatic and military inroads into Africa. The base marks an important development in the Chinese military's ability to provide logistical support to counterterrorism, anti-piracy, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. As the first accompanying passage from the Chinese Ministry of Defense suggests, China has often played down the military significance of the base, emphasizing its support and logistics roles instead. However, the recent live-fire drills, along with reports that the base will host up to 10,000 troops, could indicate an enhanced military role for the base. Currently, it is unclear if the facility represents an effort for China to enhance its support and logistics capabilities, or suggests greater ambitions. If China opens more military bases in African and the Indian Ocean region, then the base would mark the start of a change in Chinese naval ambitions in the Indian Ocean region.

Located on the tip of the Horn of Africa, the Djibouti base sits at a strategic point between the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aden. The 36-hectare (approximately 90 acre) facility will likely host several thousand troops, and have repair facilities for ships and helicopters. There is some evidence suggesting a large, underground storage facility around 23,000 square meters. The base lies approximately seven miles northwest of the US base, Camp Lemonnier, and is located in the general vicinity of the facilities leased by France and Japan in Djibouti.

To better understand the purpose and uses of the Djibouti base, it is helpful to examine three features of China's broader foreign policy: migration of Chinese citizens to Africa and Beijing's growing diplomatic engagement on the continent; a growing emphasis on maritime military power and safeguarding citizens abroad, and; the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China's base in Djibouti helps to support Chinese diplomatic efforts in Africa and provides an outpost to assist growing numbers of Chinese citizens in Africa. Over the years, there has been a steady increase in the number of Chinese citizens engaged in commerce and living abroad in Africa and South Asia, and the involvement of Chinese state-owned enterprises in these regions. This increased Chinese economic engagement in Africa has been accompanied by enhanced diplomatic efforts—consisting of foreign aid—and over 2,000 Chinese soldiers serving as United Nations peacekeepers in Africa. China intends the base to serve as a support and logistics facility for peacekeepers, and also as a naval facility to support anti-piracy operations.

The Djibouti base also reflects a growing emphasis on maritime military interests. In its most clear articulation of a shift to prioritizing maritime power, China's 2015 Defense White Paper noted that China must protect its maritime rights and interests. Over the years, the PLA Navy has augmented its maritime capabilities, both in terms of rapid shipbuilding, and also operational learning and participation in joint exercises.

The Djibouti base is an important station along the Belt and Road Initiative's "belt," which is also referred to as the Maritime Silk Road. In Africa, China has invested in a railway linking Ethiopia with Djibouti, and has plans to construct a natural gas pipeline between the two countries as well. The Chinese government has trumpeted BRI as a peaceful endeavor that will spread economic prosperity, but analysts outside of China view it as a way for Beijing to create new spheres of influence at best, and as a gradual way to increase its military influence at worst.

Against this backdrop, the Djibouti base will likely fulfill several needs. As the second passage notes, it will provide re-supply and other support to facilitate the PLA Navy's anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, and the PLA's peacekeeping operations in Africa. The facility should also provide a hub for the PLA Navy's naval diplomacy in the region, could assist in future counterterrorism operations, and help with intelligence gathering. Additionally, it will help expedite evacuations of Chinese nationals in the region. On balance, its primary purpose in the near term will be to support China's economic interests along the Maritime Silk Road, and assist in military operations other than war. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fei)**

“The base will provide effective support to the Chinese military’s naval escort, peacekeeping and humanitarian rescue missions in Africa and western Asia. It will also be used [for] military cooperation, military exercises, [and] protection of overseas Chinese...”

Source: “中国人民解放军驻吉布提保障基地成立(People's Liberation Army Establishes Logistics Support Base in Djibouti),” Ministry of Defense of China, 11 July 2017. http://www.mod.gov.cn/shouye/2017-07/11/content_4785240.htm

The base will provide effective support to the Chinese military’s naval escort, peacekeeping and humanitarian rescue missions in Africa and western Asia. It will also be used to better implement military cooperation, military exercises, protection of overseas Chinese, and emergency quick response duties, as well as relevant to preserve the security of international strategic lines of communication.

Source: “我军首个海外基地年内将启用，或部署“陆海空”合成部队 (Our Military's First Overseas Base Will Begin Operations Within The Year, Deploying a Combined “Land Sea Air”),” Unit QQ News, 7 March 2017 <https://view.inews.qq.com/a/20170307A04DFB00>

The base in Djibouti is part of the Haikou, Hainan Comprehensive Strategic Support Base. Its primary responsibilities are providing resupply to the Army and Navy. The base is approximately 36 hectares, not far from the port currently operated by a Chinese company.



The Chinese Navy’s Top Five Accomplishments in 2017

OE Watch Commentary: China’s military is in the process of undergoing some of its most significant reforms since the 1950s. Part of these reforms include a shift in strategy from being ground forces-centric to expanding naval and air capabilities. The changing focus is meant to better meet newer security imperatives, such as enforcing maritime claims and safeguarding sea lanes.

The accompanying passages are from an article summarizing China’s five primary naval accomplishments over the past 12 months. Topping the list is the launching of China’s first home-grown aircraft carrier, the Type 001A, which is expected to go into full service by the end of 2018. The second item on the list is the Type 055 destroyer, which is reportedly the world’s second most powerful destroyer after the US Zumwalt class destroyer. Third is the world’s largest supply ship, followed by the commissioning of the Ezhou, a stealthy guided-missile frigate designed to boost the navy’s capabilities in the East China Sea. The final item is the development of the Zhenghe, a large training ship capable of accommodating 400 sailors at a time. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“China has been keener than ever this year to grow and show its maritime muscle.”

Source: “Home Grown Aircraft Carrier Tops List of Major Additions to China’s Navy in 2017,” *South China Morning Post*, 31 December 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2125977/home-grown-aircraft-carrier-tops-list-major-additions>

China has been keener than ever this year to grow and show its maritime muscle.

If you missed them, here are the five major additions to China’s navy over the past 12 months: Home-grown aircraft carrier... Asia’s ‘most advanced’ destroyer... Biggest ever supply ship... Powerful patrol vessel... Floating training center...



China’s second aircraft carrier, the 001A, sitting in Dalian port.

Source: GG001213, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_001A_aircraft_carrier#/media/File:%E5%81%9C%E6%B3%8A%E4%BA%8E%E5%A4%A7%E8%BF%9E%E6%B8%AF%E7%9A%84001A.jpg, public domain.



China's Strategic Advantage in Selling Cheap Submarines

OE Watch Commentary: Chinese actions to sell cheap submarines to Indian Ocean nations is alarming India. The accompanying article describes these sales and offers excellent insight on some of the potential ramifications of such transactions. For example, in 2013, Bangladesh purchased two used Ming-class diesel-powered subs, which became operational in 2017. Last year, Thailand agreed to buy two new Yuan-class subs. In 2015, China and Pakistan entered into an agreement for Islamabad to acquire eight Chinese subs.

According to Japan's *Asahi Shimbun* news source, China's maritime strategy is shifting from being focused on coastal and near-sea defense to one extending to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In doing so, China has been building more aircraft carriers and subs.

The article goes on to list several potential benefits for Beijing to sell subs to Indian Ocean littoral states. First, such sales allow Beijing to extend its influence. Second, because nations that purchase Chinese subs must also have the appropriate repair and supply facilities to meet their requirements, China will require access for repairs or to acquire weapons. Third, it gives China an avenue to acquire vital information, such as seabed mapping, which China can use to its own advantage.

The final note in the article points out that Cuba is one of an undisclosed number of countries that has also expressed an interest in purchasing Chinese subs. If that is the case, based on the analysis and conclusions given, with only about 100 miles separating Cuba's closest point to Florida, this is a process worth monitoring. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“The more submarines China sells to regional nations, the more data it will amass that is related to operations and potential challenges.”

Source: “China Alarms India by Selling Cheap Subs to Indian Ocean Nations,” *Asia Times*, 16 January 2018. <http://www.atimes.com/article/china-alarms-india-selling-cheap-subs-indian-ocean-nations>

...China's new focus on the Indian Ocean is part of a shift in maritime strategy from coastal and near-sea defense to one that extends to the Pacific and Indian oceans. The strategy puts more emphasis on aircraft carriers and submarines — which China has been building at an accelerated rate.

Asahi notes it allows Beijing to extend its influence in related maritime areas... “This gives China the option of asking that its submarines be allowed to temporarily berth there for repairs or to acquire weapons,” Asahi said.

The more submarines China sells to regional nations, the more data it will amass that is related to operations and potential challenges. All this can be used to improve China's sub technology, experts told Asahi.

Countries purchasing Chinese subs must also rely on Chinese naval officers and technicians for advice on operations and maintenance. “Those personnel could also play a key role in gathering vital information, including seabed mapping, as China strives to improve its submarine capabilities,” Asahi said.

Egypt and Cuba are reportedly among the other countries that have expressed an interest in buying Chinese submarines.



Yuan (Type 039A) Class Attack Submarine.

Source: By CSR Report RL33153 China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress by Ronald O'Rourke dated February 28, 2014 (United States Naval Institute News Blog). [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AYuan_\(Type_039A\)_Class_Attack_Submarine.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AYuan_(Type_039A)_Class_Attack_Submarine.JPG), Public domain.



Why is China the Champion, and not India?

OE Watch Commentary: The excerpted article from the Chinese language news site *dwnews.com* discusses Chinese-Indian competition. The author posits that China has been more successful in managing regional security affairs than India. According to the article, India has been more concerned about geopolitics while China has consistently emphasized economics. For example, India has prioritized Afghanistan because of its rivalry with Pakistan even though it does not gain significant economic benefit from the relationship with Afghanistan. In contrast, China has focused on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which envisions extending an economic corridor from China through Afghanistan and Pakistan. The article indicates that whether or not the US succeeds in Afghanistan, China will be the real winner because it can rely on the economy, not military, to acquire hegemony. The article argues that India, like the US, relies on its military for hegemony.

The article goes so far as to recommend that rather than compete with China, India should seek ways to harness the BRI so that it also becomes a part of it. For example, according to the article, China can extend BRI through Afghanistan and Pakistan into the Indian Punjab region. The author believes this would also improve relations between India and Pakistan by making them stakeholders in each other's economies. This sums up the main point of the article, which is that turning rivals into stakeholders is the best way to ensure influence and mutual security. This is, in essence, China's intended approach to regional security with the BRI. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“I think what should be considered by Indian leaders is how to harness the ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ for the best interests of India.”

Source: “为什么中国总是赢家 印度却走不远 (Why is China Always the Winner, but India does not Go Far?),” *dwnews.com*, 10 January 2018. <http://news.dwnews.com/global/news/2018-01-10/60034612.html>

India's diplomacy is always from a geopolitical perspective, such as Afghanistan, and seldom concerned about the economy. No matter whether Americans can win the war in Afghanistan, the Chinese people will become real “winners.” Obviously, India has suffered a series of setbacks - whether in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh or Afghanistan - as India has always stared at China, setting a geographic regional strategy from a geopolitical perspective. Meanwhile China is in the next step of the chess game. Basically, it is unlikely that China will use its military power to establish the position of hegemony and, more likely, it will rely on economic means. The Belt and Road Initiative may not be a charity, but it must not be usurious exploitation. It should be propagated that it contains a “win-win” program.

Obviously, India is also unable to contend with the Belt and Road initiative, which has astonishing global character. In that case, I think what should be considered by Indian leaders is how to harness the Belt and Road Initiative for the best interests of India. Beijing should probably also propose a small ring extending eastward into our Punjab.



China's cyber policy has become partly visible to foreign nations through observation, tracking, and inference. The policy appears to have three vectors. These three aspects—peace activist, espionage activist, and attack planner—dominate China's cyber policy. Some are always hidden from view while others are demonstrated daily. Three Faces of the Cyber Dragon is divided into sections that coincide with these vectors.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195610/download>



China's "Physicals for All" Program in Xinjiang

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpt from Nepal's largest selling English daily, *The Himalayan Times*, reports that beginning in July 2017, authorities in Xinjiang began collecting biometric data as part of a "Physicals for All" program. With a focus on 'priority individuals,' the government has collected a range of biometric information on the region's predominately Uyghur and minority population. However, the shape and scope of this program has been heavily criticized by international human rights organizations, particularly by Human Rights Watch.

The *Himalayan Times* reports that Chinese authorities have begun to amass a significant database of biometric data from the residents of Xinjiang amid an ongoing and massive security crackdown in the province. According to the report, police are collecting "pictures, fingerprints, iris scans and household registration information," while health authorities collect "DNA samples and blood type information" as part of the program. Citing concerns over mandatory participation, as well as privacy concerns, the paper further notes that human rights organizations are publically denouncing the collection process, taking place under the so-called "Physicals for All" program. Human Rights Watch in particular maintains a strong stance against the security crackdown.

As the second excerpt from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates, Lu Kang, a spokesperson for the Ministry dismissed the concerns as "untrue" during a daily press conference on 13 December 2017. While promising progress and emphasizing the "peaceful and happy life" of residents, Lu decried that overseas observers have been "unwilling to see" the situation for what it is. **End OE Watch Commentary (Shanks)**

"The mandatory data-banking of a whole population's biodata, including DNA, is a gross violation of international human rights norms, and it's even more disturbing if it is done surreptitiously, under the guise of a free health care program."

- Human Rights Watch, China director Sophie Richardson

Source: "Rights group criticizes China for mass DNA collection in Xinjiang," *The Himalayan Times*—World. 13 December 2017. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/world/rights-group-criticizes-china-for-mass-dna-collection-in-xinjiang/>

Chinese authorities have collected DNA and other biometric data from the whole population of the volatile western region of Xinjiang, Human Right Watch said on Wednesday, denouncing the campaign as a gross violation of international norms. Hundreds of people have been killed in Xinjiang in the past few years in violence between Uighurs, a mostly Muslim people, and ethnic majority Han Chinese, which Beijing blames on Islamist militants.

The unrest has fueled a sweeping security crackdown there, including mass rallies by armed police, tough measures that rights advocates say restrict religious and cultural expression, and widespread surveillance. Police are responsible for collecting pictures, fingerprints, iris scans and household registration information, while health authorities should collect DNA samples and blood type information as part of a "Physicals for All" program, the New York-based group said in a statement, citing government a document.

"The mandatory data-banking of a whole population's biodata, including DNA, is a gross violation of international human rights norms, and it's even more disturbing if it is done surreptitiously, under the guise of a free health care program," Human Rights Watch's China director Sophie Richardson said. According to the Xinjiang-wide plan posted online by the Aksu city government in July, main goals for the campaign include collecting the biometric data for all people between the age of 12 and 65, and verifying the region's population for a database....

...Data for "priority individuals" should be collected regardless of age, it said, using a term the government has adopted to refer to people deemed a security risk.... Human Rights Watch cited an unidentified Xinjiang resident saying he feared being labeled with "political disloyalty" if he did not participate, and that he had not received any results from the health checks.

Source: "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on December 13, 2017," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. 13 December 2017. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1519191.shtml

Q: According to reports, the Human Rights Watch today issued a report expressing concern about the Chinese government's moves in Xinjiang to obtain DNA from every single resident. What's your response to this?

A: This organization you mentioned has kept making false allegations on China-related issues all along. That's why I would like to say that such allegation is not even worth your time.

In terms of the situation in Xinjiang, we have said from this podium many times that with economic development, people in Xinjiang are living a peaceful and happy life, and the situation there is sound. Indeed, certain people overseas may be unwilling to see such a situation. I would like to tell them that the Chinese government will continue to uphold the unity of people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang, safeguard their happy life and promote progress in various fields of Xinjiang.



“Borderization” of Occupied Georgian Territory

OE Watch Commentary: There have been a number of reports in Georgian media about border problems regarding the occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but few of them go into any detailed analysis of the broader problem. The accompanying excerpted article, from the Georgian independent news website *Netgazeti*, looks at the problem of what some Georgians refer to as the “borderization” of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the author offers a few solutions worth noting.

The author is a researcher at the Georgian Institute of Politics, a non-partisan research organization in Tbilisi, Georgia. He mentions that in the Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) there are “barbed wire and fences installed by the Russian occupation troops along more than 52 km of the occupation line” and “more than 48 km” along the border with Abkhazia. He also notes that “Tbilisi has no direct levers to influence Moscow’s behavior regarding the occupied territories.” The author believes that to resolve the borderization problem, “it is necessary to act within the frames of what is possible” and makes four recommendations.

His first recommendation is to support “people on both sides of the administrative borderline” and to “simplify procedures for obtaining Georgian passports.” Secondly, he suggests developing an action plan with “procedures that will define concrete responsibilities in case of new instances of borderization.” Third, he recommends creating an “integrated state communications strategy” in order to deal with “the Kremlin’s narrative that is aimed at exerting a psychological influence on the public.” Finally, he recommends that the Georgian government become better at “informing the international community on the process of borderization,” specifically to “coordinate its anti-occupation policy with Ukraine and Moldova in order to shape a joint position at international forums.” Georgia’s potential cooperation with Ukraine and Moldova in border security is particularly notable as all three have been working with European governments on a variety of projects, including security. The author’s recommendations are not likely to become policy, but they do offer some insight into what action Georgia could take as reports of the borderization process continue to surface. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**



Map of Georgia showing the autonomous republics of Abkhazia (de facto independent) and Adjara, and the de facto independent region of South Ossetia.
Source: United Nations Cartographic Section, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AGeorgia_high_detail_map.png, Public Domain.

“According to the official data submitted by the Georgian State Security Service [SSS], the borderization process became intensive from February 2013.”

Source: Kakhishvili, Levan. “ბორდერიზაცია საქართველოში: შესაძლებელია თუ არა რუსეთის პოლიტიკასთან გამკლავება (Borderization in Georgia: Is it possible to cope with Russian policy?),” *Netgazeti.ge*, 25 December 2017. <http://netgazeti.ge/news/242817/>

After the August 2008 Georgian-Russian war, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, but this has proved not to be the last stage of Russia’s aggressive policy regarding Georgia and the occupied territories. The first instance of the so-called “borderization” was registered a year later - in August 2009...The aforementioned process involves installing artificial barriers, fences, barbed-wires, and banners marking the so-called border and digging ditches and trenches along the occupation line...

According to the official data submitted by the Georgian State Security Service [SSS], the borderization process became intensive from February 2013...They involve 33 villages along the occupation line of the Tskhinvali region and additional seven villages along the Abkhaz occupation line...The total length of the occupation line in the Tskhinvali region is more than 350 km with barbed wire and fences installed by the Russian occupation troops along more than 52 km of the occupation line. As regards occupied Abkhazia, the total length of the occupation line is comparatively shorter and amounts to 145 km and the total length of illegal fences, barbed wire, and trenches is more than 48 km...

Georgia must face reality: For the time being, Tbilisi has no direct levers to influence Moscow’s behavior regarding the occupied territories in Georgia. Correspondingly, it is necessary to act within the frames of what is possible. This encompasses four major directions:

First, the government should continue to support people on both sides of the administrative borderline...simplify procedures for obtaining Georgian passports to make public services available to the population residing on the occupied territories and enable them to use the benefits of visa-free travel to the EU.

Second, in order to find mechanisms for coping with the existing situation, it is important that the state set up an interdepartmental working group to study the problem, shape a consistent official position, and elaborate an integrated action plan...The action plan must encompass details of all the procedures that will define concrete responsibilities in case of new instances of borderization.

Third, it is necessary to elaborate an integrated state communications strategy...Supplying the public with precise information on the issue and confronting the Kremlin’s narrative that is aimed at exerting a psychological influence on the public...

And finally, the Georgian government is to improve their practices of informing the international community on the process of borderization...The government should also coordinate its anti-occupation policy with Ukraine and Moldova in order to shape a joint position at international forums. This will enable to place borderization within the broader frames of the aggressive policy Russia is pursuing against its neighbors...

A Review of Kazakhstan's Armed Forces in 2017

OE Watch Commentary: The government of Kazakhstan continues to implement a number of reforms in the country's armed forces, particularly regarding the modernization of its weapons and equipment inventory. The accompanying excerpted article reviews important developments in the Kazakh Armed Forces in 2017, providing an update on how this modernization process is going and what this could mean for Kazakhstan's defense industry and security cooperation. The article, from the Russian language news website *Inform Buro*, notes some basic information about the armed forces, including its "annual budget of 382 billion Tenge (\$1.15 billion)." This number is down roughly \$500 million from a couple of years ago, but still represents one of the largest defense budgets in Central Asia and it is not likely to drop any further soon.

The article points out that the Kazakh Air Force now has Su-30SM fighters and that "by the end of the year, there will already be eight aircraft in Kazakhstan, almost a full squadron." The author states that "within the next few years the fleet of combat aircraft will be upgraded" and that this follows Kazakhstan's acquisition of various transport aircraft, including the "C-295 from Spain" and the "Mi-17 and Mi-171 helicopters from Russia" a few years ago. This is in addition to the acquisition of "four Mi-35M helicopters" and "another four helicopters [to] be delivered."

The article also includes an update on the production of the mine-resistant ambush-protected "Arlan" and that "the exact number of (the Arlan) armored vehicles in Kazakhstan's inventory is unknown," but "there are an estimated 200." One of the main goals for the growth of Kazakhstan's defense industry has been to purchase weapons and equipment from various international defense firms with a stipulation that production will take place in Kazakhstan. While the large number of Arlan armored vehicles in service is only an estimate, news of its continued production confirms that Kazakhstan's defense industry is experiencing some growth. Lastly, the author mentions that at the center of the modernization process "are domestic engineering enterprises and foreign defense enterprises, mostly Russian." If Kazakhstan's acquisition of additional Su-30SM fighters and Mi-35M attack helicopters in 2017 is any indication of the direction of the country's defense industry, it appears that Russia is maintaining a significant part of this sector. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

"Involved with this are domestic engineering enterprises and foreign defense enterprises, mostly Russian."



Kazakh Sukhoi Su-30SM at Irkutsk-2.

Source: Alexey Korshunov, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AKazakh_Sukhoi_Su-30SM.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: Bedenko, Grigoriy, "Вооружённые силы Казахстана: итоги 2017 года (The Armed Forces of Kazakhstan: the results of 2017)," *Inform Buro*, 13 December 2017. <https://informburo.kz/stati/vooruzhyonnye-sily-kazahstana-itogi-2017-goda.html>

The Armed Forces of Kazakhstan celebrated its anniversary this year – 25 years since its establishment. The Kazakh Army today is not the same as it was a dozen or so years ago. 80 thousand soldiers and officers, most of which are contractors, an annual budget of 382 billion Tenge and a rearmament program, which is being very actively implemented. Inform Buro prepared a review of events in Kazakhstan's Armed Forces in 2017.

...The newest multifunctional Su-30SM fighters have looked particularly effective and by the end of the year, there will already be 8 aircraft in Kazakhstan, almost a full squadron...Today, the most experienced pilots of the 604th air base at Taldykorgan fly the Su-30SM...Within the next few years the fleet of combat aircraft will be upgraded. Just three or four years ago we saw how the military transport aircraft, the C-295 from Spain, came to us (and) the Mi-17 and Mi-171 helicopters from Russia. Now it's on to combat aircraft...The latest acquisition of the Air Force are is four Mi-35M helicopters.... In December or early January, another four helicopters will be delivered...

In 2017 Kazakh ground forces continued to be supplied with a completely new type of armored vehicle. It is the heavy armored personnel carrier "Arlan," which is manufactured by the joint venture Kazakhstan Paramount Engineering...Arlan is a 16 ton mine-resistant ambush protected version of the (South African) Paramount Group's Marauder...The exact number of (the Arlan) armored vehicles in Kazakhstan's inventory is unknown. It appears, from open sources, that there are an estimated 200...

It needs to be noted that the rearmament program of Kazakhstan's Army includes the modernization of existing Soviet-made equipment. Involved with this are domestic engineering enterprises and foreign defense enterprises, mostly Russian...



Afghanistan's Cooperation with the SCO

OE Watch Commentary: The government of Afghanistan has expressed its interest in joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) several times since its first request in 2015. It is unknown if or when this will take place, but statements made by Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah at the recent SCO meeting in Russia provide some insight into the why Afghanistan would like to join the organization. The accompanying article, from the English version of the independent news website *Tolo News* discusses the Afghanistan-SCO relationship in light of Abdullah's recent comments.

Abdullah's main message was to "call upon SCO member states to use their leverage and contacts with armed Afghan militant groups to urge they enter into intra-Afghan talks." While he does not mention any specific SCO members, the Afghan government has made similar statements to Pakistan, which joined the SCO in June 2017. This is in addition to the hostility between Afghanistan and Pakistan related to a number of issues, particularly dealing with terrorism. It is worth noting that issues between Pakistan and India (which also joined in June 2017) did not prevent either from gaining membership in the SCO.

Abdullah also requested that the SCO "grant Afghanistan permanent co-chairmanship for the future Contact Group" [cooperation] and that Afghanistan maintains "interest in acquiring full SCO membership" as well as developing "enhanced cooperation on anti-terrorism between SCO member states and Afghanistan." He also mentioned that they would like to work with "the China-led Silk Road Economic Belt and other similar integration platforms."

SCO members established the Afghanistan Contact Group in 2005 as a mechanism for increased cooperation between the organization and Afghanistan, but it only resumed work in October 2017 after several years of no activity and it has not been clear what the group will do now. The SCO gave Afghanistan observer status in 2012, after which the Afghan government made its first request to join the organization in 2015. However, outside of annual summits or conferences, not much has progressed in this area. As such, despite the Afghan government's desire for closer cooperation with the SCO, past cooperation suggests it may take time for this to develop. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

"Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah called on the member states of the organization to use their leverage in bringing militant groups in Afghanistan to the Afghan negotiations table."



Dr. Abdullah Abdullah at Embassy of Afghanistan, in New Delhi.

Source: Hariva, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ADr_Abdullah_Abdullah_at_Embassy_of_Afghanistan%2C_in_New_Delhi_2016-02-01_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ADr_Abdullah_Abdullah_at_Embassy_of_Afghanistan%2C_in_New_Delhi_2016-02-01_(2).jpg), CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: "Abdullah Calls On SCO Members To Support Afghan Peace Talks," *Tolo News*, 1 December 2017. <http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/abdullah-calls-sco-members-bring-militants-peace-table>

Addressing the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in Russia on Friday, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah called on the member states of the organization to use their leverage in bringing militant groups in Afghanistan to the Afghan negotiations table.

"We Call upon SCO member states to use their leverage and contacts with armed Afghan militant groups to urge they enter into intra-Afghan talks," Abdullah said...

"In order to further enhance cooperation and achieve progress between the SCO and Afghanistan, we propose the following: SCO grant Afghanistan permanent co-chairmanship for the future Contact Group to help address the challenges that confront Afghanistan and the region; we renew our interest in acquiring full SCO membership...we are seeking enhanced cooperation on anti-terrorism between SCO member states and Afghanistan," he added.

"We also look forward to working with member states on SCO's development strategy and important initiatives such as the China-led Silk Road Economic Belt and other similar integration platforms," he stated. "I would like to mention Heart of Asia Istanbul Process, RECCA, and projects such as CASA 1000, TAPI and Chahbahar among important initiatives..."

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

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

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

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-monographs/195094>



Legitimizing Aina Gamzatova

OE Watch Commentary: The recent article from *Islamdag.ru*, Dagestan's largest and most popular Islamic news and content website, entitled "Why is Aina Gamzatova a Candidate for the Russian Presidency?", is less an article and more a series of favorable editorial justifications for Aina Gamzatova's run for the Russian presidency. Before and since Mrs. Gamzatova made her candidacy official by filing with Russia's Central Election Commission, she has had little to say on the issues except that she supports a stronger unified Russia - Christian and Muslim - and wants an end to the Islamic radicalism that has torn apart her homeland of Dagestan and the region in which she resides.

What is interesting about this article is that it originates from a web news portal that Mrs. Gamzatova owns and operates, *Islam.ru*. One might get the impression that the story was contrived from within her media organization to justify her candidacy to the Muslim population of Dagestan itself—her most probable but problematic supporters. The editorial voices that comprise the article cover topics like instability in Dagestan and the North Caucasus region, unfavorable economic conditions for the population, the threat of radical Islam, public service, Muslim women's rights and Mrs. Gamzatova's right to run for President as a Muslim woman.

The editorial compilation specifically addresses Mrs. Gamzatova's charitable efforts beside her husband, the Mufti of Dagestan. Other topics covered include the threat of radical Islam and the concept in the stricter religious quarters of her home turf where women are restricted in their agency. Much is made of the fact that her husband is the Mufti of Dagestan, which leads to a contradictory thread to her rationale for her candidacy—or perhaps a carrot to appease more fundamentalist Muslims who might oppose her effort because she is a woman acting on her own. The article makes it clear she has the blessing of the male religious figures that matter, by pointing out, "As we know, this decision is supported by the Sheikh of the Naqshbandi and Shazali tariqats, and the Mufti of Dagestan, the husband of Aina Gamzatova, Ahmad Abdulaev."

Mrs. Gamzatova is also craftily compared to the great Dagestani Imam Shamil (1797-1871). Imam Shamil is the measuring stick one is held to in the region when in a position of power or seeking power and that comparison is one everyone in the region will understand. There will be those who will not accept this comparison for many reasons. Just two decades early another Shamil, the Chechen Shamil Basaev (1965-2006) was the military or combatant face of the Chechen independence movement. He too, especially in the first war 1994-1996 was often compared to the legendary Imam Shamil and part of his initial legitimacy was rooted in that comparison.

Not one of the authors comprising this news piece suggest that Aina Gamzatova has a chance in a Russian national election. In fact, only one, Aisha Anastasia Korchagina, even mentions Russia or its current president, posing the question, "Who can be an alternative to Putin?" Instead the focus is clearly for the people of Dagestan and the north Caucasus. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

"If this was the decision of Aina Gamzatova herself, then, in that case, there could be doubts. But, as we know, this decision is supported by the Sheikh of the Naqshbandi and Shazali tariqats, and the Mufti of Dagestan, the husband of Aina Gamzatova, Ahmad Abdulaev."



Mufti of the Republic of Dagestan Ahmad-Haji Abdulaev.

Source: www.president.e-dag.ru, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AMufti_of_Dagestan.png, CC BY 3.0.

Source: Почему Айна Гамзатова выдвигается кандидатом в президенты России? (Why is Aina Gamzatova nominated as a candidate for the presidency of Russia?), *Islamdag.ru*, 3 January 2018. <http://islamdag.ru/analitika/48109>

"They say a woman should stay at home and watch the fire. There is no doubt. But, every time Alima said 'A woman should stay at home' they added 'She can only go out if necessary.' Until Aina Gamzatova nominated her candidacy for the presidency of the Russian Federation, 99% of women clung to the words 'They can go out only when necessary.'"

...

"If this was the decision of Aina Gamzatova herself, then, in that case, there could be doubts. But, as we know, this decision is supported by the Sheikh of the Naqshbandi and Shazali tariqats, and the Mufti of Dagestan, the husband of Aina Gamzatova, Ahmad Abdulaev."

Russian General Staff's Military Thought on "Color Revolutions" and the Changing Nature of War

OE Watch Commentary: In the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian General Staff identified Western democracy and civil society building programs as part of the threat assessment in their practice of military science. In the current volume of the Russian General Staff Academy's journal, *Vestnik*, the accompanying article analyzes the "Color Revolutions" of Ukraine (Orange), Georgia (Rose), and Kyrgyz (Tulip) in the context of the current Russian military thought paradigm.

The authors A.S. Brychkov and G.A. Nikonorov begin their article with a critique of the Clausewitzian dictum that "war [is] an extension of politics by violent means" and they question "whether we have reached a point of never going to war again or [whether] wars will still be there but will change their nature rather than substance." Following the General Staff's discipline of historical analysis, the Cold War is poignantly summed up as: "The adversary that defeated us did so without resorting to combat." The authors raise the comparison of WMDs and the experience via the Soviet Union in losing against this sort of threat, and they posit that Russia "will need to revise the emphasis previously placed on armed conflicts." This is in support of current Russian thought that describes a perpetual state of war. The article proceeds to define the threat aspects of "Color Revolutions" in this light.

One of the article's main purposes is to associate the phenomenon of "grand-scale social transformations" with economic development through a military science prism. This rejects any indigenous desires for Western-style democracy or social assistance by the Russian populace and correlates national and individual economic stress to the threat. The article catalogs an extensive list of US and Western governmental and non-governmental organizations and programs that "create an appearance of grand-scale social transformations that were allegedly in consort with hopes of the peoples." The authors state that "there will always be a traitor who will open the city gates." The article associates national economic degradation with the goals of these organizations and programs and their activity to lure average Russians into becoming such "traitors." This subjective-into-objective reality aligns with the Russian military science factor of "psychological preparation" of the population for support of the forces.

Interestingly, Brychkov and Nikonorov also outline the strategy and tactics of Color Revolutions in "defeating a geopolitical adversary." They list weakening the opponent, changing the political course from 'Our nation comes first' to pro-Western, and gaining control over the country's resources by using 'controlled chaos' technologies that ultimately will reduce and degrade the Russian population and place "their national resources under control of transnational corporations."

From the Russian perspective, their argument is not really one of pro- or anti- democracy. Rather, it is one of forecasting the changing nature of war in the fashion of current General Staff thinking. Brychkov and Nikonorov conclude by stating that "Miscalculations in the internal politics cannot be solved by any kind of special forces, nor by the patriotically minded part of the population who are not interested in a coup. War and chaos caused is not by force but by weakness of the intendent object thereof." **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm, Vainer)**

"We have to treat these social experiments as ordinary coup d'état."



Ukrainian protesters, Orange Revolution, Kiev, November 2004.

Source: Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joetsjsjenko_Marion_Kiev_2004.jpg CCA-SA 3.0.

Source: А. С. Брычков и Г.А. Никоноров, Вестник, "Цветные революции в России: возможность и действительность," Вестник, 3 (60), 2017, стр. 4-9 (A.S. Brychkov and G.A. Nikonorov, "Color Revolutions in Russia: Possibility and Reality)," *Vestnik*, 3 (60) 2017, pp. 4-9).

The adversary that defeated us did so without resorting to combat. We, on the other hand, were investing everything in the military component of national security and waited for shots to be fired. The Soviet Union was defeated by a non-military strategy without old-fashioned combat intervention...

Initiating social action, that result in regime change in specific countries became known as color revolution because during this process the opposition used different colors for identification. Regime change in these countries did not signify a radical shift in the form of governance, political or social institutions. We have to treat these social experiments as ordinary coup d'état, since only the top leadership changed. However, politologists wanted to create an appearance of grand-scale social transformations that were allegedly in consort with hopes of the peoples of these nations and thus called them 'revolutions'...

The United States is the principal instigator and financier of "reformatting" the global geopolitical map, which is consistent with the role this country has been playing as the world policeman and fundraiser for the transnational capital...

Multiple Drones Attack Russian Airbase in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: According to Russian and other sources, on 5 January 2018, Russia's Khmeimim Air Base in Syria was attacked with multiple drones. Taken together, the reports demonstrate the emergence of a new tactic in the terrorist and insurgent playbook, war reporting in Russia, and how propaganda evolves.

According to the *TASS* official news website, on 5 January 2018, Russian forces at Khmeimim Air Base successfully defended themselves from an attack by 13 drones. Quoting an official Russian Defense Ministry (MoD) report, TASS stated there were no casualties and no equipment damage. The *Moskovsky Komsomolets* newspaper added that the Ministry's press release about the attack indicated that it was the first time "the terrorists" have carried out a mass attack using drones. According to *Sputnik News*, the Russian MoD said the attack had been foiled. While ten of the drones targeted the Khmeimim Air Base and three others were sent toward the Tartus Naval Base, all of the drones were downed in a controlled area outside the base. Three were detonated when they hit the ground and seven were destroyed by Pantsir-S air defense missile systems. MoD's *Facebook* post indicated that the six drones not destroyed by the Pantsir-S were intercepted by Russian Electronic Warfare complexes, which took over control of their trajectory.

Moskovsky Komsomolets posited that the attempted attack marks the first time the terrorists have used modern guidance technologies on satellite GPS because the drones used were capable of carrying out attacks from a range of about 100 kilometers. According to the MoD's *Facebook* post, Russian specialists are currently determining supply channels through which terrorists obtained the technologies and devices, as well as examining the type and origin of explosive compounds and foreign detonating fuses carried by the drones. The MoD also stated that these "aircraft-type drones" were fitted with pressure transducers and altitude control servo-actuators. The post also suggested the "terrorists" could have gotten the technology from a country with well-developed technological capabilities of satellite navigation and remote control to drop improvised explosive devices on assigned coordinates. While much of the Defense Ministry's report seemed to be confirmed by The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, as reported by BBC.ru, according to them, the drones were rather primitively constructed with lots of tape and a motor.

In the hours and days following the report of the attack, some Russian officials and casual commentators quoted in *Echo Moskvy*, *Interfax* and TASS suggested that the US or Israel were behind the attack. A particularly ominous comment in *Live Journal* stated: "It won't be so funny once these self-styled drone makers crawl to the four corners of the earth." **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm, Hall, Bartles, Finch, Winter)**

"It won't be so funny once these self-styled drone makers crawl to the four corners of the earth."



Photo of UAV downed during attack on Khmeimim air base, 5-6 Jan 2018.
Source: Russian MoD Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/mod.mil.rus/photos/pcb.2031218563787556/2031214087121337/?type=3&theater>, CCA-4.0.

(continued)

Continued: Multiple Drones Attack Russian Airbase in Syria

The following sources were used in this article:

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- 8 January 2018, Moskovsky Komsomolets
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- (<https://twower.livejournal.com/2209550.html#comments>)

Source: Facebook post by the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, *Facebook*, 8 January 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/mod.mil.rus/posts/2031218563787556>

Security system of the Russian Khmeimim air base and Russian Naval CSS point in the city of Tartus successfully ward off a terrorist attack with massive application of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) through the night of 5th – 6th January, 2018.

As evening fell, the Russia air defence forces detected 13 unidentified small-size air targets at a significant distance approaching the Russian military bases.

Ten assault drones were approaching the Khmeimim air base, and another three – the CSS point in Tartus.

Six small-size air targets were intercepted and taken under control by the Russian EW units. Three of them were landed on the controlled area outside the base, and another three UAVs exploded as they touched the ground.

Seven UAVs were eliminated by the Pantsir-S anti-aircraft missile complexes operated by the Russian air defence units on 24-hours alert.

The Russian bases did not suffer any casualties or damages.

The Khmeimim air base and Russian Naval CSS point in Tartus are functioning on a scheduled basis.

Currently, the Russian military experts are analyzing the construction, technical filling and improvised explosives of the captured UAVs...

It was the first time when terrorists applied a massed drone aircraft attack launched at a range of more than 50 km using modern GPS guidance system

Technical examination of the drones showed that such attacks could have been made by terrorists at a distance of about 100 kilometers.

Engineering decisions applied by terrorists while attacks on the Russian objects in Syria could be received from one of countries with high-technological capabilities of satellite navigation and remote dropping control of professionally assembled improvised explosive devices in assigned coordinates. All drones of terrorists are fitted with pressure transducers and altitude control servo-actuators.

Terrorists' aircraft-type drones carried explosive devices with foreign detonating fuses.

The Russian specialists are determining supply channels, through which terrorists had received the technologies and devices, as well as examining type and origin of explosive compounds used in the IEDs. The fact of usage of strike aircraft-type drones by terrorists is the evidence that militants have received technologies to carry out terrorist attacks using such UAVs in any country.



Photo of UAV downed during attack on Khmeimim air base, 5-6 Jan 2018.

Source: Russian MoD Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/mod.mil.rus/photos/pcb.2031218563787556/2031214087121337/?type=3&theater>, CCA-4.0.



Russia to Focus on Munitions, Instead of Platform Development

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia*, the Russian Federation will now emphasize the development and production of munitions instead of expensive weapons platforms. The *Izvestia* article makes the point that precision munitions, such as the 3M-14 Kalibr-NK (SS-N-30A) land attack cruise missile, launched from older and/or less technologically advanced platforms in Syria were quite successful. Apparently, there has been an ongoing debate in Russian security circles about whether the finite amount of defense dollars are better spent on expensive platforms (aircraft, ships, etc.) or more modestly priced platforms with better munitions. President Putin's recent comments at a meeting of the Defense Ministry Board, appear to make it clear that Russia will favor the latter, as can be seen in the accompanying excerpted Kremlin press release. In practice, this decision means that the 2027 State Arms Program will likely look significantly different from its predecessor, which emphasized platform development. It is important to note that this change does not mean that Russia will stop the development and fielding of technologically advanced platforms, but instead this development will likely slow, and fewer expensive platforms will be produced. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Aleksey Ramm, Sergey Valchenko, Dmitriy Strugovets, "Ставка на высокоточное и высокоэффективное (Banking on Precision and High Efficiency)," *Izvestia Online*, 25 December 2017. <https://iz.ru/687444/aleksei-ramm-sergei-valchenko-dmitrii-strugovets/stavka-na-vysokotochnoe-i-vysokoeffektivnoe>

...Vladimir Putin summed up the numerous arguments about the new National Arms Program (GPV), which have been going on for almost a year," military expert Vladislav Shurygin told *Izvestia*. "The defense industry notionally split into two camps. One advocated the maximum funding of the building of new 'platforms': tanks, field guns, aircraft, helicopters. Their opponents sought a reduction in the building of platforms to a rational level and allocation of the maximum funding for precision weapons: guided munitions and cruise, aeroballistic, and hypersonic missiles. It was reasonably maintained that even an old aircraft with new precision munitions and missiles would acquire serious possibilities. The argument of the defense industrialists became most intense in November and December of this year. but now Vladimir Putin has closed the books. He supported the supporters of precision weapons.

Their part was taken in his speech by Sergey Shoygu also. The defense minister observed that it was precision missiles: Kalibr, Kh-101, Iskander, and Kh-55, which had been employed against the most important facilities of the rebels...

Arms systems have in the modern world been divided into "platforms" and "munitions" for quite some time now...The previous GPV was oriented toward the building of platforms. The Defense Ministry was to have received 60 T-50, 120 Su-35S, 60 Su-30SM, and 17 MiG-35 fighters, 24 MiG-29K/KUB carrier fighters, and up to 140 Su-34 tactical bombers. The funding for pilot projects for new airborne platforms was far less in the new GPV.

"The experience of Syria showed that special platforms: nuclear-powered destroyers and aircraft carriers, are not needed for the employment of Kalibr. The majority of launches were performed from on board conventional diesel-powered submarines and small guided-missile ships," military historian Dmitriy Boltenev observed. "The Kh-101 were fired not by the PAK-DA but by modernized Tu-95MSM bombers.

"A special emphasis must be made on equipping troops with high-precision air, land and sea weapons, unmanned airstrike complexes, and individual equipment for servicemen, as well as advanced reconnaissance, communication and electronic warfare systems..."

-Vladimir Putin

Source: Expanded meeting of the Defence Ministry Board," *Kremlin Website Press Release*, 22 December 2017. <http://en.special.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/56472>

Vladimir Putin visited the Peter the Great Military Academy of the Strategic Missile Forces, where he took part in an annual expanded meeting of the Defense Ministry Board...

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Comrades officers, "... Second, our new State Armament Program will get underway next year. We discussed its key features in May and November at our meetings in Sochi and numerous meetings in Moscow. A special emphasis must be made on equipping troops with high-precision air, land and sea weapons, unmanned airstrike complexes, and individual equipment for servicemen, as well as advanced reconnaissance, communication and electronic warfare systems..."

"...as I noted we are detecting further attempts to upset strategic parity by deploying the global missile defence system [Ballistic Missile Defence System] and conventional attack systems that are comparable to nuclear weapons. In terms of strike power and accuracy, they are hardly inferior to nuclear arms. What are they designed for? I believe they serve only one purpose, blackmail, because they create the illusion of a potential unpunished strike..."

"Today our nuclear forces reliably ensure strategic deterrence but we must develop them further. By the end of 2017 the share of modern weapons in Russia's nuclear triad reached 79 per cent and by 2021 they should be equipped with modern arms by up to 90 per cent. I am referring to missile systems that are capable of confidently overcoming existing and even projected missile defence systems..."



Heavy MLRS Being Added to Russian Division and Brigades

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia*, Russian motorized rifle and tank brigades and divisions will be equipped with the Uragan-1M Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS). Previous reporting on the Uragan-1M MLRS stated that it was capable of firing 220mm and 300mm rockets. These rockets are stored in their firing canisters, so instead of using a crane to reload each rocket into the MLRS (the practice with previous version of the Uragan), the crane simply removes the empty pod, and replace it with a fully loaded pod of the desired caliber. According to *Izvestia*, the Uragan-1M is also capable firing 122mm rockets, the same rockets fired by the BM-21 Grad MLRS battalions that are found in most maneuver units. If this change is implemented, Russian maneuver units will gain an organic capability to significantly extend the brigade's range of fire (220mm and 300mm MLRSs are routinely attached to maneuver units). Currently, the MLRSs and howitzers found in maneuver units (with the best equipment) have a maximum range of approximately 60-70km, the Uragan-1M equipped with 300mm rockets has a maximum range of about 120km. The details of how this reform is to be implemented have yet to be released, it is unclear if the BM-21 Grad battalion will be replaced by the Uragan-1M, or if Uragan-1Ms will simply be added to the existing assets, or some combination thereof.

According to the accompanying article from *Svobodnaya Pressa*, the adoption of the Uragan-1M will not cause Russia to abandon development of the Tornado-S, a modernized version of the Smerch 300mm MLRS system. (Tornado-S/Smerchs are found in Russian artillery and MLRS brigades) The Russian Federation has recently combat tested the Tornado-S in Syria, and now will begin to field the Tornado-S, as Smerchs retire. Although both the Uragan-1M and Tornado-S are both capable of firing 300mm rockets, apparently the Tornado-S will also have rockets (probably better described as missiles) capable of 1 meter accuracy, and ranges of up to 200km. It was unclear if there is an equipment difference between the Uragan-1M and Tornado-S, that allows the firing of these greater ranged rockets, or if the Tornado-S only fires these rockets due to doctrinal reasons.

As described in the accompanying article from *RIA Novosti*, Russia greatly values long range, and relatively low-cost precision artillery. The article describes how artillery is still quite effective, even in the era of UAVs and Precision Guided Munitions (PGM), as these UAVs and PGMs cannot always be relied upon when the enemy is equipped with sophisticated electronic warfare and air defense systems. In sum, the Russian Federation is developing precision munitions, but is hedging her bets by still being able to conduct mass fires. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Yevgeniy Andreyev, Bogdan Stepovoy, and Aleksey Ramm, "Артиллерия наращивает мощь: Армейские соединения усиливаются тяжелыми артсистемами (Artillery Is Building up its Power: Army Formations Are Being Strengthened with Heavy Artillery Systems)," *Izvestia Online*, 14 December 2017. <https://iz.ru/675176/evgenii-andreev-bogdan-stepovoi-aleksei-ramm/artilleriia-narashchivaet-moshch>

The Ministry of Defense has begun the large-scale reform of artillery units. Uragan-M1 multiple rocket launcher systems, Msta-M2 self-propelled guns, and unmanned aerial vehicles are entering the inventory of the artillery regiments and brigades. The super-high yield artillery systems – Pion and Tulpan – are being returned. There have not been such large-scale changes in the Army for more than 30 years. The artillery units will substantially expand the range of combat missions that are being accomplished and they will increase effectiveness, kill range, and fire power. In the experts' opinion, the tactics of a contemporary engagement will be seriously changed after the conclusion of the reform.

Ministry of Defense personnel told Izvestia that the decision has been made to radically increase the firepower of the artillery subunits and combined-arms (motorized rifle and tank) divisions and brigades. In particular, Uragan heavy multiple rocket launcher systems will appear in them. Unmanned aerial vehicles will guide artillery to the targets...In 2013-2017, seven self-propelled artillery regiments – in the composition of five motorized rifle and two tank divisions - were formed in the Russian Army...

Ministry of Defense personnel reported the changes to the structure of the artillery regiments and brigades to Izvestia. Previously, there were two battalions, which were equipped with self-propelled howitzers, and one Grad multiple rocket launcher system battalion in the divisions' artillery regiments. That same quantity of artillery was in the combined-arms brigades...Since the fall of this year, Uragan 220mm MLRS have begun to appear in the artillery regiments and brigades. The 4th Tank Division's 275th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment was the first to receive the new vehicles. A full battalion set of these systems – eight launchers - is already on the unit's books.

Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy told Izvestia that "the formations' firepower substantially increases" with the appearance of the Uragan systems. "Uragan is a universal system," Viktor Murakhovskiy told Izvestia. "New munitions – cassette, fuel-air explosive, and enhanced range – have been developed for the Uragan systems. This multiple rocket launcher system can also use munitions from the Grad 122-millimeter system".

Besides long-range howitzers and multiple rocket launcher systems, the artillery brigades and regiments will receive unmanned reconnaissance complexes with automated command and control systems (ASU). The appearance of the Orlan-10 unmanned artillery reconnaissance complex (BKAR) is seriously affecting the tactics of the conduct of an engagement... Furthermore, the Orlan-10 can determine the location of enemy counterbattery radars, including portable radars – of the American AN/TRQ-36 type, with an accuracy of up to several meters.

In the opinion of Military Commentator Vladislav Shurygin, the RF Ministry of Defense has accomplished a revolution in military affairs. "In recent years, the significance of artillery has declined and precision-guided weapons have taken its place: guided bombs and missiles", the expert said. "Artillery was considered to be ineffective. By way of illustration, approximately 3,000 projectiles are expended for the guaranteed destruction of one concrete blockhouse based upon the standards. But right now Russian artillery has received unique capabilities. One can actually accomplish that combat mission with one shot. The commanders of units and subunits have received a universal tool, which permits them to detect and destroy any targets on the battlefield in real time"...

(continued)



Continued: Heavy MLRS Being Added to Russian Division and Brigades

“The Ministry of Defense has begun the large-scale reform of artillery units. Uragan-M1 multiple rocket launcher systems, Msta-M2 self-propelled guns, and unmanned aerial vehicles are entering the inventory of the artillery regiments and brigades.”

Source: Vladimir Tuchkov, “Опыт боёв в Сирии: На смену «Смерчу» приходит «Торнадо» (Experience of Battles in Syria: The Tornado-S is Replacing the Smerch),” *Svobodnaya Pressa Online*, 1 January 2018. <https://svpressa.ru/war21/article/189816/>

The Tornado-S new-generation multiple rocket launcher (MLRS) has been successfully tested in Syria...The Tornado-S is a thorough upgrade to the Smerch MLRS... A barrage from six Smerch vehicles can halt the advance of a motorized rifle division...

In the Tornado-S the developers have achieved even tighter clustering, with salvo dispersal of no more than 0.3 percent of the firing range. The range has been increased to 200 km, at which point dispersal is within 600 meters -- which, basically, is the diameter of the circle (more accurately -- an ellipse) within which all 12 projectiles land. More precise guidance to a target is available using a UAV also sent up from the launch vehicle... The projectiles are stabilized by being rotated in the launch tubes. Autonomous adjustment of heading and pitch while in flight is provided by gas-dynamic fins operated from a high-pressure gas generator.

The system can take a broad variety of projectiles, to perform a broad variety of combat tasks. In addition to the armor-piercing rounds mentioned earlier, this includes cluster, high-explosive, and shaped-charge loads comprising 588 destructive elements capable of piercing 160-mm armor. Also available are antitank mines. A single salvo can lay 300 mines in the path of enemy armor about to attack. There are also thermobaric rounds, which function as vacuum bombs. The projectile warhead payload is about 280 kg, with minor variations depending on type of munition.

Yet another type of munition has appeared in the new MLRS's arsenal, one that is fully equivalent to the operational-tactical class of precision missiles [such as the Tochka-U or Iskander missile systems]. It uses GLONASS for guidance to the target...Deviation from the target is no more than one meter...the range is several hundred kilometers. Moreover, it can be fired either singly or in barrages in which the number of rounds can be varied.

The loading procedure has changed significantly change. With the Smerch the transport and loading vehicle inserts an 800-kg rocket projectile into each launch tube in sequence, which can take 20 minutes or more. With the Tornado-S the entire pod of launch tubes with projectiles already in place is installed onto the vehicle by crane in a single move...

Source: Andrey Stanavov, “Выстрел в стратосферу: почему Россия делает ставку на дальнобойные пушки (A Shot into the Stratosphere: Why Russia is Prioritizing Long-Range Guns),” *RIA Novosti Online*, 14 December 2017. https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20171214/1510867314.html

Cheap, reliable, and aimed - thanks to these qualities, artillery is not only not lagging behind the positions of tactical missile systems, but are also even outperforming them at certain points. By way of illustration, it is practically impossible to detect in a timely manner and shoot down a flying projectile. However, the war of technologies is proceeding even here – the designers of guns and munitions are fighting for each centimeter of accuracy and range...

Long Range

...It is noteworthy that if the firing range of the Pion 2S7 203-millimeter self-propelled artillery gun reaches 47 kilometers and the advanced Koalitsiya-SV 152-millimeter self-propelled howitzer shot an experimental projectile to a range... of 70 kilometers... The American M109 Paladin self-propelled gun reaches targets using rocket-propelled projectiles at distances, which do not exceed 30 kilometers.

A Favorable Solution

According to the experts' assessments, no adequate replacement for classic tube artillery is expected for the time being or in the near future. Despite the high accuracy and effectiveness, state-of-the-art operational-tactical missile complexes, such as the Tochka-U and Iskander, are too complex to manufacture and are expensive in order to directly compete with guns under conditions of the unleashing of a large-scale war. And their missions are different...

...sophisticated munitions and unmanned aerial vehicles are only good when the enemy doesn't have powerful electronic warfare and air defense systems. “But if you will clash with a technically well-equipped enemy, he will rapidly knock out all radio ranges and GPS-GLONASS signals,”... Once again, we will have to rely upon topographic maps, firing tables, and meteorological data...

Tube Precision-Guided

However, Russian weapons manufacturers are not standing in place and are continuously working on increasing the accuracy of the guns and munitions. A large number of types, including advanced munitions, which are in the experimental design work stage at the time being, are being developed for their artillery pieces. Guided projectiles based upon the Krasnopol are known, which were developed for the destruction of hardened facilities from a single shot. The classic laser guidance mechanism requires the illumination of the target by an artillery spotter, who is located at line of sight...

Furthermore, they plan to introduce guided projectiles with miniature extendable aerodynamic rudders and a fuse, which contains a GLONASS chip, into the new howitzers' basic load of ammunitions. The guidance principle is very interesting: the shot is conducted with the enhancement of the range and deviation to the side, after which the projectile begins “to steer” toward the target, the coordinates of which have been loaded into the chip. What is important is that that fuse practically does not affect the cost of the munition...



Russian Ground Forces Divisions Upgrading Air Defense Capabilities

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses a major change in Russian motorized rifle and tank divisions. Previously, these divisions would have a regimental set of 16 Osa (SA-8 GECKO) or Tor (SA-15 GAUNTLET) missile launchers in their anti-aircraft missile regiment, while the anti-aircraft missile-artillery battalions found in the four maneuver regiments would have batteries of: missile-gun systems, ZSU-23-4 Shilka (GUN DISH) or 2K22 Tunguska (SA-19 Grison); close-range, tracked missile systems, the 9K35 Strela-10 (SA-13 Gopher); and close-range portable systems, Igla (SA-18 GROUSE) or Verba (SA-25). If this reform is implemented, the systems in the anti-aircraft missile regiment will be replaced by Buk-M2s (SA-17 GRIZZLY) or Buk-M3s. (Currently, Buks are only found in Ground Forces air defense brigades, but it often supports/covers maneuver brigades and divisions). This would be a significant capability increase. The Osa has a 15km range, while the Tor has a 12km range. In comparison, the Buk-M3 has an approximate range of 70km, and reportedly has a limited capability to engage ground targets. In addition, the division's maneuver regiments will gain an anti-aircraft missile battalion, equipped with Tors (likely 12 launchers per battalion). Although not mentioned, it is likely that the maneuver regiments will retain their anti-aircraft missile-artillery battalions (for providing point defense, and defeating small UAVs). Aside from the obvious area denial considerations of adding Buks to divisional MTO&Es, this change is also significant because the Buk will become the first piece of equipment that could be found in maneuver divisions, but not maneuver brigades.

In theory, these organizational changes will give the Russian motorized rifle (3 motorized rifle regiments and 1 tank regiment) or tank division (3 tank regiments and 1 motorized rifle regiments) four anti-aircraft missile battalions and an anti-aircraft missile regiment (typically, the anti-aircraft missile regiments found in divisions only have subordinate batteries, no subordinate battalions). In practice, of Russia's eight divisions, only a few have all four maneuver regiments, so most divisions will only have three anti-aircraft missile battalions. Despite this, this reform will significantly increase the divisions' capability to deny air space, an especially important capability when combatting peer-level adversaries. In terms of area defense, the 70 kilometer range of the Buk-M3 will be able to fully cover the division in combat formation, including the rear logistic areas. The Tor will be able to fully protect the individual regiments in combat formation, and are designed to not only destroy aircraft, but also cruise missile and other precision guided munitions. Also to be considered is the role of the electronic warfare company. The electronic warfare company works closely with these air defense units by feeding the air defense units targeting data, and can also help protect the air defense units from enemy precision munitions. These anti-aircraft missile units in conjunction with the anti-aircraft missile-artillery battalions found in the maneuver regiments will give the division an effective area, as well as point defense against air threats. The accompanying excerpted article from *Interfax* quotes Russian Ground Forces Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Oleg Salyukov on Russian Ground Forces air defense capabilities as saying, "Our troops' surface-to-air missile systems and complexes [are] capable of fighting all existing means of aerial warfare." **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Nikolay Surkov and Aleksey Ramm, "Пехота и танки получают новый зенитный купол (Infantry and Tanks Units Will Receive a New Air Defense Dome)," *Izvestia Online*, 22 December 2017. <https://iz.ru/685386/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/pekhota-i-tanki-poluchat-novyi-zenitnyi-kupol>

An echeloned air defense dome will cover Russian infantrymen, tank crewmen, and artillery personnel. The rearming and significant reinforcement of the standard anti-aircraft missile battalions, which exist in all tank and motorized rifle divisions, will begin in 2018. Instead of the obsolete Osa [SA-8 Gecko] short-range air defense missile complexes, they will receive state-of-the-art Buk-M2 [SA-17 GRIZZLY] or Buk-M3 medium range air defense missile complexes...

It is assumed that the anti-aircraft missile battalions, which are in each Ground Troops division based upon the TO&E, will be rearmed with Buk complexes in the next few years. In 2018, the anti-aircraft missile battalion in each of the four divisions will receive Buks: two in Western Military District and one each – in the Southern and Central Military Districts. In each battalion, the Buk air defense missile complex – will have up to three batteries of four launchers each...

The Buk-M2 has been arriving in the troops since 2008. This is a medium-range air defense missile complex – up to 50 kilometers. The complex is mounted on a tracked chassis and can easily follow attacking units. This air defense missile complex is known for its versatility and can shoot down both standard aerodynamic targets (aircraft, helicopters, and cruise missiles) at all altitudes, and also more complex offensive air weapons, for example, ballistic missiles or guided aircraft bombs. In the future, they are planning the modernization of all of the tactical Buk complexes to the latest version – the Buk-M3...

One more significant innovation within the new Tactical Air Defense Development Concept – is the creation of an anti-aircraft missile battalion (with Tor launchers [SA-15 GAUNTLET]) in each of the division's motorized rifle and tank regiments. These air defense missile complexes previously constituted the foundation of the division's air defense. Now there will be four anti-aircraft missile battalions in each division...[typically, the anti-aircraft missile regiment only has subordinate batteries, no subordinate battalions]

*Retired air defense Lieutenant-General Aleksey Gorkov told *Izvestia* that the combination of the Buk and Tor complexes will permit them to provide each division with full-fledged echeloned air defense. "The Buk complexes will destroy targets at the distant approaches and the Tor complexes will provide coverage at close range. It will turn out to be a multilayered and often time overlapping, in particular, based upon altitudes and range, air defense zone," the expert pointed out. The complexes supplement each other, the Buk complexes have some facilities to cover and the Tor complexes have others. In the aggregate, it will turn out to be a joint fire system, a type of 'impenetrable dome'..."*

(continued)

Continued: Russian Ground Forces Divisions Upgrading Air Defense Capabilities

“Our troops’ surface-to-air missile systems and complexes [are] capable of fighting all existing means of aerial warfare.”

-Russian Ground Forces Commander-in-Chief, Colonel General Oleg Salyukov

Source: Russia’s air defense can counter all existing means of aerial warfare - Ground Forces commander-in-chief,” *Interfax*, 25 December 2017.

Russian air defense weapons can counter any means of aerial warfare that currently exist in the world, the Ground Forces’ commander-in-chief Oleg Salyukov said on Friday.

“Our troops’ surface-to-air missile systems and complexes have the characteristics making them capable of fighting all existing means of aerial warfare,” Salyukov told reporters on Friday.

The rise of military threats in the aerospace sphere necessitate “a coordinated development of missile-space and air defense systems to meet qualitatively new requirements,” Salyukov said.

New air defense units have been formed, armed with the S-300V4 [SA-23 GLADIATOR] SAM system and the Buk-M2 [SA-17 GRIZZLY] complex, the commander said. The rearming with Buk-M3, Tor-M2 [SA-15 GAUNTLET] and the Verba [SA-25] portable SAM complex continues, he said...



© Vitaly V. Kuzmin

9A317 TELAR for Buk-M2 air defence system.

Source: By Vitaly V. Kuzmin, <http://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/Victory-Day-Rehearsal-in-Alabino-21April2017/i-dPMGMNW>, CC 4.0.



New Naval System Will Be Capable of Launching Air, Shipping, and Ground Attack Missiles

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has made great efforts to enforce the principles of interoperability and modularity throughout her Armed Forces. The accompanying passages from *Izvestia* discuss how these principles are being implemented in naval air defense, and shed light on the next generation of Russian universal missile launchers.

In terms of naval air defense, these principles are being implemented in two ways. The first is the type of munitions that are being fielded. Instead of developing new air defense missile systems, Russian air defenders are ‘borrowing’ systems from their Ground Forces and Aerospace Forces brethren. For example, as

mentioned in the first accompanying passage, Russian naval vessels are being equipped with naval variants of the S-400, an Aerospace Forces air defense system, and the Buk, a Ground Forces air defense system. (Although not mentioned in this article, a naval variant of the Aerospace Forces close-range Pantsir-S air defense system can also be found mounted on Russian ships.) Aside from the obvious benefit of reducing development costs, the economy of scale issues involved with producing existing systems also provide additional financial benefits for state coffers.

The second way that Russia is implementing these principles is through the development of a modular launch system capable of firing different types of missiles. The Russian Federation is already fielding the 3S-14 universal vertical launcher. The 3S-14 is capable of firing several different missiles including the: 3M55 Onyx (SS-N-26 Strobile) anti-ship missile, the 3M-54 Kalibr (SS-N-27 Sizzler) anti-ship missile, the 3M-14 Kalibr-NK (SS-N-30A) land-attack cruise missile, and Russia’s new 3M22 Tsirkon (SS-N-33) supersonic anti-ship missile.

The second accompanying passage discusses the next generation of Russian universal missile launchers. The UKSK-M will be capable of not only firing the same missiles as the 3S-14, but will also be capable of firing air defense and antisubmarine missiles. Due to the varying lengths and diameters of these different missiles, these launchers are likely to waste a significant amount of space for most applications, but in exchange Russia would gain a universal launcher capable of being installed on Russian submarines, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, and even corvettes. This universal launch system will certainly complicate ascertaining the capabilities of any given ship equipped with such a system, as the capabilities of the ship would only be known, if the type of missiles loaded into the internal launchers is known. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



Admiral Essen.

Source: By Gollevainen, MConrads, <http://www.shipbucket.com/drawings/2572>, CC 4.0.

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov, Aleksey Ramm, and Nikolay Surkov: “«Адмиралов» вооружат «сотовыми ракетами» (The ‘Admirals’ Will Be Armed With ‘Cell Missiles’),” *Izvestia Online*, 3 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/682833/aleksandr-kruglov-aleksei-ramm-nikolai-surkov/admiralov-vooruzhat-sotovymi-raketami>

Russian ships are to be protected by supersonic weapons. Project 11356 frigates (the so-called Admiral series) will be equipped with unique 9M100 interceptor missiles. Currently the 11356 frigates are armed with Shtil-1 anti-aircraft missile systems. Missiles from this system are capable of hitting targets at long range but cannot easily cope with maneuverable objects near the ship. Special cells with the 9M100 will be loaded onto vertical launchers of the Shtil system. According to experts, this will significantly expand the combat capabilities of the frigates—a layered air defense system will be deployed around them.

Izvestia was told in the Navy High Command that the project to equip Shtil-1 anti-aircraft missile systems with 9M100 missiles is at the technical evaluation stage. It is assumed that they will be included in the armament of project 11356 frigates and other newly constructed ships.

The 9M100 was originally designed for the S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft missile system and its maritime modification, the Poliment-Redut... The 9M100’s firing range is from 500 meters to 15 kilometers. It can hit targets at altitudes from 5 meters to 8 kilometers. The missile can effectively hit targets moving at speeds up to 3,600 kilometers per hour...The new project 11356 interceptors on board the frigates will be placed in special cells. These are several plastic transport-and-launch containers combined in a single structure. This cell fits in a standard Shtil anti-missile system launcher.

Naval expert Aleksandr Mozgovoy told Izvestia that the presence of highly maneuverable anti-aircraft missiles in the on-board anti-missile system is of great importance for project 11356 frigates. “These are ships operate without air cover, so they need a layered air defense,” the expert explained. “The Shtil anti-missile system that is now mounted on them has a range of about 70 kilometers and it ensures a reliable interception of aerial attack assets on distant frontiers. But to operate at close quarters it is advisable to have small, fast, maneuverable missiles. Plus, they take up less space and many more can be taken on board. The new missiles will significantly expand the combat capabilities of these ships.”

The Shtil-1 anti-aircraft missile system is equipped with the upgraded Buk-class 9-M317-ME guided missile-interceptor system. It can hit air targets at altitudes from 15 meters up to 35 kilometers and at distances up to 70 kilometers. This anti-aircraft missile system comprises from one up to three combat modules, each with 12 transport-and-launch containers. Depending on the number of modules, the munition comprises from 12 up to 36 missiles. The design of the anti-aircraft missile system initially suggests the possibility of using missiles of other types and smaller sizes. That made it easy to upgrade the 9M100 product for the Shtil.

(continued)



Continued: New Naval System Will Be Capable of Launching Air, Shipping, and Ground Attack Missiles

“It will be possible to install the UKSK-M [universal launch system] not only on cruisers and frigates but also on the lighter corvettes and even on small missile ships of very compact dimensions. Older ships will be fitted with the launcher during routine overhauls.”

Source: Aleksey Ramm, Nikolay Surkov, Yevgeniy Dmitriyev, “Универсальная пусковая установка позволяет применять любые ракеты в любых погодных условиях, [Multipurpose System Will Enable Use of Any Missile in Any Weather],” *Izvestia Online*, 17 November 2017. <https://iz.ru/654343/aleksei-ramm-nikolai-surkov-evgenii-dmitriyev/rossiiskii-flot-poluchit-superraketnitsu>

Russia's warships are to get an “everything” launcher that can store and fire all types of missile in service with the Navy, even in the strongest storm -- anti-aircraft, cruise, anti-ship, and even anti-submarine. They currently have several types of launcher for different missile types. The new product's official name is UKSK-M (ship's universal launch system). It comes as a container with pods and is mounted beneath the ship's deck. Each pod is designed to hold one missile. Externally, only the protective lids are visible. According to experts, this new development means that warships can make maximum use of their capabilities and take on board only the type of missile they need for a specific purpose.

Development work on the UKSK-M is already under way, *Izvestia* was told at the Navy's high command. The plan is that after completion of trials, the launcher will enter service with Russia's warships of the future. It will be possible to install the UKSK-M not only on cruisers and frigates but also on the lighter corvettes and even on small missile ships of very compact dimensions. Older ships will be fitted with the launcher during routine overhauls...

Naval expert Dmitry Boltenkov told *Izvestia* that a universal system with vertical launch gives greater flexibility when deploying ships. “You can load the exact type of missile you need to do a specific job,” he pointed out. “For example, to support an operation on land you take more cruise missiles and to escort an aircraft carrier task force -- anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles. But there are certain technical challenges. Missiles come in various sizes and the fixing points inside the UKSK-M will have to be equally effective at holding both light and short and heavy and long items. It will also need a unified system for the missile and the ship to exchange information. For that, you need not only the same connectivity for the missiles but also specialized software for the electronics.”

“Russia's warships are to get an “everything” launcher that can store and fire all types of missile in service with the Navy, even in the strongest storm -- anti-aircraft, cruise, anti-ship, and even anti-submarine.”





Russia Increasing Military Capabilities in the Far East

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian Federation has recently announced several force structure changes to increase military capabilities on her Eastern border, for the purposes of coastal defense and area denial. (Russia has already announced the creation of a Coastal Defense Division in Chukotka.) Specifically, the Russian Federation appears to be interested in hindering the freedom of movement of the US Navy in the Northern Pacific. The first accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses Russian plans to field a new aviation regiment and Air and Air Defense Army in the Russian Far East. The passage quotes military expert Aleksey Leonkov as saying that the US's military activity in the region "has increased many-fold under the pretext of the North Korean missile threat." According to the second passage, also from *Izvestia*, Russia will deploy new coastal defense missile systems (Bal [SSC-6 SENNIGHT] and Bastion [SSC-5 STOOGIE]) in order to deny "access to the Sea of Okhotsk and to the coasts of Primorye to American aircraft carriers." **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“This region has recently become ‘hot’. The US’s military activity here has increased many-fold under the pretext of the North Korean missile threat...We directly border Alaska in the Chukotka and Kamchatka Region, where major US aviation and naval bases have been built. The United States has six aircraft carriers in the Pacific Ocean...” - Military Expert Aleksey Leonkov

Source: Sergey Valchenko, Aleksey Ramm, and Yevgeniy Andreyev, “Дальний Восток прикроют морским воздушным щитом: На Тихоокеанском флоте создается новая армия ВВС и ПВО (They Will Cover the Far East with a Naval Air Shield: A New Air and Air Defense Army Is Being Created in the Pacific Fleet),” *Izvestia Online*, 18 December 2017. <https://iz.ru/679966/sergei-valchenko-aleksei-ramm-evgenii-andreev/dalnii-vostok-prikroiut-morskim-vozdushnym-shchitom>

In 2018, they will merge the Pacific Fleet Naval Aviation and air defense forces into the composition of a powerful army with headquartered on Kamchatka. The new operational combined formation will consist of at least two divisions – aviation and air defense forces. It has been tasked to monitor the air situation on Kamchatka and Chukotka and in the Arctic Region. Based upon expert assessments, the formation of an Air and Air Defense forces Army neighboring Alaska attests to the buildup of the Pacific Fleet’s strike potential.

*Ministry of Defense personnel reported to *Izvestia* that the formation of the Air and Air Defense Army will begin in 2018. Aviation units and the air defense missile and radiotechnical troops will be transferred to its composition. The future operational combined formation’s area of responsibility extends from the Northern Kuriles to the Arctic Wrangel Island...Unmanned aerial vehicle subunits will become part of the composition of the composite aviation regiments, along with squadrons of antisubmarine warfare and transport aircraft, fighters, reconnaissance aircraft, and missile-equipped aircraft.*

The 317th Composite Aviation Regiment, which is deployed at Yelizovo near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, and the 53rd Air Defense Division that is also based there will constitute the foundation of the new army’s grouping... The aviation and air defense forces that have been assembled under one-man command will be able to effectively track threats in their area of responsibility and effectively counter them. The grouping’s mission – is to exclude a surprise air attack and to instantaneously disrupt any attempts to challenge the Russian borders. The Air and Air Defense Army will operate in a single command and control loop with the main forces of the Pacific Fleet and of all Eastern Military District.

*Military Expert Aleksey Leonkov told *Izvestia* that the creation of these formations on the Pacific Axis is not a moment too soon. “This region has recently become ‘hot’. The US’s military activity here has increased many-fold under the pretext of the North Korean missile threat,” Aleksey Leonkov explained. “We directly border Alaska in the Chukotka and Kamchatka Region, where major US aviation and naval bases have been built. The United States has six aircraft carriers in the Pacific Ocean...”*

Source: Nikolay Surkov and Aleksey Ramm, “«Бастيون» на Курилах: Новые базы на островах прикроют мощной системой береговой обороны (The ‘Bastion’ in the Kuriles: They Will Cover the New Bases on the Islands with a Powerful Coastal Defense System),” *Izvestia Online*, 29 November 2017. <https://iz.ru/676106/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/bastion-na-kurilakh> <https://iz.ru/news/666216>

Russia will build bases on the strategically important islands of the Kuriles Archipelago. They will cover Paramushir and Matua from attacks from the sea with a powerful missile shield. Bal [SSC-6 SENNIGHT] and Bastion [SSC-5 STOOGIE] coastal anti-ship missile batteries will be able to sweep with fire the water area along nearly the entire Kuriles Archipelago – from Kamchatka to Iturup. The work on equipping the firing positions will begin already in 2018. According to the experts’ assessments, the new coastal defense system will permit them to reliably “secure” the Sea of Okhotsk and cover Primorye and Sakhalin from the attacks of a hostile navy...

The Bastion mobile coastal complexes are armed with Onyx supersonic anti-ship complexes, which are capable of destroying targets at ranges of up to 600 kilometers (with the availability of a helicopter with a radar complex). The Bastion batteries, which are deployed on the island of Matua in the middle of the Kuriles Archipelago, are capable of sweeping with fire the entire archipelago – from Kamchatka in the north to Iturup in the south. This will permit them to reliably “secure” the Sea of Okhotsk and to cover Sakhalin Island and Primorye from possible attacks...The men and equipment that are deployed here will control the northern portion of the Kuriles Archipelago and will also provide additional cover of Petropavlovsk, where ballistic missile submarines are based...The Bal complexes (firing range up to 120 kilometers) will provide the defense of the navy bases themselves in the event that the enemy will turn out to be closer or will attempt to land an amphibious assault force on Matua or Paramushir.

*Naval Expert Aleksandr Mozgovoy told *Izvestia* that the bases in the Kuriles will permit the guarantee of security of the straits between the islands and to reliably close access to the Sea of Okhotsk and to the coasts of Primorye to American aircraft carriers...*



Russian Anti-Satellite Weapons Systems

OE Watch Commentary: Russia is attempting to well position itself for different space contingencies. The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses a few of Russia's anti-satellite developments. Russia has long been interested in various laser technologies to counter imagery satellites. The Sokol-Echelon Laser System, usually referred to as the Beriev A-60, is a powerful laser mounted to an Il-76MD aircraft. In theory, this system will be able to disable overhead satellites, not by shooting them out of the heavens, but instead by damaging their optics or other components. The Krasukha-2 counters aircraft and space-based radar systems by emitting energy at the same frequency as emitted by radars, in order to interfere with the radars' operation. The accompanying article from *Interfax* mentions the development of the 'Tirada-2S,' likely a wide-band SATCOM jammer, and the 'Rudolf,' a mobile anti-satellite missile that is likely launched from an ICBM launcher. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Dmitriy Kornev, "Космос как поле боя: Военный эксперт Дмитрий Корнев — об арсенале будущих орбитальных войн (Space as a Battlefield: Military Expert Dmitriy Kornev - On the Arsenal of Future Orbital Wars)," *Izvestia Online*, 14 December 2017. <https://iz.ru/680335/dmitrii-kornev/kosmos-kak-pole-boia>

The US Armed Forces Strategic Command (STRATCOM) Commander... recently stated that Russia and China are developing and testing antisatellite weapon systems. The General explained about weapons, which can jam [satellite] communications, and about laser weapons...The development of those combat systems is usually conducted in a situation of heightened secrecy but, nevertheless, information about "counter-space" systems become accessible to the public from time to time.

The first thing that comes to mind, when they talk about the creation of jamming by spacecraft – is the somewhat latest domestic radiotechnical and laser systems. The most futuristic of them – is the Sokol-Echelon Laser System [also known as the Beriev A-60] This is a special aircraft complex with an experimental laser mount, which is designed for the destruction of spacecraft optical systems. "The Sokol-Echelon, like other state-of-the-art laser complex, is not capable of shooting down a satellite – a truly fantastic amount of energy is needed to do this. But it can disable the optical sensors..."

The second real counter-space system – is the Krasukha-2 broadband radiotechnical jamming station. Its purpose – is to cover fixed ground-based facilities from air and space electronic reconnaissance systems. The E-8C JSTARS aircraft, the radars of strike aviation aircraft, reconnaissance and reconnaissance-strike unmanned aerial vehicles, and also reconnaissance satellite radars are the Krasukha-2's main targets. Of course, that system – is not a weapon in pure form, but this is a combat radiotechnical system, which can be employed against spacecraft and disrupt the nominal operation of its detection systems...

Source: "Russia says it is developing anti-satellite weapons" *Interfax*, 30 November 2017.

The Russian Federation is developing advanced anti-satellite weapons, a research institute of the Russian Defense Ministry has said.

According to Oleg Achasov, deputy head of the 46th Central Scientific Research Institute, work is under way in several areas and will be completed under the State Armaments Program for 2018-2027. In particular, he said that the Russian Federation is developing "the mobile anti-satellite strike system Rudolf" and "the mobile anti-communications satellite electronic warfare system Tirada-2S"...

According to the website of the Russian Defense Ministry, this Central Scientific Research Institute (TsNII) drafts armaments programs and provides the foundation for "the prospects for the development of the armament system of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation".

“... the Russian Federation is developing ‘the mobile anti-satellite strike system Rudolf’ and ‘the mobile anti-communications satellite electronic warfare system Tirada-2S’.”



Taganrog. Beriev Aircraft Company. Beriev A-60.

Source: By Alexxx1979 (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ATaganrog_Beriev_Aircraft_Company_Beriev_A-60_IMG_7981_1725.jpg, [CC BY-SA 3.0]



Russia's New 'Dragonfly' UAV

OE Watch Commentary: Recent developments in military technologies have largely favored asymmetric warfare capabilities rather than traditional developments. In particular, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) play an increasing role in militaries all over the world. The Russian military continues to develop UAV capabilities, and according to the recent article in the pro-government source *Izvestia*, it has successfully tested a new category of reconnaissance UAV in Syria.

The article reports that the new drones detect mines and other explosives without significantly endangering personnel. The engineers remain in a nearby armored vehicle, controlling and monitoring the drone throughout the search. The UAV, called the Strekoza (Dragonfly), detects mines more consistently and more quickly (flying 20 kilometers/hour) than engineers, and can operate successfully both in populated and unpopulated areas. According to the author, it will be most useful in open wastelands, where limited cover greatly endangers the lives of personnel with traditional mine detection devices, but is also helpful in population centers, where accuracy and speed are critical to the prevention of civilian casualties.

The drones, “designed for use by mobile engineering reconnaissance teams,” can be transported easily in the Russian Tigr armored vehicles. The Strekoza weighs 12 kilograms, can carry a payload of an additional 2 kilograms and “can stay aloft for up to 40 minutes” using its eight electronic motors. It is designed to detect semiconductor components. While this leads to the detection of both mines and other explosives, the drones also check for “caches of weapons and ammunition, communication devices, and hardware.” The Strekoza can then determine the type of weapon detected and transmit the information to nearby engineers, who are then deployed to disarm the detected explosives. The UAV is also fitted with a video camera to allow for visual inspection of targets prior to deploying engineers.

The nonlinear radar of the Strekoza allows for detection of the unsystematic planting patterns. The ability of the drone to detect explosives in cities and through buildings ensures fewer civilian casualties and an effective handling of urban explosives. According to the author, these features in particular will ensure successful removal of explosives with limited casualties in Syria and other similar zones. **End OE Watch Commentary (Johnson)**

“The Strekoza is designed to replace the military engineer with a mine detector, especially when under fire in open country.”

Source: Nikolay Surkov, “Мины найдет робот-«стрекоза» Российские саперы испытали в боевых условиях уникальный комплекс инженерной разведки (‘Dragonfly’ Robot Will Locate Mines; Russian Military Engineers Tested Unique Engineering Reconnaissance System in Combat Conditions),” *Izvestia Online*, 27 November 2017. <https://iz.ru/657812/nikolai-surkov/miny-naidet-robot-strekoza>

Russian military engineers have received the Strekoza unique robotic engineering reconnaissance system. It is an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) equipped with a non-linear radar, camera, and GPS module. It is designed for remote search for mines and improvised explosive devices. The drone is able to quickly survey a large area and identify sources of danger. The Strekoza has already been tested in Syria. According to experts, the use of such UAVs significantly reduces the risk to life of military engineers and speeds up demining activities....

...The drone was especially in demand when checking large open spaces around population centers and also wasteland.

The Strekoza is designed is to replace the military engineer with a mine detector, especially when under fire in open country. The UAV is deployed from an armored vehicle, in which the operator remains, and systematically combs the area in automatic mode. When detecting an explosive the Strekoza determines its coordinates and transmits them in real time to a control panel.

The Strekoza UAV is designed for use by mobile engineering reconnaissance teams. With a mass of about 12 kilograms, it can be transported by a Tigr armored vehicle. It can stay aloft for up to 40 minutes and can carry up to two kilograms payload.

The Strekoza carries the nonlinear NR-900K Korshun underneath its body. It is designed to search for controlled mines and explosive devices and other equipment containing semiconductor components — whether on or off. When a probe signal from a transmitting antenna interacts with semiconductors it is re-emitted and returns to the radar receiving antenna.

In this way it checks roads and buildings for the presence of radio controlled bombs, mines, and any munitions containing semiconductors. It can also look for caches of weapons and ammunition, communication devices, and hardware....

...The drone is lifted into the air by eight miniature electric motors, which make it look like a big black spider. Flight speed when performing engineer reconnaissance, up to 20 kilometers per hour, provides a quick scan of the area. The UAV is also fitted with a video camera for visual inspection of suspicious objects. Detected explosive devices are neutralized or destroyed by military engineers.

Military expert Oleg Zheltonozhko told Izvestia that the widespread introduction of robotic systems in Syria helped reduce risks for engineering troops personnel....

...According to reports by Russian military engineers, the use of nonlinear radar became one of the main methods of searching for explosive devices in Syria. This was due to the unsystematic mining of areas by the militants and the use of a large number of improvised explosive devices in urban areas, which ruled out demining using the classical method.



Altering Lunar History

OE Watch Commentary: The Soviet Union's space program was one of its greatest achievements. Whether launching the first orbital satellite, sending the first animal, man and woman into space, conducting the first space-walk, or making the first unmanned lunar landing, the USSR often led the US in the space race. The Russian record over the past 25 years has not been as impressive, and nostalgia over the USSR's space achievements remains a source of national pride. This nostalgia, combined with the current anti-American climate, has resulted in some Russians today questioning whether the US actually landed men on the moon in July 1969. The brief excerpt from the normally authoritative *Military Industrial Courier (VPK)* describes the Russian rationale behind this skepticism.

The article begins by asserting that “there are more and more arguments from foreign researchers refuting the landing of Americans on the Moon.” The reason that Russians have not fully joined in this chorus of doubt “is economic,” suggesting that Soviet and Russian leaders and scientists “exchanged the gold of silence for material and momentary political benefits.” The article goes on to assert that “the whole [US] lunar program was invented” and that Russia today has “recognized specialists who could prove this case with the necessary scientific and technical justification.”

The article concludes by stressing that now is the time for Russia to expose this “truth,” since the country is facing “a massive offensive on all fronts of the ideological and information war.” To counterattack, Kremlin leaders must expose “this myth [which] will be a powerful blow to the image of the United States in the world.” Over the past several years, the Kremlin-sponsored media has orchestrated a campaign to convince its population that the West/US is determined to weaken Russia. To fight back against such a determined enemy, some Russians are now advocating a revision of history. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



“The exposure of this myth will be a powerful blow to the image of the United States in the world.”

Source: Boris Loznevoy, “Лунная пыль в глаза. Посадка Аполлонов – красивая картинка или политическая сделка? (Moon Dust in Eyes. The Apollo Landing- a beautiful picture or a political deal?),” *Военно-промышленный курьер (VPK-Military Industrial Courier)*, 19 December 2017. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/40501>

There are more and more arguments from foreign researchers refuting the landing of Americans on the Moon. Supposedly, even Trump's adviser on science recognized the landing of the Apollo as a fake. And what about us? Who, if not Russian scientists, designers and astronauts, could set the record straight!

In this matter, aside from the technical aspect, there were many political decisions that clearly played along with the American version. There are several explanations for the Soviet position. The main thing was economic. We exchanged the gold of silence for material and momentary political benefits. Is it not time to tell the truth about this adventure, without waiting for a self-disclosure from the Americans themselves? After all, this lie can be cast by them as another victory in the struggle of the two systems, as a political scheme, which eventually led to the destruction of the USSR and the US victory in the Cold War. ... Their whole lunar program was invented. In the matter of space flights, we have recognized specialists who could prove this case with the necessary scientific and technical justification....

...This is especially true at the present time, when “a massive offensive on all fronts of the ideological and information war is against Russia. It's time to show the world not only petty lies with a test tube of anthrax, but also lies on an interplanetary scale. In fact, most of humanity still believes that the Americans were on the moon. The exposure of this myth will be a powerful blow to the image of the United States in the world.



Shoygu's Fifth Year Report Card

OE Watch Commentary: In November 2017, Sergey Shoygu celebrated his fifth anniversary as Russia's Defense Minister, and as the brief excerpt from a long, detailed article in the governmental newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, points out, his record of achievements in this post has been impressive. To review these successes, "Shoygu presented an unprecedented open briefing [in late December] on the state of the domestic Armed Forces at the Ministry of Defense Expanded Collegium session." To highlight Shoygu's accomplishments, the excerpt claims that "during the last five years, our Armed Forces have literally been transformed, having conducted a qualitative leap both based upon the combat training level and also based upon the mastery of the latest combat equipment."

Carefully avoiding any mention of Crimea or SE Ukraine, Defense Minister Shoygu began his review by listing the many military successes in Syria. Besides giving "more than 48,000 servicemen... truly invaluable combat experience," the Syrian mission has allowed for a striking display of Russian firepower. All totaled, "215 types of weapons" were employed; everything from long-range precision-guided missiles to the latest air defense systems. And while a number of "deficiencies and defects were identified, 99 percent [of them] were eliminated already during the course of combat operations." Besides liberating more than 1,000 populated areas, Russian forces "killed 60,318 guerrillas, of them 819 leaders of bandit formations," and destroyed "396 illegal oil drilling locations and their processing plants... and also 4,100 tanker trucks."

Defense Minister Shoygu went on to review the other major military accomplishments during his tenure (e.g. new weapon systems, more realistic exercises, improved logistic systems, a higher percentage of contract soldiers, improved military housing, etc...). It is a long and notable list, facilitated by the new "Russian Federation National Defense Command and Control Center." According to Minister Shoygu, this center is a "5th-generation command and control system," allowing for "the integration into a single inter-branch coordination system of 158 federal and regional authorities, and 1,320 defense industrial complex state corporations and enterprises."

While reviewing the many indicators of renewed military prowess, Shoygu pointed out, "We are not rattling sabers and we don't intend to fight with anyone," adding that, "in the process, we are not advising anyone to test our defense capability for strength." The article concludes on a positive note, insisting that after listening to "Shoygu's briefing, one can arrive at only one conclusion: The Russian Armed Forces are strong as never before, have combat experience, and are prepared to defend the Fatherland on land, at sea, in the sky, and even in space." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"The Russian Armed Forces are strong as never before, have combat experience, and are prepared to defend the Fatherland on land, at sea, in the sky, and even in space."

Source: Sergey Ptichkin, "Шойгу: Армия получила бесценный боевой опыт и готова к защите Отечества (Shoygu: The Army Has Received Invaluable Combat Experience and is Prepared to Defend the Fatherland)," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 22 December 2017. <https://www.rg.ru/2017/12/22/shoygu-armiya-poluchila-bescennyj-boevoj-opyt-i-gotova-k-zashchite-otechestva.html>

RF Defense Minister General of the Army S.K. Shoygu presented an unprecedented open briefing on the state of the domestic Armed Forces at the Ministry of Defense Expanded Collegium session. From it, it follows that during 2017, and if more precisely – during the last five years, our Armed Forces have literally been transformed, having conducted a qualitative leap both based upon the combat training level and also based upon the mastery of the latest combat equipment.

The Minister began his report for the first time with an analysis of the Russian Army's participation in actual combat operations on Syria's territory. He pointed out that more than 48,000 servicemen obtained truly invaluable combat experience in Syria.... Every missile destroyed the assigned target. Special Operations Forces accomplished the missions for the destruction of the bandit formations' leaders and terrorists' facilities in the deep rear...

...It is no secret that the majority of the models of our military equipment were tested in the Syrian Operation. The Minister cited the precise figure. These are 215 types of weapons. During their combat employment, 702 deficiencies and defects were identified, 99 percent of which were eliminated already during the course of combat operations.... The Russian troop contingent destroyed 8,000 armored vehicles and pickups with heavy machineguns, and 718 plants and workshops for the manufacture of weapons and munitions during the course of the engagements with the bandit formations on Syrian territory. It killed 60,318 guerrillas, of them 819 leaders of bandit formations.... As a result of the VKS aircraft operations, 396 illegal oil drilling locations and their processing plants were destroyed, and also 4,100 tanker trucks. During the support of the Russian Aerospace Forces to the Syrian government troops and volunteer militia, 1,024 populated areas, including the most significant cities...were liberated....

...On the whole, the events, which were stipulated by the State Defense Order 2017, were fulfilled. Approximately 15,000 various troop training events were conducted in the Armed Forces, which is 20 percent more than in 2016.... Sergey Shoygu did not limit himself to the briefing for last year. He summed up the results of the last five years. And they are also impressive....Today the Russian Army is state-of-the-art, mobile, compact, and combat-capable.

"We are not rattling sabers and we don't intend to fight with anyone," Shoygu pointed out, having added that, in the process, we are not advising anyone to test our defense capability for strength.

The Minister had to comment on the Russian Federation National Defense Command and Control Center that was created with his direct participation. In Shoygu's words, with its deployment, we have emerged at a 5th-generation command and control system. The National Center's information platform has permitted the integration into a single inter-branch coordination system of 158 federal and regional authorities, and 1,320 defense industrial complex state corporations and enterprises.... From Sergey Shoygu's briefing, one can arrive at only one conclusion: The Russian Armed Forces are strong as never before, have combat experience, and are prepared to defend the Fatherland on land, at sea, in the sky, and even in space.



Electronic Tokens to Track Soldiers

OE Watch Commentary: Alongside incorporating the latest technology into their weapon systems, the Russian military has introduced high tech advances into how it manages personnel. The accompanying excerpt from the pro-Kremlin source *Izvestia Online* describes a new electronic token issued to military personnel which both monitors movement and stores vital personal information. Domestically produced, “the electronic token is a small plastic card,” which has been battle hardened to withstand extreme temperatures and EW measures.

The excerpt describes how these tokens will allow the Defense Ministry “to monitor the movement of troops on the unit’s territory, the time taken to get to secure facilities, and can keep track of access to restricted information resources.” The collection of this information will make “it possible to analyze the work of both the military unit and a specific soldier.” A successful trial program using these tokens has already been completed, “and their mass issue began in the autumn of this year [2017] to serving conscripts and contract soldiers.”

The article quotes a military expert who asserts that besides personal and health information, the token “stores the serviceman’s financial documents, food certificates, weapon securement logs, and much other information.” This will purportedly streamline bureaucratic processes within the military, since all the soldiers’ vital “information is stored on a chip and changes in data are entered instantly.” Another expert quoted in the article suggests that these tokens will help “to improve discipline among servicemen and security in military units.” Advances in technology continue to change how militaries operate, and issuing electronic tokens to Russian soldiers may improve both bureaucratic procedures and accountability. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“The introduction of the new tokens will allow the Defense Ministry to monitor soldiers’ access to secure facilities, track the time spent in a particular premises, ... confirm the right to social, financial and other services and maintain their records.”

Source: Vladimir Zykov and Aleksey Ramm, “Военным начали выдавать электронные досье (Soldiers Start to be Issued with Electronic Dossiers),” *Izvestia Online*, 20 November 2017. <https://iz.ru/671424/vladimir-zykov-aleksei-ramm/voennym-nachali-vydavat-elektronnye-dose>

The mass issue of electronic tokens to Russian servicemen has begun.... The tokens record personal data, access keys to various premises, biometric and medical information, and the results of combat training. Thus, the Defense Ministry now has the capability to monitor the movement of troops on the unit’s territory, the time taken to get to secure facilities, and can track of access to restricted information resources. Experts are confident that all the gathered information will be provided to a unified information system of the Ministry of Defense. This will make it possible to analyze the work of both the military unit and a specific soldier.

As Izvestia was informed by the Defense Ministry, the first pilot batch of electronic tokens was issued to privates and sergeants at the end of last year. The trial was deemed a success, and their mass issue began in the autumn of this year to serving conscripts and contract soldiers....

The electronic token is a small plastic card. Hidden inside the chip is an information store. All the electronics are developed and produced in Russia. The chip is capable of operating at temperatures from minus 50 to plus 50 degrees Celsius. The information on it will be retained if an adversary employs electronic warfare [EW] measures or the token is exposed to electromagnetic radiation. Data from the electronic tokens can be read using special fixed and mobile scanners. The latter is especially important in a combat environment. Doctors will be able to easily acquire all the information about a wounded serviceman within seconds.

The introduction of the new tokens will allow the Defense Ministry to monitor soldiers’ access to secure facilities, track the time spent in a particular premises, and confirm the right to social, financial and other services and maintain their records. The chip records all the information from a military ID card: full name, military rank, unit number, blood group, and so on.

“The electronic tokens will very much simplify military bureaucracy,” Izvestia was told by military expert Vladislav Shurygin. “Aside from personal information, the unit stores the serviceman’s financial documents, food certificates, weapon securement logs, and much other information. Previously the records had to be constantly maintained and the data verified. That was especially difficult when transferring a person between units. In such cases it was necessary to collect a package of documents, verify them, and correctly fill them out. Now all the information is stored on a chip and changes in data are entered instantly....”

...Andrey Kolesnikov, director of the Association of Internet of Things, considers that the use of electronic tokens will allow the Defense Ministry to improve discipline among servicemen and security in military units. “The Russian Army will get objective data on which to make the necessary conclusions,” the expert told Izvestia. “Discipline among servicemen as well as the security of facilities will be improved since it will be clear who is where....



Spetsnaz Minelaying Detachments

OE Watch Commentary: While many countries have renounced or limited the use of landmines, Russia continues to develop and strengthen its ability to use this weapon on the modern battlefield. The brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin source, *Izvestia Online*, describes the formation of new “special minelaying detachments,” capable of “stealthily” entering the “enemy’s rear areas in two or three armored vehicles... to plant various types of controlled engineer munitions.”

The first company-sized unit “is already operating within the 1st Guards’ Engineer-Sapper Brigade,” (Murom, Vladimir Oblast) and is purportedly armed with “the newest armored vehicles and high-tech systems with artificial-intelligence elements in their armory.” The vehicles are a “spetsnaz version of the homeland-manufactured ‘Tigr’ armored vehicle” which “thanks to their high off-road capability” are capable of “conducting rapid raids into the enemy’s rear areas.” The unit is armed with “both conventional Soviet- and Russian-produced mines and intelligent systems,” which are “equipped with various electronic (seismic, thermal, optical) sensors and a system of remote control from a special tablet.”

According to the military expert quoted in the article, “the Russian Army is devoting great attention to the use of engineer munitions.” Mines can offer an asymmetric advantage to a smaller force as they are able to “block off roads and areas of terrain that the adversary might use for maneuvering or transporting cargo,” while reducing “the risk to our own fighting men.” This expert goes on to add that “mines remain... one of the most effective and popular means of armed combat.”

The article dismisses the notion that landmines should be banned, asserting that “despite criticism from human rights campaigners, given proper control and observance of all the requirements, explosive obstacles pose a danger only to the adversary.” The Russian military continues to enhance its ability to employ mines both in defensive, and as this article suggests, in offensive operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Special minelaying subunits have been created in the Engineer Troops, capable of secretly penetrating the adversary’s rear areas in order to plant explosive obstacles or destroy important assets there.”

Source: Nikolay Surkov and Aleksey Ramm, “В российской армии появились «стелс-саперы» (‘Stealth Sappers’ Have Appeared in the Russian Army),” *Izvestia Online*, 26 December 2017. <https://iz.ru/674692/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/v-rossiiskoi-armii-poiavilis-stels-sapery>

Special minelaying subunits have been created in the Engineer Troops, capable of secretly penetrating the adversary’s rear areas in order to plant explosive obstacles or destroy important assets there. The “stealth sappers” have the newest armored vehicles and high-tech systems with artificial-intelligence elements in their armory. Experts note that mines make it possible to cover the flanks, constrain the adversary’s maneuvers, and set up ambushes with an insignificant number of personnel being involved.

The Defense Ministry has informed Izvestia that one further type of spetsnaz has been created in the Russian armed forces -- special minelaying detachments. The first such company is already operating within the 1st Guards’ Engineer-Sapper Brigade. It is expected that a similar subunit will appear in every engineer brigade.

In a special minelaying company there are several dozen high-caliber engineers. These subunits are intended not for comprehensive minelaying of terrain, but for pinpoint, clustered application. The spetsnaz men stealthily move up to the front line or into the enemy’s rear areas in two or three armored vehicles and plant various types of controlled engineer munitions there undetected. Their target may be a bridge over a river or an important road along which enemy troops are sure to pass. Using secretly planted obstacles, it is possible to set up an ambush, to cover a threatened zone, or even to blockade a population center by mining its outskirts.

For moving around, the “stealth sappers” use a spetsnaz version of the homeland-manufactured “Tigr” armored vehicle. Thanks to their high off-road capability, these vehicles make it possible to conduct rapid raids into the enemy’s rear areas, and they provide the sappers with sufficient firepower and armor protection against possible contact with the adversary. The special companies’ armory comprises both conventional Soviet- and Russian-produced mines and intelligent systems. As Izvestia has reported previously, entire explosive complexes have already been developed for the Russian Army, equipped with various electronic (seismic, thermal, optical) sensors and a system of remote control from a special tablet.

Military expert Oleg Zheltonozhko has noted that the Russian Army is devoting great attention to the use of engineer munitions. “They are an effective means of covering terrain and do not require the constant presence of personnel -- which is especially important where soldier numbers are small, as they are, for example, in special subunits,” the specialist noted. “It is possible to block off roads and areas of terrain that the adversary might use for maneuvering or transporting cargo. A competently planted minefield replaces an entire detachment. At the same time, the risk to our own fighting men is reduced.”

Oleg Zheltonozhko added that mines remain as one of the most effective and popular means of armed combat. “Despite criticism from human rights campaigners, given proper control and observance of all the requirements, explosive obstacles pose a danger only to the adversary,” the expert explained....



Thinning the Ranks

OE Watch Commentary: A modern and combat-ready military remains a key priority for the current Kremlin leadership. Trillions of rubles have been spent over the past several years to improve the overall image and fighting capabilities of Russia's armed forces. However, as the brief excerpt from the pro-business daily *Kommersant* claims, this combat ready, martial demeanor is not reflected in all those who wear the Russian military uniform- especially among senior officers. According to the passage, "Russia's Defense Ministry has decided to discharge obese servicemen" in an effort to improve the military's image, and perhaps, trim down the upper-level ranks.

The article points out that "commanders will be instructed to draw up a list of subordinates with stage III and IV obesity, after which a medical commission will rule on their fitness for military duties." The article explains the "four stages of obesity: Stage I is when excess body mass exceeds the 'ideal' by 10-29 percent, stage II by 30-49 percent, stage III by 50-99 percent, and stage IV is more than twice the 'ideal' body mass." This excerpt explains that "the Defense Ministry would not reveal how many servicemen are expected to fall into a category liable for medical discharge, citing data protection," but that this "move will make it possible to sharpen up the ranks."

Covering the same story, the second excerpt is from a Siberian news source (*URA News*), which includes quotes from two popular military journalists (Viktor Baranets and Dmitry Litovkin). Baranets points out that these high levels of obesity are rare in the military and that these "measures will affect less than one percent." He goes on to posit that there is now "a struggle for the image of the army – fat slob are not liked anywhere: neither in the troops, nor among the staff." Litovkin echoes these sentiments, stating that "it is unseemly when heavy, obese generals stand in the ranks," and that their poor physique "is not an example for young officers." Litovkin ends the article on an optimistic note, claiming that the "leaders of the Syrian operation" are a good example of today's more professional-looking Russian officers, as they were all "smart, physically strong people, without flabby stomachs." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

"The army is supposed to keep itself in shape."

Source: Ivan Safronov, "Минобороны объявило войну лишнему весу (Defense Ministry Declares War on Surplus Weight)," *Kommersant Online*, 8 November 2017. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3472466>

Russia's Defense Ministry has decided to discharge obese servicemen: A directive to this effect has already been circulated to the personnel officers of all units. Commanders will be instructed to draw up a list of subordinates with stage III and IV obesity, after which a medical commission will rule on their fitness for military duties....

... According to the book Obesity, published in 1964 and written by Professor Mikhail Yegorov and Doctor Leonid Levitskiy, medics identify four stages of obesity: Stage I is when excess body mass exceeds the "ideal" by 10-29 percent, stage II by 30-49 percent, stage III by 50-99 percent, and stage IV is more than twice the "ideal" body mass. Kommersant's sources at the Defense Ministry would not reveal how many servicemen are expected to fall into a category liable for medical discharge, citing data protection. But they did say that the move will make it possible to "sharpen up the ranks:" "The army is supposed to keep itself in shape."

Source: Sergey Makeev, Leo Istomin, "Некоторые военные срочно ставили себе клизму, чтобы похудеть (Some military urgently gave themselves an enema in order to lose weight)," *URA News*, 18 November 2017. <https://ura.news/news/1052313004>

The Russian Armed Forces will get rid of military personnel with excess weight. This decision was taken by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu following the results of the medical examination of servicemen in 2017. Until December 15, service personnel with third and fourth degrees of obesity will be offered to resign or transfer to other posts.

The presence of such an order was confirmed to the correspondent of URA.RU by the military observer of Komsomolskaya Pravda, the retired colonel and former head of the press service of the Defense Ministry Viktor Baranets. "There is indeed such an order of the Ministry of Defense, which says it will fire military personnel who fall under the third and fourth degrees of obesity. But we are not talking about mass layoffs - the measures will affect less than one percent," the source said....

...According to the expert, the new order of the Ministry of Defense will become a signal for those who do not care about their physical form and the image of the Russian military in general: "There is a struggle for the image of the army – fat slob are not liked anywhere: neither in the troops, nor among the staffs..." Baranets noted that there will not be hasty decisions on dismissals - all those who do not meet the parameters will get a chance to improve their physical form, and the final decisions will be taken by the chief medical department and the main personnel department of the Ministry of Defense.

More details about the causes and consequences of the "cleansing" of the military ranks "URA.RU" was told by retired colonel, military expert, TASS military observer Viktor Litovkin. "The army is an organism young, so the personnel hunger does not threaten it. Nevertheless, some colonels and generals should carefully consider this order and take up their own figure. Because it is unseemly, when heavy, obese generals stand in the ranks. This is not an example for young officers. This order will force some officers to do more physical training, and take better care of their health," said Litovkin....

...According to Litovkin, the leaders of the Syrian operation are a good example for overweight officers: "they are smart, physically strong people, without flabby stomachs..."

Commercial ATV Headed to Arctic Forces

OE Watch Commentary: Russian Arctic forces have a variety of tracked vehicles, snowmobiles and ATVs that perform well in the hostile climate. However, many of these come with a hefty price tag. The Russian Ministry of Defense is looking at civilian manufacturing to produce ATVs that can do a similar job for cheaper. The commercial *Шерп* (Sherp-for Sherpa) may fill the bill. The Military would rename it the *Креchet* (Krechet-Gyrfalcon, the largest of all the falcons which breeds in the Arctic and Far North). The accompanying article from *Izvestia* discusses the features of this vehicle.

According to the article, “the Arctic Jeep” can cope with any lack of roads and can also float. It can start up at air temperatures ranging between -76° and 122° Fahrenheit. Various weapons, reinforced armor, or other protection may be installed for the

military use of the vehicle. The passage quotes military expert Aleksey Khlopotov who points out that the vehicle will not require serious armor, considering that the real threat in the Arctic is more likely to come from “sabotage and reconnaissance groups with ...small arms,” as opposed to “troops with tanks and artillery.” It can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRdOIS2EuFk>. The commercial version sells for \$50,000. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



“Sherp” ATV.

Source: By TonyHansson (Own work), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ASherp.jpg>, CC BY-SA 4.0.

“The Defense Ministry will equip Arctic brigades with the Krechet all-terrain vehicle... In the opinion of experts, the small, simple all-terrain vehicles will become a kind of ‘Arctic jeep’ and will be in demand among the troops.”

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov and Aleksey Ramm, “Army Will Get ‘Arctic’ Jeep.’ Military Units Above Arctic Circle Will Be Equipped With Simple Economical All-Terrain Vehicles,” *Izvestia*, 6 January 2018. <http://iz.ru>

The Defense Ministry ... states that trials of the Krechet light all-terrain vehicles intended for Arctic brigades and other units operating beyond the Arctic Circle will begin in the winter of 2018. After completing the trials and the necessary modifications, the vehicle will be recommended for adoption into the arsenal.

Under conditions of almost impassable terrain, according to the military, the small all-terrain vehicles will be the optimum means of transport for special subunits of the Arctic grouping. One of their main tasks will be to seek out and destroy enemy saboteurs. These vehicles will also be suitable for delivering freight and personnel to remote posts.

The all-terrain vehicles have already been tested under various climatic and landscape conditions – in the polar Urals, the Taymyr and Yamal tundra, the Altay Mountains, and even the deserts of the United Arab Emirates. The test results showed that the all-terrain vehicle is capable of coping with any lack of roads and can also float. It starts up confidently at air temperatures ranging between -60° and 50° Centigrade [-76° and 122° Fahrenheit].

The TekhnoImpuls Company ...states that their vehicle ... is excellent for military use.... Various weapons, reinforced armor, or other protection may be installed.

The Krechet’s great cross-country capability is ensured by low-pressure tires and a clearance of 600 mm [two feet]. The wheel pumping system makes it possible to distribute pressure through the axles in the required ratio. The 6 x 6 wheelbase is an original development by the enterprise.

The key feature of the design of the undercarriage is the gearbox, which makes it possible to use economical, low-power units. This gives the Krechet an unprecedented range – 1,500 km. Patrols will be able to stay out on their routes for several days without refueling.

“The Defense Ministry is now deploying a large number of troops in the Arctic Region, and the military needed special hardware. Mass-produced vehicles are needed in the Far North – kind of ‘jeeps,’ suitable for use under very difficult conditions,” military expert Aleksey Khlopotov stated. “The Defense Ministry needs simple vehicles that are economical to use. Everywhere in this region ... are complex sections of terrain with hundreds of rivers, lakes, and marshes that are impossible to overcome without special gear. The main requirements for all-terrain vehicles are good cross-country capability in swampy terrain and the ability to move through water.”

The specialist added that the Russian defense industry is presently manufacturing good-quality all-terrain vehicles. But this is very heavy and “voracious” hardware. Therefore the military are considering ... purchasing a light all-terrain vehicle from companies unconnected with the defense industry. If the Krechet satisfies all the requirements, the Defense Ministry will sign a contract with the manufacturer.

“These vehicles will not require serious armor,” Aleksey Khlopotov pointed out. “It is hard to believe that our hypothetical enemy would decide to send troops into the Arctic with tanks and artillery. But sabotage and reconnaissance groups with ...small arms are a real threat.”

The MOD plans to deploy a coastal defense division in Chukotka [opposite Alaska] in 2018. The military mission will be to patrol the coast and counter a landing by enemy saboteurs. In the event of a large-scale enemy landing the Arctic infantry will have to quickly cover the threatened salient. The absence of roads where the military will have to operate can be overcome only with special gear.

Russian UAV Regiment Stationed in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying passage from *Na Strazhe Zapolyarya*-- Russia's Northern Fleet's newspaper-- discusses Russia's first (and so far its only) UAV regiment which is part of the Northern Fleet. According to the article, the location was chosen based on the goal of ensuring security for Russia's economic activity in the Arctic region and for "developing, guarding, and defending strategic areas of the Arctic Ocean."

As the article notes, there are two types of systems in service with the Northern Fleet's UAV regiment: the Forpost-1, and the mobile Orlan-10. These systems have been in the force for several years and Russia is developing UAVs particularly for the Arctic. These include long-distance UAVs, helicopter UAVs, cargo UAVs, scientific UAVs and even a nuclear-powered underwater drone [autonomous underwater vessel-AUV]. UAVs, perhaps from this regiment or the Central Military District, supported the riverine landing exercise at the river port of Dudinka on the Yenisei River last August. The first career UAV officers will be commissioned from the prestigious Zhukovskiy and Gagarin Aerospace Academy this year and some graduates will be assigned to the regiment. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“UAV detachments and squadrons have been formed throughout the Russian Federation Armed Forces but Russia's first and so far only UAV regiment is in the Northern Fleet. Its location was not chosen at random. Our state has been paying particular attention in recent years to ensuring security for Russia's economic activity in the Arctic region, and to ... developing, guarding, and defending strategic areas of the Arctic Ocean.”



Mobile Orlan-10 UAV.

Source: Mil.ru, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AITC-UAV_01.jpg, CC BY 4.0.

Source: Anna Korolkova: "The First and Only," *Na Strazhe Zapolyarya* [On Guard at the Polar Region], 15 December 2017.

In essence, UAVs are first and foremost reconnaissance devices. Using them makes it possible to instantly obtain appropriate and relevant information, assess the situation, and make decisions when executing combat and training missions....

UAV detachments and squadrons have been formed throughout the Russian Federation Armed Forces but Russia's first and so far only UAV regiment is in the Northern Fleet. Its location was not chosen at random. Our state has been paying particular attention in recent years to ensuring security for Russia's economic activity in the Arctic region, and to ... developing, guarding, and defending strategic areas of the Arctic Ocean. Unmanned aviation is an essential tool in this process....

The Northern Fleet's UAV regiment was formed just a year ago. Since then a training facility has been established, cubicles and hangars for the equipment have been made ready, and the airfield has been reinstated after being closed for 20 years. It launched its first UAV on 7 July 2017. There are two types of system in service with the Northern Fleet's UAV regiment: the Forpost-1, which operates from a fixed location, and the mobile Orlan-10. The aircraft in the Forpost system can remain airborne for up to 18 hours, and those of the Orlan for 12 hours. New UAVs will arrive in the future. By 2019, the regiment will be equipped with the specialized training simulators needed to maintain and improve the UAV operators' skills.

Regimental Commander Colonel Sergey Stepanov states that his subordinates are already a cohesive military team capable of accomplishing any mission assigned to them. The Northern Fleet regiment's UAVs are used for reconnaissance, observation, and surveillance of the fleet's zone of responsibility, inspecting the coastline, topographical surveys of the terrain, checking the condition of military infrastructure sites, assessing the quality of troops' camouflage, visual monitoring of combat training events by the fleet's subunits, detection of targets for preparation of their coordinates, artillery fire adjustment, and guiding combat aviation.

The Northern Fleet regiment's UAV combat crews provided security this year for the "Arctic -- Territory for Dialog" international forum, held in Arkhangel'sk in March. They helped assess the effectiveness of fire at the main operational and combat training event of the Northern Fleet's forces and troops for the 2017 training year -- a performance-appraisal command and staff exercise by the fleet's mixed forces under the leadership of Vice Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov, Commander of the Northern Fleet. The regiment's UAVs were also used for information support in a unique tactical-operational exercise to erect and defend a bridge across the Kola River in the settlement of Shonguy.... UAV support is irreplaceable also for peaceful purposes, like detecting oil spills and monitoring the condition of electrical transmission lines and pipelines.

This year, the regiment will receive its first officer graduates from the Unmanned Aviation Faculty of the Aerospace Academy named in honor of Professor N. Ye. Zhukovskiy and Yu. A. Gagarin.



Russia Tests New ICBM Component in Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: Russia continues to upgrade its ICBM capability. The accompanying passage from an article in the *Independent Barents Observer*, an independent online newspaper covering the Barents Region and the Arctic, discusses an ejection test of the Sarmat missile (NATO designation: Satan-2) which took place at the Plesetsk launch site in late December. The test was reportedly successful. According to the article, the new missile will replace today's R-36M (NATO designation: SS-18 or Satan) silo-based ballistic missile. The Sarmat reportedly has a maximum range of 16,000 kilometers.

The Plesetsk Cosmodrome has been around since 1957 and is truly a veteran launch site for the Soviet and Russian missile programs. However, its high latitude dictated that most of the famous Soviet-era launches were from Baikonaur Cosmodrome in what is today Kazakhstan. Russia now rents Baikonaur from Kazakhstan, but has increased its missile activity in Plesetsk. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“...the Sarmat is ... able to penetrate any American anti-ballistic missile system.”

Source: “Russia tested most deadly nuke-missile,” *The Independent Barents Observer*, 28 December 2017. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2017/12/russia-tested-most-deadly-nuke-missile>

“Russia’s new super-heavy thermonuclear armed ballistic missile is one step closer to deployment. The missile is a core part of the ongoing modernization program for the silo-based ballistic missile forces, one of the most costly legs of the country’s rearmament program. The test has so far not been officially reported by the Defense Ministry..., but a brief note in Moskovsky Komsomolets refers to the test taking place at the Plesetsk Cosmodrome in the Arkhangelsk region on ... 27 December. The test was reportedly successful.”

A so-called ejection test is not a full launch, but limits the firing to the first stage engine. Moskovsky Komsomolets writes that the missile flew “several dozen kilometers.”

The Sarmat missile, NATO ... designation Satan-2, can reportedly carry a payload of about 10 tons allowing for up to ten heavy nuclear warheads, or 15 lighter ones with yields ranging from 150 kilotons to one megaton. The Russian Military TV channel Zvezda states that, like the submarine-based missile Bulava, the Sarmat is ... able to penetrate any American anti-ballistic missile system.

The new missile will replace today’s R-36M (NATO designation SS-18 or Satan) silo-based ballistic missile. Sarmat has a maximum range of 16,000 kilometers.



Intercontinental ballistic missile SS-18 Mod 5, Strategic Missile Forces museum.

Source: By Michael (Nuclear silo), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASS-18_missile%2C_Strategic_Missile_Forces_museum.JPG, CC BY 3.0.



“The Cold War Will Look like Child’s Play Compared to New US Sanctions”

OE Watch Commentary: In a recent interview with *The Financial Times*, Herman Gref, Head of Sberbank, a state-owned Russian banking and financial services company, commented on the negative effects that a new round of US sanctions would have on Russia. His comments were repeated by *Interfax.ru* and many other Russian language news outlets. The accompanying passage transcribed from a *YouTube* video discusses his comments and puts them in context.

In addition to strongly stating the negative effect Russia’s exclusion from the international SWIFT system would have, Gref said he is counting on President Putin to adopt large-scale reforms if and when he is re-elected in March 2018. He specifically notes a reform proposal made by Aleksey Kudrin, the Russian Minister of Finance 2000-2011. Kudrin’s proposal recommends reducing the role of government in the economy, which is more in line with Gref’s previously stated advocacy against a cryptoruble and for the legalization of cryptocurrencies, wherein he sees the future of currency in general.

According to the author, Gref is right to worry, because an exclusion from the worldwide system of money transfers would signal a cardinal shift from pinpointed, targeted sanctions, to a more systematic approach to affect Russia overall. As the author sees it, Putin will likely downplay the gravity of the sanctions, nevertheless, the “cleptocracy” will feel the hit. Despite his clear disdain for those in power, the author builds his case systematically, suggesting the government’s next move will likely be one to protect the interests of the oligarchy.

The author claims that Putin’s party, United Russia, already has a plan. As announced at the recent party convention, the party’s plan would move the tax burden from the business sector to the consumer sector, to alleviate the pressure on businesses, thus spurring economic growth.

While tax schemes abound, the real danger for Russia in the threat of next round of US sanctions is the continual backsliding of the economy. The author sites the dilemma faced by the Russian government of paying pensions while attempting to limit the growth of the national debt, which in 2018 will require 1/20th of the funds coming into government coffers just to service. So far the gap has been covered by reserve funds, but starting this year, according to the budget, the debt will be serviced ironically by a fund started to support the national pension fund by investing in infrastructure.

Furthermore, the author notes that even rising oil prices would not help, because increased expenditures go primarily towards funding national security and law enforcement. Meanwhile, industrial production has taken the fastest dive since the 2009 economic crisis, unemployment is rising, and Russia has increased its ownership of American bonds, so the US has levers on the Russian economy at both ends. As one of the 472 commentators to the report states, “Sanctions are what’s imposed, but “shanktions” are the result.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**



Map of countries which implemented sanctions against Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014.
Source: By Zhitlew, modified by Elmor via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASanctions_2014_Russia_\(Crimea\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ASanctions_2014_Russia_(Crimea).png), CC0 Universal Public Domain.

“Every government has its mafia, but Russia is the only mafia with its own government.”

Source: Тэнгу, “Греф: ‘Холодная война покажется детской забавой’ по сравнению с санкциями США. Отключение от SWIFT (‘The Cold War Will Look Like Child’s Play’ Compared To US Sanctions. Exclusion from SWIFT),” *Youtube.com*, 25 December 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qrF0BuiB30>

Every government has its mafia, but Russia is the only mafia with its own government.

...

The politicians announced the need to increase taxes. The government considers it necessary to increase the tax burden on consumers to speed up economic growth. The Head of the Ministry of Economic Development, Maksim Oreshkin announced it at the Unified Russia Party convention. According to Oreshkin, the new taxes, which they will work on introducing after the 2018 presidential election, must include transferring the tax burden from businesses to individuals. “Moving the tax burden from investors to consumers is a structural change, which will aid in economic growth,” Oreshkin said.

...

As paradoxical as it might sound, even an increase in oil prices won’t solve the budget problems. “Additional resources go primarily towards security forces,” says an analyst for the Center for Development at the Higher School of Economics, Andrey Chernyavskiy. So, in November (2017) the expenses portion of the budget was increased by 361 billion rubles, and of that – 180 billion rubles – were designated for national defense and security, and law enforcement.

...

The reports of increased unemployment are even more alarming in the context of other negative indicators demonstrated by the domestic economy recently...RosStat (Russia’s State Statistics Agency) announced that industrial production in Russia had gone down by 3.6 percent in November 2017, after zero growth in October. This is the fastest drop since the crisis of October 2009, when the Russian economy took a nose dive as part of the worldwide downturn.



Crypto-Detour around Anti-Russian Sanctions

OE Watch Commentary: The recent rise in popularity of blockchain technology has led many to consider it for conducting business outside the international SWIFT banking system, making sales and purchases in some cryptocurrency instead of in a recognized fiat currency, such as US dollars or euros. In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Great Britain suggested excluding Russia from SWIFT as a form of sanctions; today, however, the technology exists for Russian businesses to find a way around such an obstacle.

While the SWIFT leadership argued that excluding Russian banks would actually harm SWIFT itself, the author of the accompanying article suggests that SWIFT criticized blockchain out of fear that its own system and substantial influence in the world could be displaced.

According to the article, the anonymity afforded by Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies would likely not be possible using a government-owned, government-regulated, or government-created blockchain platform, and therein lies the rub. In fact, this idea has been discussed for quite a while, always coming back to using cryptocurrencies as understood in the "classic" meaning, i.e. decentralized and anonymous, not in the sense it has been (mis) applied in the term 'cryptoruble'.

As the author notes, it has been suggested that the Kremlin could see cryptocurrencies as a way around Western sanctions, especially in the financial sector. In February 2017, Internet Ombudsman Dmitry Marinichev suggested letting all legal entities – both individuals and companies – register in Crimea, conduct operations using Bitcoin, and convert them into rubles. This has the potential to attract entrepreneurs. According to Marinichev, this would "give Crimeans the opportunity to be part of the worldwide financial system while also avoiding sanctions and prohibitions on moving capital."

Not coincidentally, in June 2017, the Russian Ministry of Finance suggested allowing cryptocurrency transactions in Crimea as a way to increase foreign tourism. Of course, creating a 'Black Silicon Valley' is a risky proposition: as the author notes, while no one can prohibit blockchain operations, regulators across the world could collectively decide not to recognize them. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**

"The First Vice President of the Russian Federation Igor Shuvalov...emphasized that President Putin had shown a great interest in these (blockchain) technologies, and had literally caught 'blockchain fever'."

Source: Вера Соколова, "Криптообход антироссийских санкций (Crypto-Detour around Anti-Russian Sanctions)," *SVPressa*, 1 September 2017. <https://svpressa.ru/blogs/article/180575/>

In Russia the interest in blockchain started after sanctions were introduced. As is well known, a significant part of the measures have to do specifically with the financial sector and limits opportunities for banks and companies who come under the sanctions to attract lines of credit, especially for the long term.

Moreover, the threat of tightening these measures up to and including excluding banking institutions from the SWIFT system is always hanging over the country's head. On August 25, it became known that that's exactly what happened with two banks in Crimea – RNBK and Tempbank. Although they stated that the exclusion had no effect on them because they work only in Russian and use a domestic [funds] transfer system, no one can guarantee that one of the bigger banks won't be the next in line.

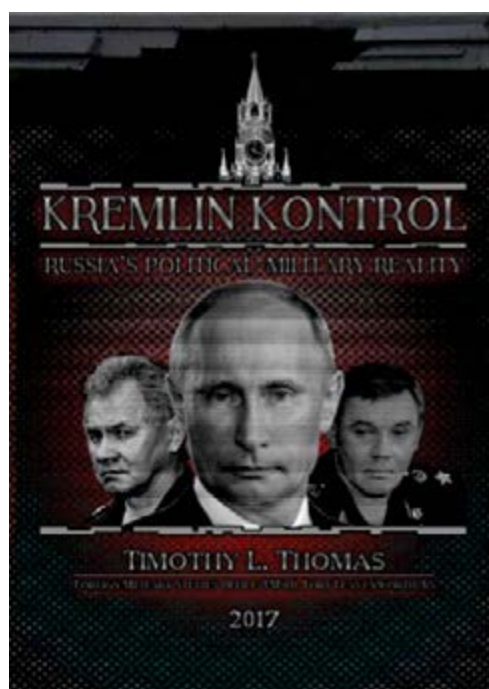
It's no coincidence that the majority of Russian financial institutions, up to and including the government's Sberbank, don't operate on the peninsula – the threat of sanctions is too great. Blockchain and its potential would help solve the problem of attracting the investments to the peninsula that it so needs, and getting around those limitations.

...

Of course, if it's the government using blockchain, there will be no anonymity, but in the case of Crimea, the type of anonymity Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies afford is exactly what advocates of this plan are counting on.

...

"The First Vice President of the Russian Federation Igor Shuvalov... emphasized that President Putin had shown a great interest in these (blockchain) technologies, and had literally caught 'blockchain fever'."



KREMLIN KONTROL by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

In 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country's security forces and reestablished the nation's military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>



Russian Digital Sovereignty Effort Led by FSB

OE Watch Commentary: The Federal Security Service (FSB) has been participating in the International Standardization Organization (ISO) effort to develop a standard for blockchain technology. This will allow the Russian government to use the new technology in the future, and to keep it Russian, according to Aleksey Urivskiy, one of the Russian members of the ISO's special committee.

As described in the article, the first in-person meeting of the ISO Special Committee to Develop a Standard for Blockchain Technology took place in Sydney, Australia in April 2017. The Russian delegation of four people was led by FSB agent Grigoriy Marshalko, according to ISO member Maxim Shevchenko. However, Marshalko told Russian business daily *Vedomosti* that he represents the FSB on a different committee, the Russian Committee of RosStandard for Standardizing Cryptography. He referred all questions regarding his participation in ISO to the FSB, which did not respond for comment.

According to Shevchenko, the legal regulation of blockchain throughout the world in general, and in Russia in particular, is just starting to be developed, while the government regulates cryptographic information protection relatively strictly. For example, those projects certified by the FSB are connected to systems that review personal data, and to bank-client systems for legal entities.

The government laid out its plans for blockchain in the Program for the Digital Economy, which was approved at the end of July. According to the document, a set of normative acts which would allow for a legal experiment in using blockchain should be ready in the fourth quarter of 2018. By the end of March 2019, the documents should be approved, and the experiment itself is planned for the fourth quarter of 2019. The experiment will last one year, and the results will be used to set the legal conditions for using blockchain.

The biggest challenge now is how to move forward quickly, while at the same time maintaining an all-Russian technology. According to the article, as well as to the many official opinions stated in the months prior to the President's announcement about the creation of a 'cryptoruble' in October 2015, Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies use "Western" technology, while Russia should use Russian technology. In fact, as the Vice President of Sberbank (a state-owned Russian banking and financial services company) admits in the article, its blockchain projects primarily use foreign cryptographic protection. Meanwhile, one of their projects, the Masterchain platform, has already been certified by the FSB.

According to the author of the book "Battle for the RU-net," The FSB is trying to add Russian algorithms to the international register to make Russian Internet users choose the domestic blockchain – voluntarily at first, then as a requirement. In his opinion, this is part of the digital sovereignty the government is developing. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**



FSB Emblem.

Source: By Espfutbol98 (Own work) via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AFSB_Emblem.png, CC0 Universal Public Domain.

“The task of the Russian representatives to the ISO committee is to ensure Russian cryptographic algorithms make their way into the international standard for blockchain.”

- Aleksey Urivskiy, Expert and member of Russian ISO Special Committee to Develop a Standard for Blockchain Technology

Source: Екатерина Сирнова, Елена Мухамешина, “ФСБ участвует в разработке международного стандарта блокчейна (The FSB is participating in developing an international standard for blockchain),” *Vedomosti*, 18 August 2017. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/technology/articles/2017/08/18/730045-fsb-blokcheina>

Because cryptographic protection is at the heart of blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies, the delegation to the international committee is comprised of members of the Russian committee of RosStandard for standardizing cryptography, according to Shevchenko. The committee develops standards for cryptographic information protection. The FSB is in charge of its work: according to the committee regulations, the Chairperson is a member of the FSB. A special committee for blockchain in Russia will start its work in the Fall. RosStandard started selecting experts for the committee August 11, 2017.

The task of the Russian representatives to the ISO committee is to ensure Russian cryptographic algorithms make their way into the international standard for blockchain, according to one of the experts and member of the committee, Aleksey Urivsky.

The lack of blockchain-based decisions certified by the FSB and the FSTEK (Federal Technical and Export Control Service) is one of the minuses of this technology, a representative of the Ministry of Communications told Vedomosti in May.

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Without the means to certify electronic signatures, as used in blockchain, Russian institutions will likely not be able to use blockchain, Urivsky continues. It should not include any Western cryptography, he says. According to a representatives of the Ministry of Communication, the plusses of blockchain are that it's impossible to change past transactions and you can trace all the stages of a deal.

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Why the Russian Government Needs the Cryptoruble

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying article discusses several compelling reasons for the Russian government to move forward with creating a cryptoruble. These range from national security and fighting crime to deposing the US dollar as the worldwide reference currency.

The author suggests the exclusion of several banks on the US and European sanctions list from the international interbank money transfer system (SWIFT) should be a red flag regarding Russia's dependence on the system, as this represents a significant national security vulnerability. If the entire country were to be excluded, the country's economy would hardly function, and the country itself would be thrown back into the technological dark ages of several decades ago.

Instead of remaking their own domestic version of every new technology in recent memory (smart phones, money transfer systems, etc.), the author suggests using the cryptoruble as a leapfrogging technology to replace credit/debit card transactions.

The overwhelming advantage for the government is that it can gain greater control over the banking sector and return to a more centralized monetary policy. All non-cash payments would be visible to the government, and, as the author suggests, this would reduce credit card fraud and other illegal financial transactions.

Ironically, the author recasts the cryptoruble as a safe haven from the shadow economy, instead of its jumping off point. He contends that the cryptoruble should replace the cash ruble, which would reduce the currency available for criminals to engage in anonymous transactions.

Finally, the author discusses how a cryptoruble would be the first step towards making an international cryptocurrency that would displace the US dollar as the world's foremost reference currency. Predictably, the author suggests this new super-currency would be "based on the national currencies" of Russia and its allies, "China, Venezuela, Iran," thus making it the antithesis to "real" cryptocurrencies, which are beholden to no country. The author suggests that the cryptoruble as the common cryptocurrency among Russia and its allies would "provide a greater degree of security in international transactions, allowing [Russia] to stop using the SWIFT system, from which Russia could be excluded anyway as part of another round of sanctions." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**

“The cryptoruble is the first step towards no longer using the dollar in international transactions with our allies (China, Venezuela, Iran), to be followed by the creation of an international cryptocurrency... it would provide a greater degree of security in international transactions...”



Central Bank of Russia, Neglinnaya street 12, Moscow, Russia.

Source: By Ludvig14 (Own work) via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AMoscow_RussiaCentralBank_1M00.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: Федор Наумов, “Цифровой суверенитет. Зачем правительству понадобится крипторубль (Digital Sovereignty: Why the Government Needs the Cryptoruble),” *Forbes.ru*, 3 November 2017. <http://www.forbes.ru/finansy-i-investicii/352381-cifrovoy-suverenitet-zachem-pravitelstvu-ponadobilsya-kriptorubl>

The introduction of sanctions has shown that Russia must create its own systems and technologies, so as not to end up cut off from the global technological infrastructure.

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The situation in the banking sector: As of today, there are many banks in Russia that use the non-cash ruble in grey [economy] schemes and do not extend credit [to their customers], thereby limiting the ability of the Central Bank to carry out monetary policy. A new, modern type of non-cash ruble – the cryptoruble – could solve the problem by making the system of non-cash payments more transparent and significantly reducing the number of illegal [financial] operations.

The fight against the shadow economy: In this country, the time has come, little by little, to squeeze cash out of circulation, in order to shut down part of the grey economy.

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The cryptoruble is the first step towards no longer using the dollar in international transactions with our allies (China, Venezuela, Iran), to be followed by the creation of an international cryptocurrency along the lines of the special lending and borrowing rights.

Based on the currencies of allies, it would provide a greater degree of security in international transactions, allowing [us] to stop using the SWIFT system, from which Russia could be excluded anyway as part of another round of sanctions.”



Cryptoruble Rejected in Favor of a Supranational Cryptocurrency

OE Watch Commentary: In preparing to meet the deadline set by President Putin to have the regulatory framework for both “traditional” cryptocurrencies and the cryptoruble in place by 1 July 2018, the Central Bank (CB) and Ministry of Finance (MinFin) have submitted a bill for review, which they discussed at a meeting of the Public Council on 28 December 2017. The accompanying articles provide insight into their proposal, which favors creating a supranational digital currency instead of a cryptoruble.

According to the first article, both the First Vice-Chair of the CB Olga Skorobogatova, and the Deputy Minister of Finance Aleksey Moiseev, declared the creation of a cryptoruble not to be worthwhile. They quickly turned to selling the positive side of their recommendation, namely, that Russia look at creating a supranational digital currency that would work across the EurAsian Economic Union (EAEU) or within the framework of Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa economic union known as BRICS.

The rest of the meeting was dedicated to a discussion of how to regulate “real” cryptocurrencies. According to the third article, the CB considers them not to be viable forms of payment, while the MinFin adds they could be treated as a form of property and could be used to trade for other property, i.e. not “buying” and “selling” per se.

As they try to thread this regulatory needle, the Deputy Minister of Finance discussed the other highlights of the part of the bill on regulating “classic” cryptocurrencies. According to the second article, he suggested this “other form of property” would be called a “token” and that tokens would be “mined” and that “miners” would be considered entrepreneurs and their activity would be taxed as such. Moiseev emphasized, however, that the part about taxing miners was not in this bill, but would be worked out in the future.

According to the second article, the bill also suggests a stock market approach, in which the market/trading house would need a license, but says nothing about the circulation of cryptocurrencies themselves.

Given the lack of concrete decisions and the suggestion to scrap the President’s idea of the cryptoruble, which Putin publicly announced Russia would issue, we will likely not know the fate of any cryptocurrency until the actual law is passed. Certainly, the importance of the cryptoruble and of regulating all cryptocurrencies cannot be understated as the President aims at a fourth term in March 2018, in conjunction with the Digital Economy project which was announced last year. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**

“... the Bank of Russia is looking at the possibility of introducing a supranational digital currency within the framework of BRICS or the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).”

Source: “ЦБ в 2018 году начнет обсуждение единой цифровой валюты с партнерами по ЕФЭС и БРИКС (In 2018 the Central Bank Will Start Discussions about Creating a Unified Digital Currency with Its Partners in the EAEU and BRICS),” *Interfax.ru*, 28 December 2017. <http://interfax.ru/business/593815>

“It does not seem altogether justified, from the perspective of macroeconomics and the population, to introduce a national digital currency. The idea that seems to us worth discussing with our colleagues is introducing a digital currency in the EAEU or within the framework of BRICS,” said Skorobogatova.

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On Thursday [December 28, 2017], the Deputy Minister of Finance Aleksey Moiseev said he does not consider creating a cryptoruble in Russia to be worthwhile.

Source: “Крипторубль пошел на повышение. Минфин представил законопроект о цифровых активах (The cryptoruble Has Been Promoted. The Ministry of Finance Presented a Bill about Digital Assets),” *Kommersant.ru*, 28 December 2017. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3512307>

At the Public Council December 28, the Deputy Minister of Finance Aleksey Moiseev presented the key elements of the bill on regulating digital financial assets. Among them – the definition of a digital asset (token) as an “other property”, mining (creating tokens) as an entrepreneurial activity, as well as using a stock market for digital assets transactions.

Source: “Ольга Скоробогатова: ЦБ РФ не признает криптовалюты расчетным или платежным средством (Olga Skorobogatova: The CB RF Does Not Consider Cryptocurrencies a Means of Payment),” *Bitsmedia*, 28 December 2017. <https://bits.media/news/tsb-rf-ne-priznaet-kriptovalyuty-raschetnym-ili-platezhnym-sredstvom/>

The Ministry of Finance suggests defining cryptocurrency as a “different form of property” rather than a form of payment/settlement. You would not be able to buy anything with them, but you would be able to obtain cryptocurrency and exchange it for other property. At the same time, according to Skorobogatova, the Bank of Russia is looking at the possibility of introducing a supranational digital currency within the framework of BRICS or the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).