

Foreign Military Studies Office

OEWATCH



Volume 8
Issue #3
March 2018

FOREIGN NEWS & PERSPECTIVES OF THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



STABILITY IN AFRICA

AFRICA

- 3 Turkey's Expanding Military Presence in Africa
- 5 Foreign Forces in Africa
- 6 Mali's Civil Protection Challenge
- 7 Why Can't Kenyan Forces Defeat al-Shabaab in Kenya?
- 8 The Destabilizing Stability Doctrine
- 9 Abubakar Shekau... Dead Man Running
- 10 The Risk of the "Somalization" of the Sahel
- 11 Boko Haram Psyop on Chibok Girls Continue
- 12 Conflict, Cash, and Cholera
- 13 Namibia: Hangry Soldiers

MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA

- 14 Turkey Eyes Police/Military Cooperation with Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan
- 15 Egypt-Turkey Friction Over Political Order in the "Levant Basin"
- 17 Iran: Warship Sinks after Mishap
- 18 Iran: Telegram Giving Data to US and Israel
- 18 Iran Develops UAS with "Smart Bomb" Capability
- 19 Iran: US Sponsoring Islamic State in Afghanistan
- 20 Iran: Winning Hearts and Minds in Deir Ezzor
- 22 Raqqa's Minefields

LATIN AMERICA

- 24 Military Training Key to Panama's Success in Counter Drug Operations
- 25 Venezuela Continues to Disappear
- 26 Venezuela's PDVSA on the Verge of Collapse, Deepening the Country's Economic Crisis
- 27 Colombian Urban What-Is-Wrong List
- 28 What Did FARC Leaders Expect?
- 29 Peruvian Cocaine Production Associated with Possible Shining Path Resurgence?
- 30 Cuba to Build Massive Windfarms with Chinese Assistance
- 31 Mexican Army Seizes Claymore Mines, Rifles, and Drugs in Tamaulipas

ASIA-PACIFIC

- 32 MILF Leaders Seek Lessons Learned from Indonesia
- 33 Indonesia, Malaysia Have Right of Hot Pursuit in Philippines
- 34 Papua New Guinea Balances Between China and Australia
- 35 Maldives: Troubled Waters in the Indian Ocean and Growing Relations with China
- 36 Maldives: Troubled Waters in the Indian Ocean and Growing Relations with China
- 37 Xinjiang Ethnic Harmonization by Quartering and Relocation
- 38 Is China's Afghanistan Strategy Modeled on Russia in Syria?
- 39 China's Evolving Nuclear Strategy: Will China Drop "No First Use?"
- 41 China Promotes Increased Maritime Capabilities
- 42 Photos Paint a Point of No Return over the Disputed South China Sea
- 43 Chinese Su-35s Fly Patrols in the South China Sea for the First Time
- 44 Chinese Aviation Academies Introduce Free Air Combat Training

CAUCASUS, CENTRAL AND SOUTH ASIA

- 45 Is the Chinese Air Force Ramping up for Further Action Following the 2017 Doklam Standoff?
- 46 Another Potential Hit to China-Pakistan Relations
- 47 CPEC: "Iron Brothers," Unequal Partners
- 49 Mirziyoyev's Reforms Reach the National Security Service (SNB)
- 50 The Russian-South Ossetian Armed Forces Agreement Takes Shape

RUSSIA, UKRAINE

- 51 Considering Information War
- 52 General Gerasimov on the Syrian Campaign
- 55 The Development of the Forpost UAV
- 57 Specialist Training for Russian UAV Pilots
- 58 Russia Developing Top-Attack Tank Mine
- 59 Russian Expeditionary Capabilities, a Relatively Low Priority
- 62 Engineer Troops Organizational Reforms
- 64 Promised Pay Raise for Military
- 65 Sacrificing Beans for Bullets
- 66 Strengthening Civil Defense
- 67 Pros and Cons of Legalizing Private Military Companies
- 68 The Russian Narrative of US Biological Weapons Research in the CIS
- 70 Ukrainian Perception of Javelin
- 71 The Eastern Military District and Pacific Fleet Control the Eastern Entrance to the Russian Arctic
- 72 Arctic S-400 reaches operational status
- 73 Birthrate Soars Among Service Families in the Arctic
- 74 Career Appeal of KGB
- 75 "Russia's Patriot Act": New Law Empowers FSB
- 76 His Holiness Patriarch Cyril Tells Parliament What Keeps Him Up at Night
- 77 The "Electronic Concentration Camp" of National Cryptocurrencies
- 78 Russian Speculation about the Cryptoyuan

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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:

A Nigerian Soldier During Exercise Flintlock 2017, Diffa, Niger.

Source: US Army photo by Spc. Zayid Ballesteros, <http://www.africom.mil/media-room/article/28739/flintlock-2017-builds-trust-in-niger>, Public Domain.

OEWATCH

Foreign News & Perspectives of the Operational Environment

Volume 8 | Issue 3

March | 2018

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Turkey's Expanding Military Presence in Africa

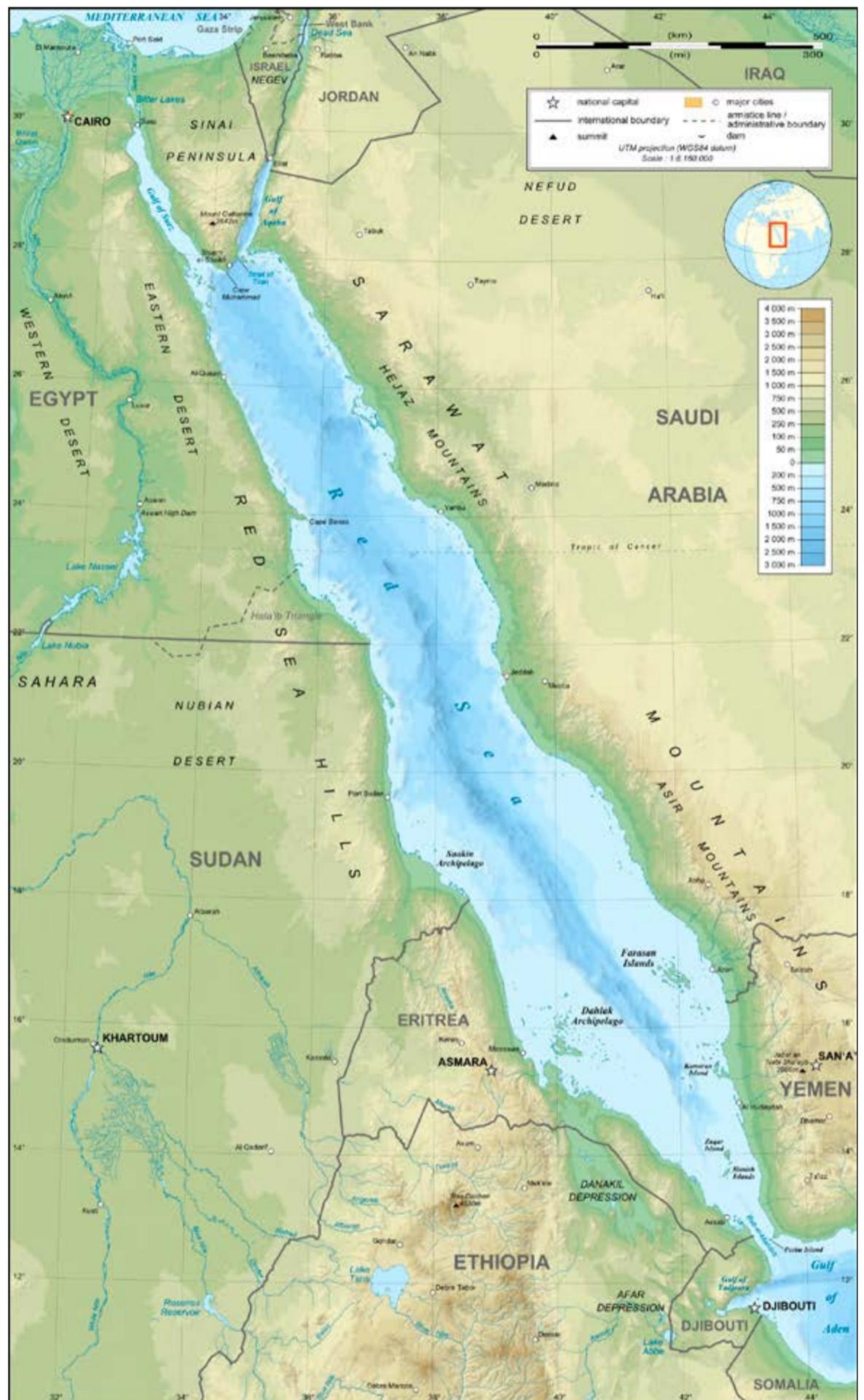
OE Watch Commentary: In late December, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan traveled to Africa for official visits to Sudan, Chad and Tunisia. The visits resulted in important military agreements with Sudan and Tunisia in particular. The efforts are part of Turkey's broader effort to establish a military and diplomatic presence in Africa. The accompanying passages from Turkish and Middle Eastern sources discuss the significance of these initiatives.

The visit to Sudan resulted in 13 agreements, including one which entails Turkey leasing Sudan's Suakin Island, on the Red Sea. As the first passage from the website of *TRT World*, an English news channel based in Istanbul, notes, the agreement to lease Suakin Island is significant because Suakin is at "the crossroads between Aden Gulf and the Red Sea, and Saudi Arabia and East Africa." Other agreements include a new airport for the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, a free-trade zone in Port Sudan, a port and shipyards for military and civilian ships in the Red Sea. The two countries' chiefs of staff also agreed to develop military cooperation.

The second passage from *Al-Monitor*, a news website with analysts from the Middle East, notes that the agreement caused panic in Arab countries, especially in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, where there is concern that Suakin Island will become a military base for Turkey. As the passage points out, "Egyptians fear that a Turkish military alliance with Sudan could actually upset the power balance in the region... Saudis fear that a base in Sudan controlled by Turkey — which is cooperating with Iran — could become a springboard of support for the Qatar- and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen."

The third passage, from the Turkish-language daily newspaper *Milliyet*, is a report about Sudan's announcement that the agreement signed with Turkey regarding Suakin Island does not pose a security threat for Arab countries. It should be noted that Turkey already has a military presence in Africa via its recently opened military base in Somalia. The base has about 200 Turkish personnel and a military academy to train Somali officers.

As the final passage from *Karar*, a pro-government Turkish-language newspaper notes, Erdoğan's visit to Tunisia resulted in a military cooperation agreement with Tunisia to train Tunisian soldiers in Turkey and to invest in Tunisia's defense field. These are all part of Ankara's initiatives in Africa, which significantly increased in 2005 when Ankara declared that year "The Year of Africa" and a number of unprecedented high-level visits took place, culminating in Turkey obtaining observer status in the African Union. Since then, Turkey has been an active player in Africa, with hopes that its initiatives on the continent will elevate its status as a key regional and global power. (For more information, see Karen Kaya and Jason Warner, "Turkey and Africa: A Rising Military Partnership?" <https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmsom/fmsom-monographs/200295>). **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Topographic map in English of the Red Sea.

Source: By Eric Gaba via Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ARed_Sea_topographic_map-en.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0-3.0-2.5-2.0-1.0.



Continued: Turkey's Expanding Military Presence in Africa

“Turkey is temporarily taking over the island for reconstruction. Suakin is at the crossroads between Aden Gulf and the Red Sea, and Saudi Arabia and East Africa. The move is another step for Turkey’s engagement policy in Africa.”

Source: Ali Topchi, “Why is Sudan’s Suakin island important for Turkey?” *TRTworld.com*, 26 December 2017. <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/why-is-sudan-s-suakin-island-important-for-turkey--13630>

Turkey is temporarily taking over the island for reconstruction. Suakin is at the crossroads between Aden Gulf and the Red Sea, and Saudi Arabia and East Africa. The move is another step for Turkey’s engagement policy in Africa.

Source: Fehim Tastekin, “Erdoğan’s Ottoman dream causes storm in Red Sea,” *Al Monitor.com*, 3 January 2018. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/01/turkey-sudan-cooperation-sparks-worry-in-gulf.html#ixzz55nyPG8SW>

During his visit to Sudan, Erdoğan signed 13 agreements covering a new airport for the capital Khartoum, a free-trade zone in Port Sudan, a port and shipyards for military and civilian ships in the Red Sea, grain silos at various locations, a university, a hospital and power stations. The countries are targeting an annual trade volume between them of \$10 billion, up from the current \$500 million. The two countries induced panic in the Arab world when, in addition to Turkey gaining temporary control of Suakin Island, the two countries’ chiefs of staff agreed to develop military cooperation.

Whether the island will become a military base is open to speculation, but the port project for military and civilian ships and the accord of military cooperation are enough to raise eyebrows, especially in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Egyptians fear that a Turkish military alliance with Sudan could actually upset the power balance in the region... Saudis fear that a base in Sudan controlled by Turkey — which is cooperating with Iran — could become a springboard of support for the Qatar- and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Source: “Türkiye hakkındaki iddialara Sudan’dan jet açıklama! (Speedy response from Sudan regarding allegations about Turkey),” *Milliyet.com.tr*, 28 December 2017. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/sudan-in-turkiye-ile-sevakin-adasi-gundem-2580966/>

Sudan announced that the agreement signed with Turkey regarding Suakin Island during [Turkish] President Erdoğan’s visit does not pose a security threat for Arab countries.

Source: “Türkiye ile Tunus arasında 4 anlaşma imzalandı (Turkey and Tunisia signed four agreements),” *Karar.com*, 27 December 2017. <http://www.karar.com/guncel-haberler/turkiye-ile-tunus-arasinda-4-anlasma-imzalandi-704345>

The Military Cooperation Agreement was signed by [Turkish] Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli and Tunisian Defense Minister Abdulkerim ez-Zubeydi.



The RED DIAMOND is the Army’s leading e-journal highlighting current threats in the Operational Environment.

It is published by TRADOC G-2 OEE ACE Threats Integration and is posted at:

https://atn.army.mil/dsp_template.aspx?dplD=377



Foreign Forces in Africa

OE Watch Commentary: The presence of foreign militaries in Africa has changed since 2000. Back then, as the accompanying article relates, it was mostly France supplying units along with a few from the US and what the article's author describes as "niche deployments," such as UN forces. That scene has changed dramatically. Although China made the headlines for opening a military base not far from US forces deployed in Djibouti, less publicized is that small but strategic Djibouti also hosts bases and/or units from France, Italy, Japan, and Germany. Both India and Saudi Arabia are also considering opening bases there. As for Russia, it wanted to partner with the Chinese base but could not, so it is now believed to be in talks with Sudan for a place of its own.

The scramble is not just for Djibouti. Following the opening of its base in Eritrea, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is now in the process of establishing one in Somaliland, a portion of northwestern Somalia that has declared itself independent, but which no other country formally recognizes. India has facilities in Madagascar and Mauritius and besides contemplating a Djibouti base, has been considering a deeper presence in the Seychelles. And, there are still the French, who while they may no longer be the near monopoly foreign power in Africa they were in 2000, currently maintain a significant presence in Africa, especially in the Sahel. France, with its long history of involvement in Africa, is described in the article as remaining that continent's key foreign power.

As for the reasons behind the growing presence of foreign military powers in Africa, the article emphasizes three: insecurity in several regions, self-interest, and conflict among countries outside of Africa. With regards to insecurity, the European nations and the US are focused on attacking Islamist extremists. However, the article adds that they are also pursuing their own business interests, citing their growing commercial presence on the continent as perhaps an indication that this is the case.

More complex is the reason for the growing presence of Middle Eastern militaries in Africa. It is possibly related to international posturing between the two factions - which includes Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain on one side and on the other, Qatar - embroiled in the Gulf crisis. Somalia has so far managed to stay neutral in the Gulf crisis even though it hosts bases from Turkey, which sides with Qatar, and the UAE, which opposes Qatar. Meanwhile, the UAE's Eritrea base is part of its joint campaign with Saudi Arabia against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, just across the Bab al-Mandab Strait. Against this backdrop there are warnings that African countries could be sucked in as proxies for the conflict among these Middle Eastern countries.

The African Union (AU) finds itself not in control of most of these ventures as the majority are through bilateral agreements between the host countries and foreign governments. Even though the AU may want to at least monitor these militaries to ensure they are not harming African interests, it lacks both a mandate and the capability to do so. Indeed, it is doubtful, as the article states, that the AU even knows the scale of military expansion in Africa, a situation especially true in places such as Libya and Somalia, where numerous foreign militaries are involved. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The United States in particular, but also France, have had a lot of flak for their military presence in Africa. However a surprising number of other foreign powers have quietly been putting boots on African soil over the past couple of decades, though attracting little attention..”



The American flag being raised over Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.

Source: US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Regina L. Brown, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Navy_070911-N-3285B-157_Storekeeper_1st_Class_David_Trimble_and_Religious_Program_Specialist_1st_Class_Wayne_George_raise_a_flag_over_Camp_Lemonier.jpg, Public Domain.

Source: Peter Fabricius, “AU Summit 30: Should Africa Worry About a Growing Foreign Military Presence?” *Institute for Security Studies (South Africa)*, 25 January 2018. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/au-summit-30-should-africa-worry-about-a-growing-foreign-military-presence>

The United States in particular, but also France, have had a lot of flak for their military presence in Africa. However a surprising number of other foreign powers have quietly been putting boots on African soil over the past couple of decades, though attracting little attention.

Yann Bedzigui, a researcher in the ISS Peace and Security Research Programme in Addis Ababa, says, ‘The issue of foreign military bases has been a source of concern for many member states of the Peace and Security Council (PSC). However it is a complicated issue. Hosting a foreign military base is a sovereign decision. Since the PSC and the AU in general have tended to emphasize sovereignty above all, its leverage is quite limited.’

[Institute for Security Studies’] Leijenaar believes the AU would like to keep control of foreign military activity or at least play some coordinating role, and have an intelligence overview of all such military activities on the continent. ‘But they just don’t have the capacity to do that, for one thing,’ she says.



Mali's Civil Protection Challenge

OE Watch Commentary: Personal security has deteriorated in large parts of the north and central regions of Mali. These parts of the country have been engaged in an insurgency war which has lasted for a number of years. Organized crime and trafficking has become more common, much of it introduced by the insurgent groups controlling large swaths of Malian territory. That makes sense – based on statistical evidence from other global hotspots, where the rule of law breaks down and the central government struggles to control territory. The first source, in addition to providing an update on Malian military personnel killed-in-action during a recent one-week period, makes reference to the lack of police and civil protection in the Gao region, particularly in Menaka. This suggests that part of the problem may be the state of the police forces guaranteeing personal security within the country.

The second source, written two years ago, addresses this very question. It suggested then that the condition of the police and domestic security forces in Mali were, and continue to be, partially to blame for what is becoming a general lack of personal security across the country, including the capital and southern regions, with armed robbery being the most frequent crime. The second article also suggested that if armed robbery and other crimes cannot be stopped across the entire country, it would not only threaten the local population, but also threaten international aid work, on which significant segments of the population of Mali depend.

It is not easy to gather crime statistics from the numerous cities, towns, and villages, even in the relatively peaceful south. Consider Ouelessabougou (population roughly 50,000), about two hours drive south of the capital. Ouelessabougou has no local written news outlets and only three local radio stations. A number of Western charities also operate in and around Ouelessabougou. While the dire prediction given two years ago in the second source has not come to pass, NGOs based in Ouelessabougou have been advised to enhance security infrastructure and planning.

While Bamako and the southern part of the country have been largely exempt thus far from the war in the north, there is continued pressure to ensure domestic security in this part of the country. This may be hard to do given everything else the semi-stable Malian government is dealing with, particularly fending off enemies of the state to the north and east of the country. **End OE Watch Commentary (Billingsley)**

“Terrorist groups continue to occupy parts of the territory where they extort money and engage in various types of trafficking.”

Source: “Régions de Ménaka et de Mopti: Sept Militaires Tues En Une Semaine (Regions of Menaka and Mopti: Seven Military Personal Killed in one Week),” *L’Essor*, February 6, 2018. <http://www.essor.ml/regions-de-menaka-et-de-mopti-sept-militaires-tues-en-une-semaine/>

Terrorist groups continue to occupy parts of the territory where they extort money and engage in various types of trafficking.

Source: “Sécurité et protection civile : Le Mali face à l’insécurité grandissante (Security and Civil Protection: Mali Faces Growing Insecurity),” *www.Malinet.net*, October 19, 2015. <http://www.malinet.net/les-citoyens-sexpriment/securite-et-protection-civile-le-mali-face-a-linsecurite-grandissante/>

If the fight against terrorism and the attacks of rebel groups is or must be done through a concerted action between the defense and security forces of Mali and those formed by the international coalition, domestic crime is exclusively the business of Malian authorities. Any weakness at this level, calls into question the national policy on security and civil protection.



United Nations Military Convoy between Bamako and Ouelessabougou.
Source: Dodge Billingsley, used with author's permission.



Why Can't Kenyan Forces Defeat al-Shabaab in Kenya?

OE Watch Commentary: While much has been written in the Western press about al-Shabaab in Somalia, the terrorist group's activities in Kenya, except for large-scale attacks such as the one at the Westgate Mall, tend to go unreported. However, as the accompanying article relates, al-Shabaab is also active in launching relatively small-scale attacks in certain Kenyan regions that border Somalia. To be sure, after several years of trying, Kenya has made progress against the terrorists, but it still does not appear to have the answer as to how to completely remove al-Shabaab from its territory. In the three years since Kenya launched Operation Linda Boni to flush the terrorist organization out of Boni Forest – an operation that was later extended to several other areas – the terrorists have proven adept at exploiting the security forces' weaknesses as well as appealing to Kenyan al-Shabaab sympathizers.

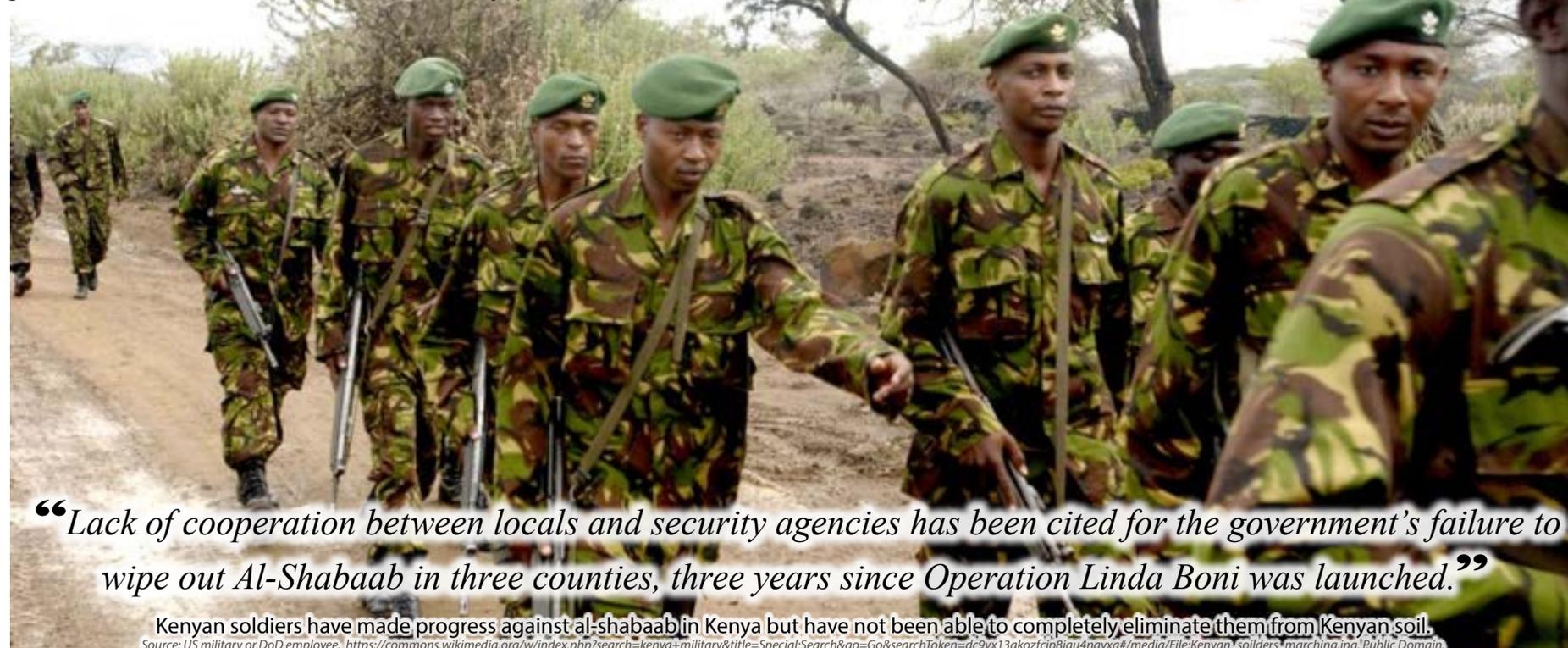
Numerous reasons are given in the article for Kenya's failure to defeat al-Shabaab, with a lack of cooperation between the local populace and the security forces being the biggest one. Most notably, the government has failed to deploy to these embattled regions personnel who understand the local culture and thus could foster important relationships which lead to the residents sharing important information with the security forces. As a result, little in the way of key intelligence is being gathered through local contacts.

According to the article, cultural expertise is not all the security personnel lack; they also lack morale, a consequence at least in part due to their not receiving allowances they believe they are owed. Food and living quarters are also reportedly issues, further eroding the troops' already low spirits.

As described, one part of these beleaguered soldiers' job is to protect motorists, but frequently in these regions the roads are of extremely poor quality, forcing drivers to slow down and thus providing al-Shabaab with easy targets. Once they complete their ambush, the terrorists can readily cross the porous border into Somalia, waiting to slip again into Kenya and launch yet another attack. Meanwhile, there is a financial incentive for some "tenderpreneurs" as they're called - a portmanteau of tender and entrepreneur with tender referring to government contracts - to keep the conflict going as they find provisioning soldiers to be quite lucrative.

One more factor compounding the situation that the article points out is the perceived presence of al-Shabaab sympathizers among the Kenyan populace. Operation Linda Boni Director Joseph Kanyiri recently accused locals of working with al-Shabaab, enabling the terrorists to not only continue their attacks but also to make it difficult to arrest them. Additionally, some Kenyans have travelled to Somalia to train with the terrorist group and have now returned home, having become radicalized. The article also posits that these returnees are recruiting local youths to join the group.

Director Kanyiri relates that the Kenyan security forces are in total control of the situation, and that considerable progress has been made against the terrorists. While this may be true, the article's authors paint a different picture, one of ongoing and deep trouble with the attempt to quell al-Shabaab on the Kenyan side of the border, a view reinforced with every al-Shabaab attack on a car driving slowly along a curvy, potholed road. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**



Source: Kalume Kazungu and Mohamed Ahmed, "Poor communication, low morale derail battle against Shabaab," *Daily Nation (Kenya)*, 28 January 2018. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/war-on-Shabaab-has-dragged-on-in-three-counties-/1056-4282534-8wi48hz/index.html>

Lack of cooperation between locals and security agencies has been cited for the government's failure to wipe out Al-Shabaab in three counties, three years since Operation Linda Boni was launched.

The poor state of the Garsen-Lamu road that has remained untarmacked since independence, despite the launch of works by President Uhuru Kenyatta last March, has further made it easy for the terrorists to plant explosives.

When the government launched Operation Linda Boni in 2015, many thought the terrorists would be flushed out of the forest within a few years. But this was not to be as the terrorists still cause havoc despite the presence of Kenya Defence Forces and police officers in Lamu, Tana River and Garissa counties where the operation falls.

"Lack of cooperation between locals and security agencies has been cited for the government's failure to wipe out Al-Shabaab in three counties, three years since Operation Linda Boni was launched."

Kenyan soldiers have made progress against al-shabaab in Kenya but have not been able to completely eliminate them from Kenyan soil.
Source: US military or DoD employee, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=kenya+military&title=Special:Search&go=Go&searchToken=dc9vx13akozfcp8jgu4nayxd#/media/File:Kenyan_soldiers_marching.jpg, Public Domain



The Destabilizing Stability Doctrine

OE Watch Commentary: For much of Africa the question is “At what price stability?” For the author of the accompanying article, that price could be the rule of law, democracy, or free and fair elections. The main example the article provides is that of the 2017 elections in Kenya. The incumbent won the contested vote, and the opposition turned to the courts to challenge the outcome. The Supreme Court, to the surprise of many, ordered a do-over, but the hurried process with which the new round of voting ensued, along with an opposition boycott, resulted in more than 15 million people refusing to participate in what was regularly described as an illegitimate election. Even with the Kenyan electoral commission declaring that the second vote was a shambles, foreign ambassadors, according to the article, emphasized stability, essentially placing it above credible elections. It should be noted, however, that nowhere in the article does it mention that any foreign ambassadors were interviewed or given an opportunity to refute such an assessment.

The article intimated that much of this foreign diplomatic attitude is ascribed to corporations needing stability before risking significant investments in a country. This is occurring at the same time as many foreign governments, because of economic limitations or frustration with past efforts, are trying to extract themselves from becoming involved in the governance and government of individual African nations. The result is that foreign governments, in order to provide a stable milieu for investing, tend to favor the existing power, thus bolstering the status quo even if it means overlooking discontent and state abuses.

While such an approach may yield stability now, in the long run it could actually be counterproductive as people become increasingly frustrated that their desire for liberal democracy is being subjugated to elites and corporations. Thus, that push for stability could paradoxically be increasing instability.

The author relates that it has not always been this way. Back in the Cold War era there was an emphasis on creating long-term allies. What has changed, especially in the last ten years, is the rise of China, Turkey, and other non-Western economic countries that have challenged the West’s economic dominance of the African continent. According to the author, foreign policymakers, including Westerners, have weakened their insistence on good governance not just to push stability, but also in order to enable their corporations to compete in this new environment where not all players are going to follow the old rules. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“In the name of this ‘Stability Doctrine’, foreign governments tip the political balance in favor of existing power and the state.”

Source: Nanjala Nyabola, “Will the Stability Doctrine in Africa destabilise the world?” *African Arguments*, 23 January 2018. <http://africanarguments.org/2018/01/23/will-the-stability-doctrine-in-africa-destabilise-the-world/>

In the name of this “Stability Doctrine”, foreign governments tip the political balance in favour of existing power and the state. They bolster the short-term status quo, even if that means disregarding visible discontent and overlooking state abuses. They pick power over protesters, and privilege the interests of others over those of the citizens in the countries at hand.

The Stability Doctrine treats Africa as a place to make as much money as quickly as possible, not a place where people live, love and exist. It ensures African countries continue to play a position in the periphery of global politics, providing raw materials, markets, and an acquiescent labour force for multinational corporations.

The reality, however, is that while outsiders are tipping the scales in favor of wealth and the status quo in the corridors of power, African countries are growing increasingly inhospitable for many of their citizens, particularly the youth.

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>



Abubakar Shekau...Dead Man Running

OE Watch Commentary: Abubakar Shekau, the leader of the Boko Haram terrorist group, was reported by the Nigerian army to be on the run. According to the accompanying excerpted article, the military based their assessment of Shekau on information provided by surrendered insurgents. Additional intelligence supposedly revealed that he could not withstand the pressure from the counterinsurgency campaign the Nigerian government has been conducting against his Sambisa Forest hideout, and that he disguised himself as a woman using various hijabs to facilitate his escape.

While Shekau abandoning his fighters would be welcome news by the many Nigerians Boko Haram has terrorized over the years, it must be remembered that there have also been repeated reports of his death. The earliest one was in 2009, the same year he assumed leadership of Boko Haram following the execution of its founder, Mohammed Yusuf. Shekau however, surfaced in a July 2010 video, dispelling the earlier reports of his demise. Over the years there were repeated claims of his being killed, only to have him reappear in videos, claiming how he enjoyed orchestrating an attack that took 180 lives, or laughing after abducting over 200 girls in Chibok, an action that received worldwide attention.

Some Nigerian media claim he was killed and that imposters have taken his place. His supposed use of body doubles just adds to the confusion. The Nigerian military has not helped the situation, earlier announcing he was dead, and now saying he has run off because he could not deal with the sustained tempo of fighting. Dead or furtive fugitive, he cannot be both.

To be sure, there has definitely been progress against Boko Haram in Nigeria, with the armed forces, through Operation Deep Punch II. The operation cleared terrorists from large areas of Sambisa Forest, including Camp Zairo, which served as Boko Haram's headquarters. After that successful operation, the Nigerian military declared the terrorist organization defeated, but a surge of attacks by the group has, like Shekau's reappearances, cast doubt on the government.

It may be true that Shekau fled the fighting, disguised as a woman and reportedly alternating the colors of his hijab between black and blue, however, probably no one would be surprised to see this brutal and violent terrorist fight again. After all, not even his own death seems to stop him. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“The Nigerian Army Tuesday claimed that the factional leader of the Boko Haram terrorists, Abubakar Shekau is on the run disguising as a woman in different hijabs.”



The Nigerian army claims Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, in the middle, fled the scene of recent fighting disguised as a woman.

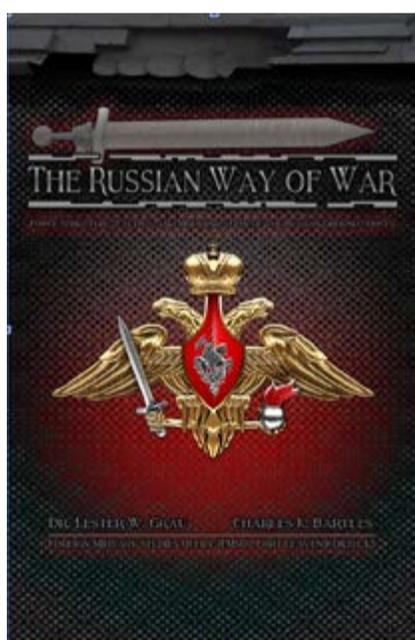
Source: tiny.cc/jinnews, https://goo.gl/Y5vMvW, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Source: Segun Olaniyi, “Shekau on the run, disguised as a woman, Nigerian Army says,” *The Guardian (Nigeria)*, 13 February 2018. <https://guardian.ng/news/shekau-on-the-run-disguised-as-woman-nigerian-army-says/>

The Nigerian Army Tuesday claimed that the factional leader of the Boko Haram terrorists, Abubakar Shekau is on the run disguising as a woman in different hijabs.

The Director Army Public Relations, Brig. Gen Sani Usman said in a statement on Tuesday that credible information from surrendered insurgents indicated that the factional leader of the group could not sustain the tempo of the heat of the ongoing counterinsurgency going on in the forest.

[Troops] have also rescued civilians being held hostages by the terrorists, recovered arms, ammunition, Improvised Explosives Devices (IED) factories and making materials as well as other equipment.



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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The Risk of the “Somalization” of the Sahel

OE Watch Commentary: On 25 January an article in the French-language *courrierinternational.com* discussed perspectives from the Sahel on the ongoing violence in the region. There has been an increase in landmine and suicide attacks in Mali, and according to the article, the militants are sending a message to the G5 Sahel, which comprises Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger and receives the support of up to 4,000 French troops in the region. The G5 was created in 2014 but has recently attracted significant publicity, according to the article, because of the launch of a new operation codenamed Pagnali, which means “thunder” in the local Fulani language.

The article expressed concern that due to pressure on terrorists in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan they may relocate to the Sahel, where the operational environment is more permissive for them, specifically that a “Somalization” of the Sahel region is under way.” This could lead to a scenario where various jihadists from around the world collect in the region, which is already overwhelmed with disorder. This is the prime reason why the article urges the G5 Sahel to act immediately to restore order and prevent the region from becoming like Somalia.

Among the biggest victims of this situation of insecurity, according to the article, are civilians. The article points to an example of a group that traveled from Burkina Faso to a market in Boni in central Mali but their vehicle hit a mine that killed women and children. Making things more difficult, this attack, like many others, remain unclaimed, although the article notes it is clear that the terrorists who operate in the area are responsible. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“Everything suggests that hunted jihadists in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and from around the world have made an appointment in the Sahel.”

Source: “Multiplication des attaques terroristes: la “somalisation” du Sahel est en marche (Multiplication of terrorist attacks: the “Somalization” of the Sahel is underway),” *www.courrierinternational.com*, 30 January 2018. <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/multiplication-des-attaques-terroristes-la-somalisation-du-sahel-est-en-marche>

The joint G5 was announced with much publicity, but it is slow to see the light of day. It is possible new attacks have been perpetrated to taunt the leaders of the subregion. The G5 Sahel just launched the anti-jihadist operation Pagnali (which means “thunder” in Fulani). While leaders prepare the response, Allah’s lunatics are also refining their strategies. Aware that they will not be able to stand up to the troops of the sub-region, the terrorists have decided to multiply their acts of despair, in this case the suicide bombings and the attacks with mines. The “Somalization” of the Sahel region is under way, to say the least. It is urgent to act. Everything suggests that hunted jihadists in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and from around the world have made an appointment in the Sahel.

On January 25, 26 Malian and Burkinabe civilians, including women and children, died in another attack. Their vehicle from Burkina Faso, which was traveling to the Boni market in central Mali, jumped on a mine.



Ansar Dine Tombouctou.

Source: Magharebia, “Ansar Dine Tombouctou,” https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ansar_Dine_Tombouctou.JPG, (CC-BY:2.0).



Boko Haram Psyop on Chibok Girls Continue

OE Watch Commentary: On 15 January the excerpted article appeared in the Nigerian publication *Vanguard*. It discussed a video Boko Haram released showing a group of 14 of the schoolgirls kidnapped in Chibok, Nigeria in April 2014. Wearing blue niqabs and with three of them holding babies, one of the girls spoke to the camera and said that the Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau had married them off and taken care of them and that they no longer wanted to return home. The article notes that there is no way to tell whether the girls were under duress or speaking voluntarily but the video came nearly a year after the last exchange of 82 schoolgirls in May 2017 between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government and one month after one of the Chibok schoolgirls was found near the border with Cameroon. After the exchange in May 2017 Boko Haram released a similar video with four girls wearing black niqabs in which they held guns and also said they did not want to return home.

The latest video, like the May 2017 video, is part of psychological operation by Boko Haram against Nigerian society and the government. There are currently no reports of negotiations underway between the Nigerian government or international organizations and Boko Haram, as was the case when the last exchange was made with Boko Haram. This could mean this video indicates the door on negotiations has been sealed.

Whether or not the girls have Stockholm syndrome, their fate will be in the hands of Boko Haram for the foreseeable future. Only a rescue operation or revived negotiations with Boko Haram may allow them to be free again. However, even if free, it is unclear whether some of the girls featured in the videos would indeed want to leave their Boko Haram captors and new so-called husbands and whether they would be able to reintegrate once back home. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“We are the Chibok girls... By the grace of Allah, we will not return to you.”



August 2016 'Proof of Life' Video Showing Dozens of Kidnapped Chibok Girls
Source: VOA, <https://www.voanews.com/a/boko-haram-some-abducted-chibok-girls-killed-in-air-strikes/3463613.html>, CC-BY-SA-2.0 (Public Domain).

Source: “Boko Haram propaganda: 14 Chibok girls vow not to return,” *vanguardngr.com*, 15 January 2018. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/01/boko-haram-propaganda-14-chibok-girls-vow-not-return/>

‘Boko Haram released a new video purporting to show at least 14 of the schoolgirls abducted from the northeast Nigerian town of Chibok in April 2014. At least three of the group were seen carrying babies. One of the students said: “We are the Chibok girls... . By the grace of Allah, we will not return to you.” It was not clear when or where the latest message was recorded or whether those who appeared on camera were under duress. But the woman speaking, her face covered by a veil, said they had all been married by Boko Haram factional leader Abubakar Shekau. The Chibok abductees are among thousands of women, girls and boys kidnapped during the conflict, which began in 2009 and has killed at least 20,000 people and displaced more than 2.6 million.



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Conflict, Cash, and Cholera

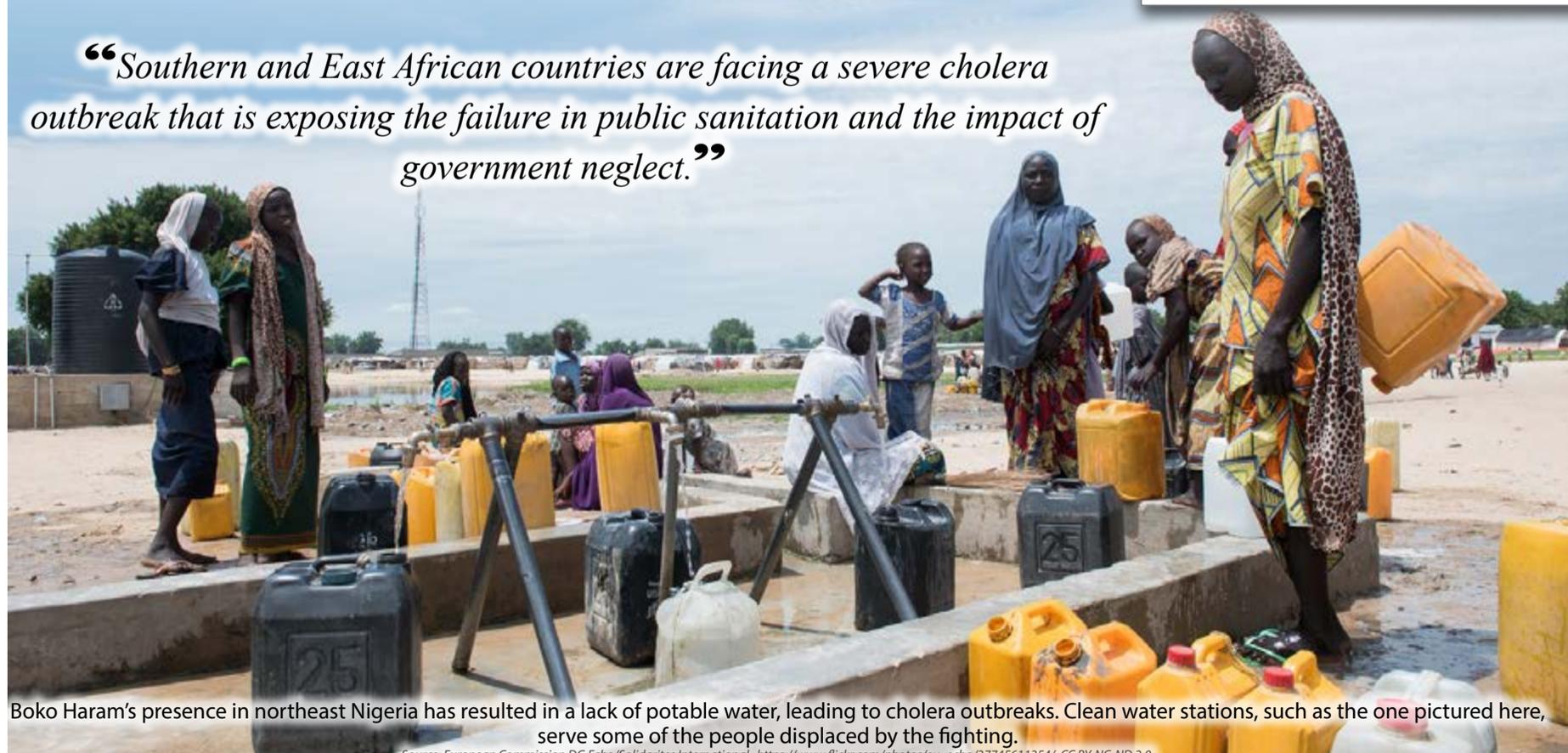
OE Watch Commentary: Cholera, an infection of the small intestine, is largely preventable through public health measures such as ensuring the water and food supply are not contaminated with the bacterium *Vibrio cholerae*. However, as the accompanying article relates, the disease is still stubbornly prevalent in several parts of Africa, mostly due to two big factors: conflict and cash-strapped governments. Not surprisingly with regards to conflict, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which has been wracked by violence from the failure of President Kabila to step down at the end of his term, as well as ongoing fighting among various groups over the country's vast mineral riches, has been struck particularly hard by cholera. Médecins Sans Frontières reported 55,000 cases, including 1,190 deaths last year. Besides the difficulties in providing needed sanitation programs in conflict areas to prevent the disease, the country's instability has also precluded significant tax revenue being raised to adequately fund public health programs. Compounding the problem is that a significant portion of the tax revenue that is raised is diverted to attempts to quell the unrest, as opposed to being used in disease prevention efforts. Thus, the DRC is a prime example of both conflict and a lack of funding resulting in cholera outbreaks.

The war-torn countries of Somalia and South Sudan have also been hit hard by the disease, with approximately 78,000 cases for Somalia and 17,000 for South Sudan reported in 2017. As conflict in both of those countries has continued into 2018, it is expected that cholera will continue to be a problem. Interestingly, much like the DRC, both countries have natural resources – large oil deposits in South Sudan and a stunning coastline in Somalia that many years ago sprouted numerous resorts – but due to conflict are unable to be fully developed and provide the needed financing for public health programs.

Some African countries are not in the midst of large-scale fighting, but due to mismanagement and/or corruption, lack the funds to combat cholera. Such is the case for Zimbabwe, which under Robert Mugabe has gone, as some describe it, “from Africa's breadbasket to a basket case.” Mugabe was forced to resign in November 2017, but the damage to the economy and the public health system cannot be immediately reversed. The result is outbreaks of cholera and typhoid, from, as the accompanying article describes, an “appalling” sanitation system.

Zimbabwe is hardly the only country in the eastern and southern regions of Africa described in this article that lacks appropriate infrastructure for public health. In the twelve countries constituting that area, only 53 percent of the people have access to potable water and just 30 percent to basic sanitation. 21 percent still practice open defecation. For those who do contract cholera, the health care infrastructure, such as the quality and quantity of hospitals, is often equally weak, greatly reducing the chances they will survive. All of this is preventable, but not when the two factors mentioned earlier - cash-strapped governments and conflict - are present. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Southern and East African countries are facing a severe cholera outbreak that is exposing the failure in public sanitation and the impact of government neglect.”



Boko Haram's presence in northeast Nigeria has resulted in a lack of potable water, leading to cholera outbreaks. Clean water stations, such as the one pictured here, serve some of the people displaced by the fighting.

Source: European Commission DG Echo/Solidarites International, https://www.flickr.com/photos/eu_echo/37745611354/, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Source: Tonderayi Mukeredzi, “Africa's all too preventable cholera crisis,” *IRIN (Zimbabwe contributor)*, 1 February 2018. <http://www.irinnews.org/news/2018/02/01/africa-s-all-too-preventable-cholera-crisis>

Southern and East African countries are facing a severe cholera outbreak that is exposing the failure in public sanitation and the impact of government neglect.

Portia Manangazira, the director of Epidemiology and Disease Control in Zimbabwe's Ministry of Health and Child Care, acknowledged that the public health and sanitation situation in the country was “appalling”, and the nation could do much better to stop “creating” avoidable health crises.

The [Zambian] government and the WHO blame poor waste management and inadequate personal hygiene for the contamination of water and food in the townships, which has driven the epidemic.

Zimbabwe's cash-strapped government has struggled to make those investments in sewerage infrastructure and water management systems, with cholera outbreaks becoming more frequent since the early 1990s when the economy first stalled.



Namibia: Hangry Soldiers

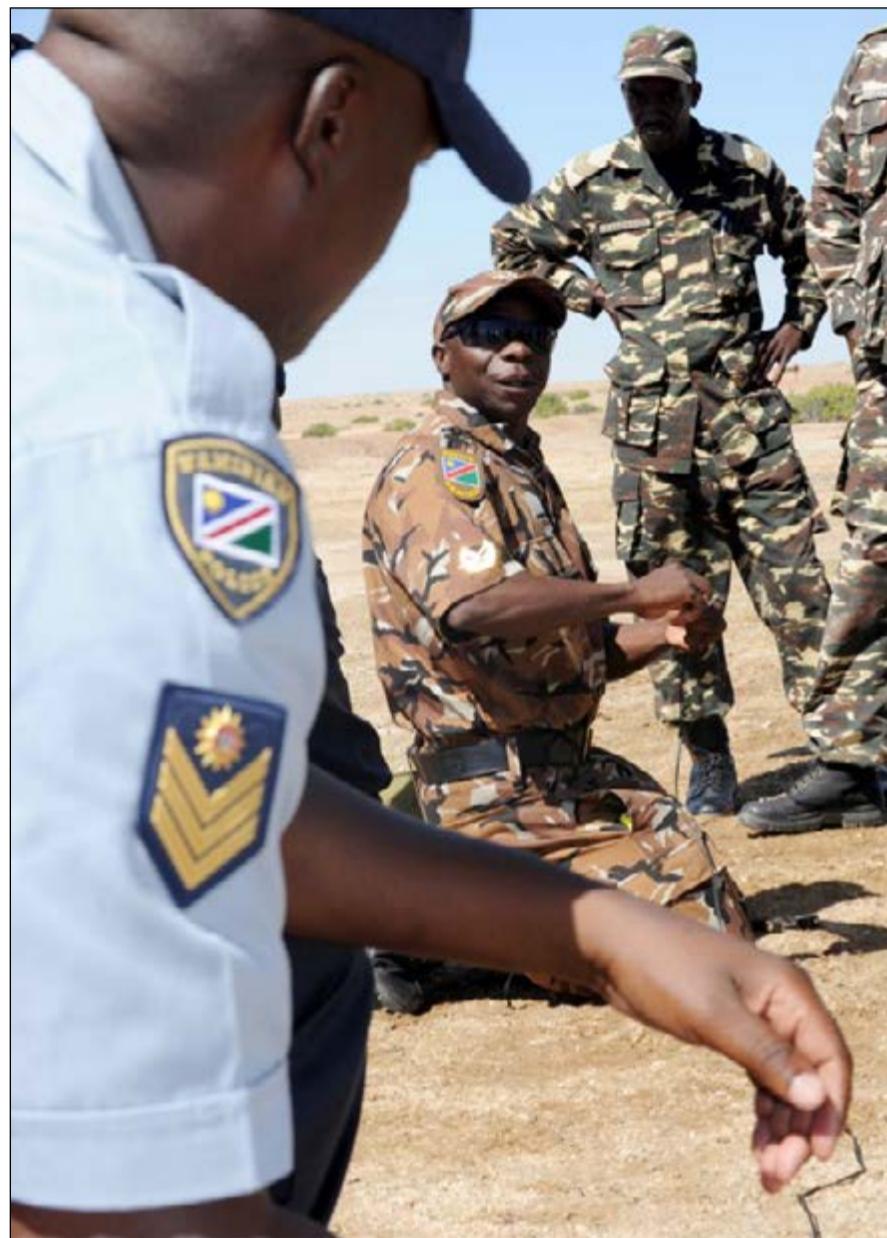
OE Watch Commentary: If truly “an army marches on its stomach,” an expression attributed to both Napoleon and Frederick the Great, then Namibia’s military is in trouble. According to the accompanying excerpted article, the southern African nation is forcing thousands of its troops – the Namibian government did not provide the exact number, citing confidentiality – to take leave as it can no longer afford to feed them. With a military just 15,500 strong, even if the number placed on leave is only 1000, such an action leaves the country with a significantly smaller force. To make matters worse, it is not just that the government cannot feed the soldiers; it also is struggling to pay the military’s electric and water bills. Meanwhile, the army owes municipalities millions of dollars.

Although funding for defense shrank this year compared to last year’s expenditures, the military actually receives the third largest chunk of the national budget. Much of that is used to purchase new equipment. Despite that hefty appropriation, last year the armed forces overspent in four different departments. Additionally, there was a large unexplained sum spent on subsistence and travel allowances. This year’s military budget was smaller and apparently insufficient, at least in the way it was allocated, to meet the basic needs of its troops.

While the accompanying article does not detail the reason for Namibia’s economic difficulties that have led to its military needing to scale back spending, a late 2017 World Bank report does offer insight into the primary causes. Even though the country is rich in minerals and politically stable, it is not immune from global forces. Thus, the 2016 worldwide economic slowdown that caused the country’s mineral prices to drop spilled over into other sectors, such as external trade and public sector finance. A drought the same year placed additional strains on the economy. Government budgetary issues from these past difficulties, along with continuing economic weakness in some sectors, have contributed to the defense department’s present day financial problems.

Fortunately, Namibia’s surrounding neighbors are friendly, making any need for immediate military action to defend its territory from invasion by a foreign nation unlikely. Meanwhile, the troops on extended leave will continue to be paid, but apparently not fed and housed at government expense. Additionally, the economic forecast is for a recovery, albeit slow at first, although the article makes no mention of when or what percentage of those troops sent home will be recalled to their bases, should defense spending begin to return to its previous funding levels. **End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)**

“Thousands of army personnel staying at the seven bases around the country will be forced to take leave with effect from next month.”



A Namibian soldier sets up an electric firing system during an exercise with the Namibian Defense Forces EOD and Police Explosive Control Unit back when military budgets and morale were fairly robust. Recent austerity measures have decreased both.

Source: US Air Force photo by Master Sgt. Dawn Price, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:US_Navy_110426-F-XM360-533_Armed_Forces_Namibia_Defense_Forces_Warrant_Officer_Mashatu_Jonas_center_sets_up_an_electric_firing_system_during_the.jpg, Public Domain

Source: Ndapewoshali Shapwanale, “Defense Sends 1000’s on Leave,” *The Namibian*, 31 January 2018. <https://www.namibian.com.na/63861/read/Defence-sends-1000s-on-leave>

Thousands of army personnel staying at the seven bases around the country will be forced to take leave with effect from next month.

Those who are already on leave have been asked not to report for duty since the army can no longer afford to feed them as well as food [sic] the water and electricity bills.

The defence ministry was allocated N\$5,6 billion of the national budget for the 2017/2018 financial year. This was less than the N\$5,9 billion they had received in the 2016/2017 financial year.



Turkey Eyes Police/Military Cooperation with Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan

OE Watch Commentary: As the accompanying passages from Turkish sources discuss, the Turkish Gendarmerie General Command (which is part of the Turkish Interior Ministry) is aiming to re-activate the ‘Organization of Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status.’ The group, which goes by the acronym TAKM per its founders Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, was initially set up in 2013 with the goal of strengthening cooperation and experience-sharing among the four countries’ law-enforcement personnel, but did not become active at that time.

As the first passage from the Turkish-language daily newspaper *Milliyet* discusses, “The organization was initially established in 2013 but then it was put on hold due to Mongolia’s decision to terminate the military formation.” The passage also points out that the Turkish Gendarmerie is leading the effort, with the goal to strengthen relationships between law enforcement agencies with a military status in Eurasia, and to share information and experience as well as how gendarmerie personnel from Turkey will train other countries’ law enforcement personnel. The symbol for the organization will include the figure of a horse, which has an important meaning in each of these countries’ cultures. On top will also be four stars to represent the four countries. The second passage comes from *Stratejik Ortak*, a Turkish news website on defense issues, and it notes how the organization also hopes to fight organized crime and other crimes that fall under the responsibility of law enforcement, such as terrorism and smuggling. The organization is “not against a particular enemy, country or organization.”

The third passage from *Al-Monitor*, a news website with analysts from Turkey, also notes that the organization’s charter allows any Eurasian country with gendarmerie law enforcement units to apply for membership, and that Kazakhstan has expressed a firm intention to join. Russia is reportedly also closely following the re-activation efforts.

The Turkish gendarmerie is quite unique compared to many others, because it has conventional combat experience. It was active in Turkey’s Euphrates Shield Operation in Syria, which was launched in August 2016. As the third accompanying passage notes, it is active in combating terror and border security with its attack helicopters, heavy armored vehicles, armed drones and combat-proven special operation teams and looks more like “an army with serious conventional military capabilities instead of a rural police force.” This effort appears to be part of a larger effort by the Turkish gendarmerie to expand its coordination with foreign forces. As the final passage notes, the gendarmerie command is already in close cooperation with Italy and France in training and joint exercises. It also executes train-and-equip programs in Macedonia, Gambia and Somalia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**

“The force will consist of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, and will be named ‘Organization of Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status.’”

Source: “Türk dünyası ortak ordusunu kuruyor (The Turkic world is establishing its joint army),” *Milliyet.com.tr*, 13 December 2017. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/turk-dunyasi-ortak-ordusunu-kuruyor-gundem-2571475/>

The Turkic world is establishing a ‘Eurasian Military Force’... Initially, the force will consist of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia, and will be named “Organization of Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status.” Its symbol will be a horse and four stars. Turkey will be represented by its Gendarmerie General Command in the force, which will officially become operational in 2018 and work only for peace. The organization was initially established in 2013 but then it was put on hold due to Mongolia’s decision to terminate the military formation that was to join the Eurasia Military Force; now the joint military is being re-activated. The Organization of the Eurasian Law Enforcement Agencies with Military Status will aim to strengthen relationships between law enforcement agencies with military status in Eurasia, and to share information and experience...

Turkey will be represented by its Gendarmerie Command... The gendarmerie personnel from Turkey will also train other countries’ law enforcement personnel. Turkey is leading the effort in this force... The symbol for the organization will include the figure of a horse, which has an important meaning in each of these countries’ cultures. On top will also be four stars to represent the four countries.

Source: “Ortak Türk Ordusu Kuruldu (TAKM) (Joint Turkic Army (TAKM) is Established),” *StratejikOrtak.com*, 16 December 2017. <https://www.stratejikortak.com/2017/12/ortak-turk-ordusu-kuruldu.html>

A new and useful structure has been formed in Eurasia, to fight against organized crime, and other crimes that fall under the responsibility of law enforcement, such as anti-terror and smuggling. It is not against a particular enemy, country or organization. It has come together to fight international crimes. ... It will also ensure the security of the region’s energy routes...

Source: Metin Gürçan, “Turkey’s ‘war machine’ goes global,” *Al Monitor*, 28 December 2017. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/12/turkey-urasianism-is-rising-among-gendarmerie-ranks.html>

...[T]he gendarmerie command — which is active in combating terror and border security with its attack helicopters, heavy armored vehicles, armed drones and combat-proven special operations teams at its disposal — appears more like an army with serious conventional military capabilities instead of a rural police force...

The gendarmerie command, which has been in close cooperation with Italy and France in training and joint exercises, also executes its own train-and-equip programs in Macedonia, Gambia and Somalia. Now it is eyeing Eurasia for 2018...

According to TAKM’s charter, any Eurasian country with gendarmerie law enforcement units could apply for membership, and Kazakhstan has expressed a firm intention to join. Russia is also closely following the reactivation efforts.



Egypt-Turkey Friction Over Political Order in the “Levant Basin”

OE Watch Commentary: In 2014, the leaders of Egypt and Cyprus ratified a bilateral agreement signed the year before, which delimited the two countries’ Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Mediterranean Sea. The agreement was largely motivated by Egypt’s desire to exploit the massive offshore natural gas deposits within its EEZ in the “Levant Basin,” the eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. The first accompanying article, from the Qatari daily *al-Araby al-Jadid*, explains how before Abdel Fattah Sisi gained power in 2013, the Egyptian government had preferred to avoid delimiting the EEZs for various reasons. Sisi, in contrast, has put securing these resources atop his list of priorities, “[and ex-president Hosni] Mubarak’s complex calculus vis-a-vis Turkey and Israel were not part of his calculus; he treated the first as a regional adversary after 2013 and has had no issues collaborating with the second in various matters of politics, strategy and security.”

Sisi has overseen a major expansion of Egyptian military power over the past few years, particularly its naval capabilities. According to the second accompanying passage, from the influential Saudi daily *al-Hayat*, this military expansion and modernization is tailored to protect Egyptian economic interests in the Mediterranean.

Recently, Turkey began challenging the political order Egypt seeks to create in the Levant Basin. Turkey does not recognize the Nicosia-based Cypriot government and therefore does not recognize the EEZs established in the Cyprus-Egypt agreement. In February 2017, Turkey’s foreign minister stated that his country would begin exploring for offshore gas in areas claimed by Cyprus. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry responded with oblique warnings against attempts to infringe on Egypt’s sovereign rights. On 13 February, Turkish warships prevented a commercial drill ship from entering a maritime zone licensed by the Cypriot government.

This is all taking place as the Egyptian military carries out Operation Sinai 2018, a massive nationwide military campaign showcasing many of the new weapons systems purchased during the Sisi era. The operation included the mobilization of Egypt’s two Mistral-class helicopter carriers and other naval assets, and according to a retired Egyptian officer cited in the third accompanying article, the mobilizations “are tantamount to a message to anyone seeking to challenge Egyptian investments and economic interests in the Mediterranean, in particular Turkey.” The article, from the Saudi daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, also highlights Turkish unease with the recent “Medusa 5” naval-aerial military exercises carried out by Egypt and Greece last year. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source: المناطق الاقتصادية في المتوسط تجدد التوتر المصري التركي
“Economic Zones in the Mediterranean Renew Egypt-Turkey Tensions,” *al-Araby al-Jadid*, 8 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/gDHgGU>

[An Egyptian diplomatic source] explained that Turkey knows well that Cairo is more committed than ever to end the maritime border problems to draw more investments in the oil and natural gas sectors, given that it is the only sector that will allow Egypt major economic gains without having to wait tens of years. This makes Egypt lay aside the caution that was in place during the rule of ex-president Hosni Mubarak, before the 2011 revolution. For Mubarak, resolving the issue of borders and dividing the Mediterranean Sea’s resources could wait until the resolution of the Turkey-Greece conflict on the one hand, and to not be forced to recognize Israel’s purported maritime boundary on the other hand. The Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF), of which Sisi was a member, wanted to keep the status quo until a government was elected, despite pressure from some neighboring countries to resolve it. Therefore, this issue was at the forefront of Sisi’s priorities, whether in terms of the Red Sea or the Mediterranean. Mubarak’s complex calculus vis-a-vis Turkey and Israel were not part of his calculus; he treated the first as a regional adversary after 2013 and has had no issues collaborating with the second in various matters of politics, strategy and security.”

Source: تحديث منظومة الجيش سمح للقاهرة بتأمين مصالحها في المتوسط
Ahmed Rahim. “Modernized Military Systems Allow Cairo to Secure its Interests in the Mediterranean,” *al-Hayat*, 10 February 2018. <http://www.alhayat.com/Articles/27258876>

In 2015 and 2016, many Egyptians asked themselves about the push to modernize the military’s various weapons systems, leading to enormous cost in an already strained budget and amidst economic conditions in which all, the rich included, were suffering. Many questions were raised at the time, including why the country sought to own two naval carriers and submarines while at the same time negotiations loans of billions of dollars from the IMF and other financial institutions. The answer to this question would come later, as Egypt would have been unable to secure economic interests being monitored by the authorities in the near-term without modernizing the military, in particular the navy...

A reliable Egyptian source told al-Hayat that the military “committed to securing the economic zone along the Mediterranean coastline after the forces experienced and responded to a ‘provocation’ there.” Last month, President Abdel Fattah Sisi said that “the military is securing gas fields in the Mediterranean.” He asked: “Would someone come to provoke us if we did not have the power to confront them?” He then answered: “Has anyone tried to provoked us?... Yes, but we were ready with our full force.”

The source told al-Hayat that the development of the naval forces was necessary before announcing that gas had been discovered in the Mediterranean, adding: “No international drilling company would come before being assured that the finds would be secured so that their investments would not be lost.” In the final months of last year, Egypt finished modernizing the Alexandria Naval Base and carried out the “Battle of the Masts” naval exercises, which foreign media was allowed to witness and which included exercises to “secure a vital naval target and shooting artillery at a surface target”...

The source added that “for the naval forces to reach 200 kilometers from the coast these weapons and equipment were necessary and a fundamental development of naval infrastructure. This made it possible to quickly reach the gas fields in the Economic Zone, especially in light of regional interactions.” Late last year, Egypt opened its first comprehensive military base in Marsa Matrouh, on the Mediterranean coast. It includes units from all the main and secondary branches of the armed forces. The developments in the navy are primarily focused on the Northern Fleet, which points to the prioritization of securing economic interests in the Mediterranean.”



Continued: Egypt-Turkey Friction Over Political Order in the “Levant Basin”

Source:

Mohammed Nabil Hilmi. “Egypt Conducts Naval Exercises with Missiles to Confront ‘Threats’ in the Mediterranean,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 14 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/ghmPXx>

مصر تُنفذ تدريباً بحرياً بالصواريخ لمواجهة تهديدات في المتوسط

While Egypt began its first movements following Turkey’s confronting a gas drilling ship in Cypriot waters last Sunday, Egyptian armed forces yesterday carried out a number of training activities in the Mediterranean operations theater, by launching four ground-sea and sea-skimming missiles. Yesterday, the Egyptian military stated that these movements are in the context of training to “deal with all threats and aggressions in its regional waters”... The Turkish Foreign Ministry has objected to Egypt-Cyprus relations, particularly military relations. Last November Turkey stated its rejection of “joint military maneuvers between Egypt and Greece on the Greek island of Rhodes.” The Egyptian navy and air force nonetheless conducted the exercises, which were called “Medusa 5” and included the Mistral-class helicopter carrier (Anwar al-Sadat), the FREMM-class frigate (Tahya Misr), the S41 submarine, and a number of Greek naval vessels, in addition to a formation of F-16 fighter jets. [Retired] General Samir Farraj, former head of morale in the Egyptian Armed Forces, told al-Sharq al-Awsat that “the naval exercises are tantamount to a message to anyone seeking to challenge Egyptian investments and economic interests in the Mediterranean, in particular Turkey.”

“... a message to anyone seeking to challenge Egyptian investments and economic interests in the Mediterranean, in particular Turkey...”



Image from the “Medusa 5” Egypt-Greek Exercise, November 2017.

Source: Egyptian Army Spokesperson Facebook Page, <https://www.facebook.com/EgyArmySpox/photos/pcb.1170803216383992/1170801969717450/?type=3&theater>, Public Domain.



Iran: Warship Sinks after Mishap

OE Watch Commentary: Since 2007, the Iranian leadership has redoubled emphasis on Iran’s navy in order to project power beyond the Persian Gulf. Simultaneously, Iran’s government has prioritized its own indigenous military industries so as to become less reliant on foreign suppliers. A recent incident raises questions about how effectively the Iranian military has done both.

While the Iranian navy’s activities in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and sometimes Eastern Mediterranean make international headlines, it has also deployed ships in the Caspian Sea to defend Iran’s interests over maritime disputes in the oil rich waters and to counter smuggling and poaching in offshore fisheries. It was in the Caspian that, according to the semi-official *Young Journalists Club* in an article excerpted here, on 10 January 2018, the Iranian frigate “Damavand” struck a breakwater while attempting to dock in the Iranian port of Bandar Anzali and sank. Even if seas were stormy, such an incident raises questions about the quality of Iran’s indigenous military platforms and the competence of its naval personnel.

Initially, the Iranian military denied that the Damavand had sunk. However, in the video accompanying the *Young Journalists Club* report, it is clear that the Damavand did sink, even if waters were shallow. That the Iranian military would deny the incident and that a semi-official outlet would not only ignore this but photograph the aftermath and openly contradict the official line indicates that at least some portions of the Iranian press are no longer willing to cover up the regime’s mistakes and errors. Whether such willingness to contradict authorities is the new normal or simply a temporary extension of the resistance accompanying the recent mass protests remains to be seen. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Source: “Navshakan-e Damavand Gharegh Shod” (“Damavand Destroyer Has Sunk”), *Young Journalists Club*, 28 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/p3xaaB>

On January 10, 2018, as the destroyer Damavand arrived in port, it hit the breakwater due to the increase in wind speed and storm in the Caspian Sea. Unfortunately, two of the Damavand crew also disappeared in the incident. After 16 days, the bodies of the two martyrs were found. According to the public relations department of the 4th regular navy corps, the damage is negligible and will be repairs in a short time, but the destroyer has now sunk.

“As the destroyer Damavand arrived in port, it hit the breakwater.”

1986

2016

**FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES OFFICE:
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Iran: Telegram Giving Data to US and Israel

OE Watch Commentary: The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Passive Defense Organization was the first unit within Iran's security structure to address cyber defense in a systematic way, and it remains an influential, if not paramount, voice in setting Iran's cyber policies. In the excerpted article from *Tasnim News Agency*, a news agency close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Passive Defense Organization head Gholamreza Jalali accuses Telegram, one of the most popular social media apps in Iran, of active engagement in espionage.

While it has been noted that Jalali embraces a xenophobic and conspiratorial outlook common among senior IRGC officers, such accusations, even when false, signal a forthcoming crackdown on foreign social media applications. The Passive Defense Organization, Iranian cyber police, and the Basij (paramilitary volunteers) may soon arrest Iranians who have Telegram for engaging in espionage. While such prohibitions on social media signal a lack of Iranian regime confidence in the loyalty of the population especially in the wake of the December 2017-January 2018 unrest, Jalali's efforts to delegitimize Telegram and other Western social media companies likely signal renewed efforts inside Iran to create a distinctly Iranian intranet that the Iranian government both sees as safe and which conforms to the revolutionary values espoused by the Islamic Republic's leadership. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“There is no doubt that our information stored in Telegram has certain customers, like the United States, the Zionist regime...”

Source: “Etela’at-e Karbaran-e Irani Tawsat Madiriyat-e Telegram beh Amrika va Israil Farukhteh Shod” (“Telegram Management Sold the Information of Iranian users to the United States and Israel”), *Tasnim News Agency*, 30 January 2018. <https://goo.gl/CYKvjh>

Brigadier-General Chief Gholamreza Jalali, head of Passive Defense Organization, in a speech to a gathering of the provincial directors of Passive Defense Office in the Martyr [Hassan] Abshenasan hall and the ten-day Fajr commemoration [marking anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 return to Iran], emphasized the magnificence of these days.

In reference to the recent protests and riots in the country, he said, “This is a modern-type of security incident, and its dimensions must be identified and plots thrown out. The agents behind this incident were a triangular: The first side was in cyberspace, the second side rested on economic problems, and the last side was the threats of enemies. All three issues must be checked....”

“Telegram CEO Pavel Durov is recognized as an agitator in his own country. He left Russia as he incited unrest there like our riots and engaged people in uprisings against authorities. Telegram is a network that collects 16 categories of personal information of its users, such as their phone numbers, place of work, photos, place of residence, calendars, and more. This data is stored in its servers which are not located in Iran, and data-mining occurs, and after processing, it assembled ‘big data’ which later can be easily used for assessing information of every community,” Jalali said.

He continued, “Pavel Durov, does not charge Iran for its services. He sells the personal information of Iranian users to those who are interested in analysing our country. There is no doubt that our information stored in Telegram has certain customers, like the United States, the Zionist regime, the Monafeqin [Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization] and all other groups who want to use operational forces against us. The clear example of this are the incidents occurred on 31 December,” Jalali said.

Iran Develops UAS with “Smart Bomb” Capability

OE Watch Commentary: On 3 February 2018 Iranian state news announced the development of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) equipped with so-called “smart bombs.” According to the accompanying excerpt of an article from *Kayhan News*, an Iranian newspaper, Iran is expected to mass produce a series of its existing Mohajer-6 drones. Iran's Minister of Defense Brigadier General Amir Hatami and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Force Commander, Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpour, jointly announced this military-technical development as one of the most important in the Islamic Republic's almost 40-year history.

According to the article, the Mohajer-6 is a tactical drone that is also capable of intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance (ISTAR) missions. It can reportedly send information in real time and can remain in the air for a prolonged period. Additionally, the Mohajer-6 is shown in a test flight in the accompanying video stills from *Fars News*, another Iranian news media source, as a reporter explains its logistical capabilities. According to the video correspondent, the equipped “smart bomb” can identify its target from 12 kilometers away and take photos from as far as eight kilometers away. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**

Source: “Eftetahe kaht toleed amboo pahbad Mohajer-6 mosala be bomb ha-ya hooshmand ghaem (The Mohajer-6 drone is in development with smart-bomb capability),” *Kayhan News*, 4 February 2018. <https://goo.gl/bDcAc4>

Yesterday, the Defense Minister unveiled a series of Mohajer-6 drones equipped with smart-bombs that will be led by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps...

Source: “Pahbad Mohajer-6 ba bomb hooshmand nokhtezan ghaem (The Mohajer-6 drone with smart-bomb),” *Fars News* (3:14 Minute Video), 5 February 2018. <http://www.farsnews.com/MediaDisplay.aspx?nn=13961116001241>

...The drone can identify its target from 12 kilometers away...



Iran: US Sponsoring Islamic State in Afghanistan

OE Watch Commentary: Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has in his public speeches repeatedly embraced and amplified the conspiracy theory that the United States created the Islamic State. Prior to the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq, Khamenei and other Iranian officials used both the presence of the Islamic State and supposed American complicity to justify sponsorship and control of militias and the presence of Iranian advisors.

In the excerpted speech posted on Khamenei's website, Khamenei accuses the United States both of transferring the Islamic State to Afghanistan and being responsible for a rash of major terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. While such accusations are false, they could both signal Iranian intentions to augment their own presence or that of their proxy militias inside Afghanistan and also a desire in Tehran to foment anti-Americanism among the Persian (Dari) speaking-population inside Afghanistan.

Iran has been engaged in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime and participated in the Bonn conference which determined the shape of the post-2001 Afghan government. It has also dominated the western Afghan provinces of Farah, Herat, and Nimruz economically, culturally, and increasingly politically. In addition, Iran has long sought to preserve and increase its influence in both Kabul and the Pushtun-dominated eastern provinces where Pakistani influence remains significant.

Should the Islamic Republic of Iran decide to engage more militarily inside Afghanistan, it has greater capacity to do so than at any time since the early 1980s: In recent years, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has helped create the *Liwa Fatemiyoun*, an Afghan Shi'ite militia which has also gained battlefield experience in Syria. While the Islamic State does pose a threat inside Afghanistan, an augmentation of *Liwa Fatemiyoun* and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps activity might further destabilize Afghanistan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

“The United States aims to transfer Islamic State terrorists to Afghanistan.”



Supreme Leader Khamenei meets with families of martyrs.

Source: Khamenei.ir, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/photo-album?id=38794>, Public Domain.

Source: “Biyanat-e Rahbar-e Enghelab dar khasus Koshtar-e Mardam dar Havades-e Terroristi Afghanistan” (“Statement by the Leader of the Revolution on the Killing of People in the Terrorist Attacks in Afghanistan”), *Khamenei.ir*, 30 January 2018. farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=38809

His Excellency, Ayatollah Khamenei, leader of the Islamic Revolution, this morning at the beginning of a lesson on jurisprudence, expressed deep regret at the killing of innocent people in the recent terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, and said, “The United States aims to transfer Islamic State terrorists to Afghanistan in order to justify its continued presence in the region and to establish security for the Zionist regime.”

His Excellency Ayatollah Khamenei with reference to the murder of hundreds of people in recent months in Afghanistan, added, “The same hands that created the Islamic State and used it as a means of brutality against the people in Syria and Iraq are today, following its defeat in those areas, trying to relocate the Islamic State to Afghanistan, and the recent killings are actually the beginning of this plan.”

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution added, “For U.S.-backed terrorists, there is no difference between Sunnis and Shi'ites; both Sunni and Shi'ite civilians are their targets.” He considered the occupation of the regional nations to be the first objective of the United States, and said, “The United States seeks to ensure that this region will not experience a good life and the governments and peoples of the region will be so busy with their own problems that they will not think of confronting the evil factor of arrogance, that is to say, Zionism.”



Iran: Winning Hearts and Minds in Deir Ezzor

OE Watch Commentary: Deir Ezzor is a tribal Sunni province of Syria located on the Euphrates River, along the border with Iraq. Its physical and socio-cultural environments resemble those of Iraq's Anbar Province, and it was an ISIS stronghold for several years. Late last year, the provincial capital and surrounding areas were retaken by loyalist forces, with Iranian-backed militias leading the charge. Although it is not a natural social environment for deep-rooted Iranian influence to take hold, some of the Iran-backed militias may be there to stay. The foundations for Iran's ability to assert control over this traditionally Sunni area are partially explained in the accompanying passage, published last November in the Syrian opposition news website *alsouria.net*.

According to the article, soft-power measures from as early as 1988 have paved the way for Iran's new foothold in Deir Ezzor. That year, the article claims, Iranian envoys began enticing poor villagers from the Baqqara (Baggara) tribe to adopt religious practices associated with Shi'i Iran. Through mechanisms such as the Imam al-Murtaza Foundation, Iran extended its influence by providing these neglected areas with material assistance and a new ideological edifice, based on Iranian Revolutionary ideals and centered around newly built Shi'i houses of worship (Husseiniyat). Iran's close relations with the Assad government also allowed its envoys and allies to provide government functions in some areas, according to the article.

The loyalist retaking of Deir Ezzor in late 2017 received crucial support from Nawaf al-Bashir, a prominent member of the Baqqara in Syria. Al-Bashir had been an early defector to the side of the opposition in 2011, but last summer he publicly declared his renewed support for the Syrian government on Iran's Arabic-language news channel al-Alam. The article explains how Iran has leveraged ancestral lineage between al-Bashir's clan and Muhammad al-Baqir, the fifth Imam for mainstream Shi'i Islam but a relatively inconsequential figure for Sunni history, in order to draw him and his followers in the Baqqara tribe back into the loyalist camp. The Baqqara militia, which also played a role in the Battle of Aleppo, is tellingly called the "Al-Baqir Brigade" in reference to Muhammad al-Baqir. According to the article, the militia received initial training from Iran but is now trained by Iraqi militias from the Popular Mobilization Forces (for more see: "Shia Symbolism: Iran-Backed Militias Resurgent in Syria," *OE Watch* October 2016 and "Chechen Military Police in East Aleppo," *OE Watch* March 2017).

Iran's persistent efforts in the "gray zone," at times conducted in conjunction with military operations, have yielded a diffuse yet strongly rooted presence in Syria. What is occurring in Deir Ezzor is not unique: gaining local allies, spreading ideology, providing material assistance, and helping set up local militias have all been part of Iran's modus operandi throughout the Syria conflict. These efforts have borne fruits in part due to measures begun decades ago, and their cumulative effects are likely to continue for many years. **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**



Saida Zeinab mosque (Damascus)

Source: By Odilia (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saida_Zeinab_mosque_SYRIE_004.jpg, CC3.0.

(continued)



Continued: Iran: Winning Hearts and Minds in Deir Ezzor

“...a history of Iranian Shi’i proselytism in Deir Ezzor which dates to 1988...”

Source:

إيران تمضي بنشر التشيع في دير الزور.. وهذه وسائلها لتطبيق أهم مشاريعها بسوريا
 “Iran Continues to Spread Shi’i Ideology in Deir Ezzor... These are the Tools it Uses to Conduct its Most Important Projects in Syria,”
 alsouria.net, 29 November 2017. <https://goo.gl/xglaxM>

Through its militias and proxies in Syria, Iran continues its ongoing project of spreading Shi’ism in Deir Ezzor, after expelling ISIS from there recently. Ammar Shihab, a resident of Deir Ezzor who is well informed on the project of spreading Shi’i thought, pointed out while speaking to alsouria.net that part of Iran’s operations consisted in spreading the Shi’i doctrine among Sunni tribal members, using a variety of methods, most notably providing material goods and managing the affairs of people officially through state agencies and authorities, taking advantage of the major influence of Iranian officials in state institutions under the rule of the Assad family.

Shihab explained that Iran relied on specific leaders and prominent personalities from Deir Ezzor’s tribes to carry out its agenda, most notably Nawaf al-Bashir, a sheikh from the Baqqara (Bagara) tribe who announced his allegiance to Tehran. He claimed that al-Bashir plays a role in carrying out the Iranian agenda by exploiting the financial needs and influence of his tribes, given his role as one of the tribe’s prominent personalities able to draw its members together. The Anatolia news agency recently reported that al-Bashir oversees an Arab tribal militia trained and financed by Iran, with the training continued by leaders from the Iranian-backed Iraqi PMF...

Shihab said that Iran took advantage of the siege placed by ISIS on the regime-held Deir Ezzor neighborhoods (al-Jura and al-Qusura) by using its allies to gain the allegiance of area residents and bring them into the Shi’a sect. The source alleges that Haydar al-Arifi, an official in the Iranian Chancellery, played a major role in influencing residents of these neighborhoods, particularly since a portion of them were considered regime loyalists, making things easier for the Iranian officials.

Fragments circulated by activists in Deir Ezzor show sectarian flags alongside Iranian flags and PMF flags in areas that were entered by Iranian militias in Albu Kamal and al-Mayadin, following the recent withdrawal by ISIS. The activists claim that militia members raised the flags on the mosques of Albu Kamal, playing sectarian hymns. Iran sent food assistance after its militias took a broad swath of Deir Ezzor to support the needs of the people, which activists from the province said was a means of gaining popular support, particularly given the deteriorated economic conditions there.

Shihab alluded to a history of Iranian Shi’i proselytism in Deir Ezzor which dates to 1988, when Tehran began implementing its plans by focusing on specific villages and geographical areas linked administratively to the city of Deir Ezzor, most notably the towns of Hatla and Marrat, where the Imam al-Murtaza Foundation, headed by Jamil al-Asad the brother of former regime head Hafez al-Assad, played a major role. The source added that the foundation focused on people’s material needs in these villages and their fear of the security services and authorities, as many residents of Hatla and Marrat converted to Shi’ism and built Husseiniyat (Shi’a worship site) there.

Following the year 2000, the number of Shi’i adherents increased and three other Husseiniyat were built, two of them with support from Kuwaiti Shi’i and the other from the Iranian Chancellery in Damascus. The first was in the town of al-Saawa and the other in Hawayij Bumsaa, in the northeast countryside of Deir Ezzor, both of which are inhabited by members of the Baqqara tribe. The projects took advantage of the residents’ poor economic conditions, given that these are among the poorest towns in Deir Ezzor...

They also played on ancestry in some cases, by focusing on the tribes themselves, such as the Baqqara, arguing that they were descendants of Mohammed al-Baqir (the fifth Imam for Imami Shi’i), in addition to being a tribe which extends to Iraq and many of whose members are Shi’i. Tehran has also worked to spread Shi’i ideas in parts of Homs and Hama, as well as Damascus and its countryside including Saida Zaynab neighborhood and parts of Darayya, using similar methods to those used in Deir Ezzor.

AVAILABLE AT:

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



EGYPT AND ISRAEL TUNNEL NEUTRALIZATION EFFORTS IN GAZA

by LUCAS WINTER, FMSO



Raqqa's Minefields

OE Watch Commentary: The US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), have been nominally in control of the city of Raqqa and its surrounding countryside since November 2017. This state of affairs is opposed by both the Syrian government (backed by Iran and Russia) and by the official Syrian opposition (backed by Qatar and Turkey). Syrian loyalist and opposition groups may therefore seek to undermine the current status quo by working in the so-called “gray zone” to improve their strategic position in Raqqa. They have plenty of material to work with, as the three accompanying articles suggest.

Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS) is a civilian organization established in 2014 to document ISIS atrocities from within Raqqa. The group is sympathetic to the official opposition and some its members have received refuge in Turkey during the conflict. Since the expulsion of ISIS from the city in November 2017, the group has continued to document conditions on the ground. Their diagnosis of present-day Raqqa is not good, as illustrated by the accompanying excerpt from an article titled “Raqqa: The Full Picture,” published on the group’s website in late January 2018. The article bemoans the “extremely slow rate” at which mines, rubble and corpses are being cleared from the city, claiming that media friendly to the US-backed SDF “have sought to portray an image that differs from reality regarding the destroyed city.” Much of Raqqa remains a physical minefield, with hundreds of returnees having been killed and maimed by landmines and explosives. Harsh conditions in refugee camps, along with fears of dispossession and a desire to return home, have led many to nonetheless return. Meanwhile, the article notes, “[governing] councils are busy holding parties and making pronouncements praising [the Turkish PKK leader]” while at the same time, “SDF militias are busy setting up ambushes and arresting young men for forced military conscription, while the people of Raqqa remain stuck in displacement camps, without water or medicine.”

The second accompanying article, authored by a prominent member of the official opposition from Raqqa, lists additional complications plaguing the city. In particular, he highlights the “social and political landmines” of displacement and forced disappearances, which “will without a doubt create internecine conflict for which there does not appear to be a solution on the horizon.” The author is critical of the view that these “social and political landmines” can only be resolved as part of a broader settlement and once physical reconstruction begins, seeing in this line of argument a political ruse designed to indefinitely maintain the status quo.

The third accompanying article, from the pro-Syrian government Lebanese daily *al-Akhbar*, echoes the frustration of Raqqa’s residents who view the SDF as outside interlopers with political goals and interests that are at odds with their own. Citing a member of the “Raqqa Council,” a political body composed of local figures that are opposed to SDF control over the city, the article hints that the people of Raqqa may opt for armed resistance “if the Kurds continue to rule over Raqqa and its people under the pretense of having liberated it from ISIS.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Winter)**

Source:

الرقعة الصورة الكاملة

“Raqqa: The Full Picture,” *Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently*, 31 January 2018. <http://www.raqqa-sl.com/?p=5073>

A number of civilian testimonies from within Raqqa attest to the massive extent of destruction, affecting as much as 80% of the city’s buildings and infrastructure. Media friendly to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia and some foreign media have sought to portray an image that differs from reality regarding the destroyed city. These groups focus on photographing the returnees and those fleeing the degradation of refugee camps lacking in basic human necessities...

Today, after months of the SDF controlling the destroyed city, there are no true signs of the commissions created to bring about tangible change in the city’s situation. The efforts to clear mines and rubble or even remove corpses from beneath the rubble are proceeding at an extremely slow rate, while these councils are busy holding parties and making pronouncements praising the terrorist Abdullah Ocalan. The SDF militias are busy setting up ambushes and arresting young men to train as part of forcible military conscription, while the people of Raqqa remain stuck in displacement camps, without water or medicine.

Source:

الرقعة من يحل ملفات ما بعد داعش؟

Khalil al-Hajj Salih. “Raqqa: Who Will Resolve Post-ISIS Issues?” *al-Modon*, 16 December 2017. <https://goo.gl/riZmsC>

The sidelining of Raqqa’s people from any effective role in what happens to them and their land is met with weakness and hesitation by the official opposition and regional countries with interests in Syria, as well as the complete absence thus far of the Syrian regime...

The issue of those kidnapped and forcibly disappeared on the one hand, and refugees and the displaced on the other hand, are not separate from issues of rule of law and rights left behind by [ISIS], described as political and social landmines. [ISIS] issued deeds and papers for thousands of kidnapped and refugees and sold them or gave them to its fighters and supporters. This will without a doubt create internecine conflict for which there does not appear to be a solution on the horizon and the results of which will be mitigated by local society...

Estimates based on eyewitness testimonies regarding the damage to Raqqa’s infrastructure, housing and private property estimates that 90-100% of it was destroyed. Some, using impeccable logic, believe that dealing with the previously mentioned issues must be part of a broader context that encompasses rebuilding, which in turn must be launched with or at the end of a comprehensive political process. Therefore, the rebuilding of Raqqa, which begins from ground zero, is what will make it possible to deal with the issues of the kidnapped and missing, as well as the victims of landmines and of looting, and the return of refugees and the displaced. Yet no one explains how this will happen, unless the intention were to barter physical reconstruction for some or most of these issues.

The current political indications are bad regarding the situation in Syria or in the Syrian Jazira to be specific. This area is currently controlled by the “international coalition” and the Kurdish militias. There are no indications of any plans to rebuild by any measure or from any angle. Most likely its future will remain linked to American wishes - the strongest force in the “international coalition” - and its policies which are inscrutable in the long term, in this stage of rapid developments and changes.



Continued: Raqqa's Minefields

“...The military option is not out of the question if the Kurds continue to rule over Raqqa and its people under the pretense of having liberated it from ISIS...”

Source:

Firas al-Hikar. “American Presence Disguised as ‘Syrian Democratic Forces’: Raqqa Under Occupation,” *al-Akhbar*, 20 January 2018. <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/289563>

الوجود الأمريكي المُقنَّع بقوات سوريا الديمقراطية الرقة تحت الاحتلال

A Source in the “Raqqa Council” told al-Akhbar that “the SDF and the PYD are occupation forces and thus sitting with them merely to negotiate would entail recognizing them, which is why we will not go”... “The military option is not out of the question if the Kurds continue to rule over Raqqa and its people under the pretense of having liberated it from ISIS, which is supported by their US ally”... The Americans will not leave Raqqa, at least for the foreseeable future, which is confirmed by American and Kurdish statements. Will the American occupation represent a reason for civilians to resist? Or will the plan to completely destroy the city succeed and keep Raqqa’s people busy for the next several years searching for ways to rebuild their homes? Until then, Raqqa will be in the hands of the United States of America.



SDF fighters in Raqqa's downtown, July 2017.

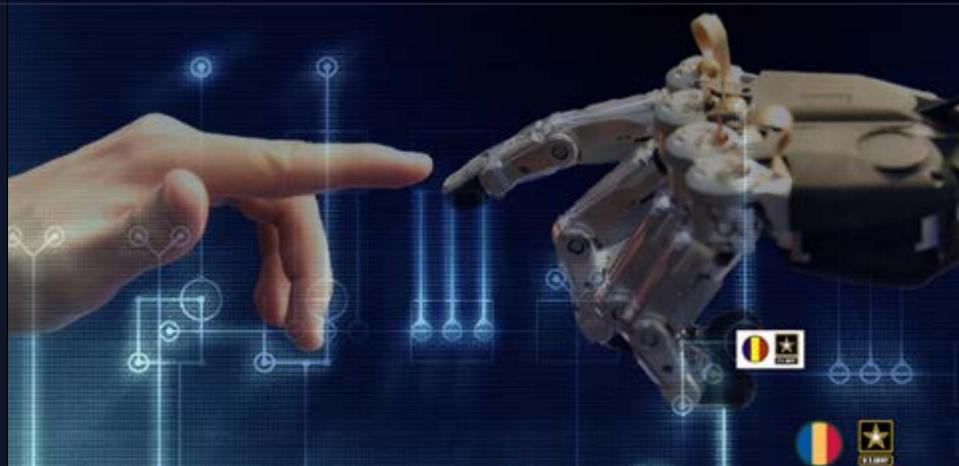
Source: Mahmoud Bali (VOA), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SDF_fighters_in_Raqqa_downtown.png, Public Domain.

THE MAD SCIENTIST LABORATORY BLOG

<http://madsciblog.tradoc.army.mil>

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Military Training Key to Panama's Success in Counter Drug Operations

OE Watch Commentary: When the Panamanian Minister of Public Security Alexis Bethancourt took office in May 2016, he promised to make Panama “the most secure country in the Americas.” Many factors can be considered when determining if Bethancourt has kept his word, but some in Panama believe there is one area he has excelled at and that is in attacking drug trafficking head on. This idea is demonstrated by the fact that Panamanian authorities seized 84.6 metric tons of drugs (primarily cocaine) in 2017, surpassing the record amount of 72 metric tons seized in 2016 as reported in the excerpted article from *La Patilla*. The Ministry of Public Security, the National Aeronaval Service (SENAN), the National Border Service (SENAFRONT) and the National Police unveiled this figure at a recent press conference, citing international cooperation as the key to seizing drugs and combatting criminal organizations. Apart from drugs, Deputy Police Director Alonso Vega discussed other feats made by the Panamanians during 2017 to include cash, weapon and boat seizures as well as the confiscation of drug production equipment.

Panama's drug seizures are even more impressive when compared to those of neighboring countries. For example, Costa Rica is also working hard to thwart drug trafficking and in recent years, has made strides but the numbers do not compare. For example, Costa Rica seized 12.14 metric tons of cocaine in 2012, 15.1 in 2015, 25 in 2016, and 29.8 in 2017 according to the country's Ministry of Public Security. Drug seizures in Costa Rica are significantly less than those in Panama, but it is important to take into account that Costa Rica is 1 of 22 countries in the world that does not have a military. Because of this, they must fight their internal drug issues with limited resources such as the Coast Guard, the National Police Force and the National Drug Police.

Excessive drug passage through Panama and Costa Rica is a direct result of the fact that they are both transit countries for the largest drug producers in South America to include Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. The excerpted article from *Univision* notes that Colombian authorities made the largest cocaine bust in the country's history when they seized 12 metric tons on 8 November 2017. This seizure occurred in a banana-growing region of the northwest Antioquia Province, near Colombia's border with Panama.

Some in Panama believe the success in seizing record amounts of cocaine can be attributed to extensive training provided to both SENAN and SENAFRONT members by partner nations, including the United States and Colombia. Local security forces also conduct tactical and weapons training with neighboring Colombia and Guatemala, as well as with other countries, all with the end goal of achieving enhanced success in counter-drug operations. Panama is also proactive in enhancing regional interoperability and in 2016, hosted UNITAS, an exercise that focused on maritime exercises and in-port training as discussed in the excerpted article from *La Estrella de Panamá*. What is certain is that Central America is a key transit region for cocaine from South America, but countries such as Panama are taking a proactive approach in seeking out training and working with their neighbors to thwart this issue as best they can. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“During 2017, Panamanian authorities seized a record breaking 84.6 metric tons of cocaine.”

Source: “Panama rompe récord de incautación de droga en lo que va del 2017 (Panama Breaks Record of Drug Bust in 2017)”, *La Patilla*, 27 December 2017. <https://www.lapatilla.com/site/2017/12/27/panama-rompe-record-de-incautacion-de-droga-en-lo-que-va-del-2017/>

During 2017, Panamanian authorities seized a record breaking 84.6 metric tons of cocaine surpassing the 72 metric tons seized in 2017. In addition to drugs, authorities also seized more than \$6,000,000 million dollars, 113 weapons, 56 boats, 253 vehicles and 1,000 glass tanks that were used to manufacture crystal meth. In addition, 147 people were arrested on drug smuggling charges.

Source: “12 toneladas de cocaína: la mayor incautación de drogas en la historia de Colombia (12 Tons of Cocaine Seized in Biggest Drug Bust in Colombia's History)”, *Univision*, 09 November 2017. <https://www.univision.com/noticias/narcotrafico/12-toneladas-de-cocaína-la-mayor-incautacion-de-drogas-en-la-historia-de-colombia>

President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia announced the seizure of 12 metric tons of cocaine; the largest amount to ever be seized in the country. This shipment allegedly belonged to the Clan del Golfo and had a reported market value of \$360 million. It was found buried underneath four farms in a banana-growing region located in the Antioquia province, near Colombia's border with Panama.

Source: “Panamá, sede de la operación Unitas 2016 (Panama Hosts Unitas 2016)”, *La Estrella de Panamá*, 19 September 2017. <http://laestrella.com.pa/panama/nacional/panama-sede-operacion-unitas-2016/23961676>

Naval forces from 13 countries in Central, South American and the Caribbean participated in Panama Unitas 2016 to include Panama, the United States, Honduras, Chile, Mexico, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru. Five others joined as observers to include Guatemala, Costa Rica, the United Kingdom, Belize and the Dominican Republic. This exercise focused on training military forces to counter drug trafficking, human trafficking and illegal fishing.



Venezuela Continues to Disappear

OE Watch Commentary: Reports of Venezuela’s continuing economic decline are now constant and ubiquitous. The accompanying references highlighted here offer a potentially useful metric -- where people voluntarily go and do not. During Carnival, the festive run-up to Lent, Venezuelans would normally be found reveling, especially at the beach. They apparently stayed away from the coast in droves this year. Meanwhile, tens of thousands were leaving the country daily, mostly going to or through Colombia. If accelerating, the net refugee outflow is not new, as the accompanying image attests. This commenter cautions readers not to suppose that the emigration phenomenon means that a political crisis is brewing. While it might seem reasonable to conclude that such a rapid economic down-spiral would at some point spark a change of government, there is as yet little in the reportage to suggest that the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) and the Venezuelan United Socialist Party (PSUV) are losing any of their control over the country. Not to be found in recent reporting is evidence of any actual threat to the Bolivarian regime. [As to the second accompanying reference, the original *Clarín* article could not be readily accessed, so the provided URLs are to re-publications.] **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...hyperinflation and insecurity have done their bidding...”

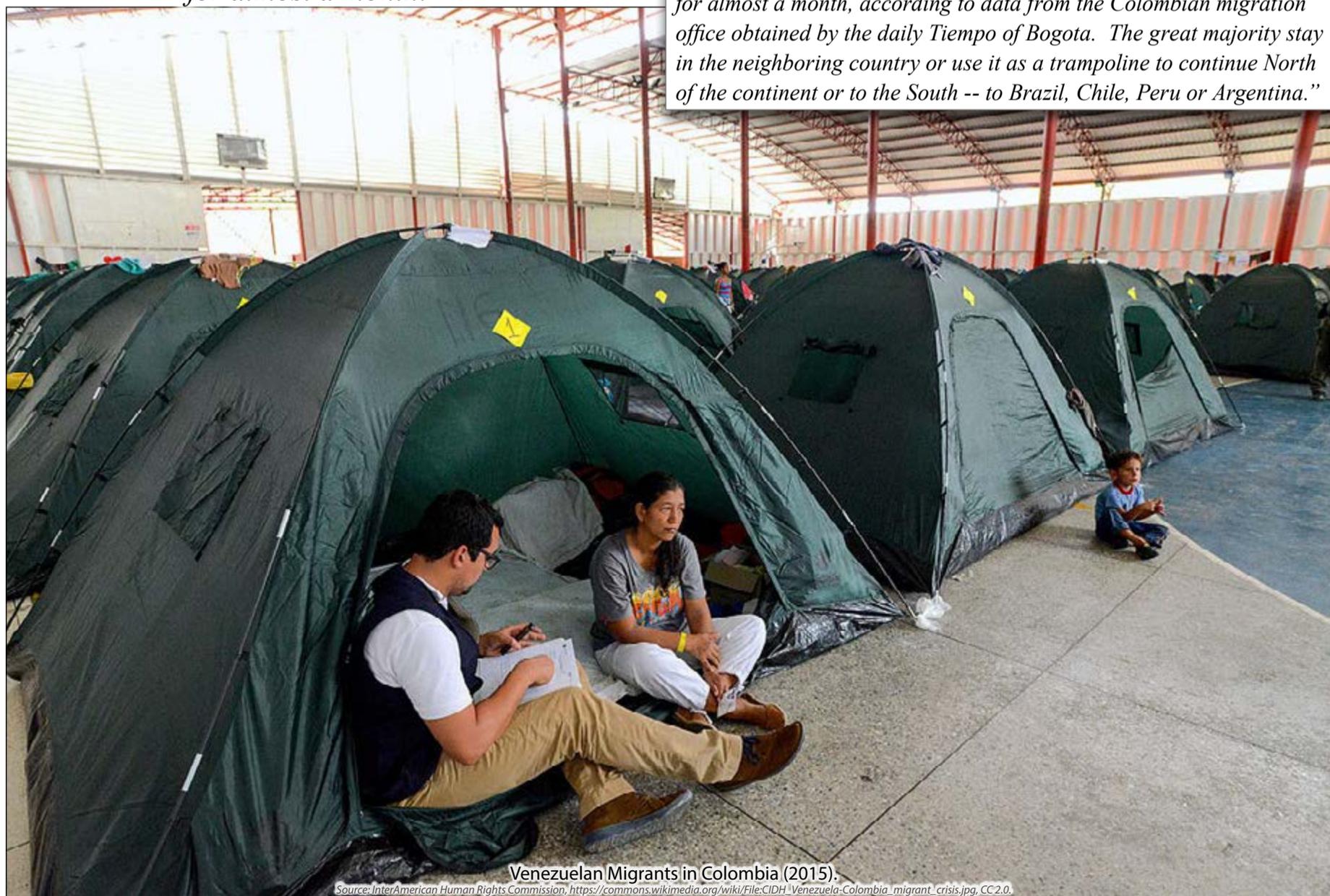
“...Almost 35, 000 people cross the border daily for almost a month.”

Source: “¡Desiertas! Así lucieron playas venezolanas en el fin de semana de Carnaval (Deserted! This is how the Venezuelan beaches look in the final week of Carnaval),” *El Cooperante*, 11 February 2018. <https://elcooperante.com/desiertas-asi-lucieron-playas-venezolanas-en-el-fin-de-semana-de-carnaval-fotos/>

“The panorama that toasted the last week of Carnaval was one of half-full hotels, stations and beaches almost empty, obtaining to Carnaval break in states such as Anzoátegui y Falcón that, normally, would be highly visited....The Venezuelan is by nature a ‘beach bum’ and the coasts of these regions are the most visited. Nevertheless, hyperinflation and insecurity have done their bidding to such a degree that they have turned the first holiday break of the year into what seems a normal week.”

Source: ““LA HUIDA DESESPERADA DE VENEZUELA EN RUINAS (The Desperate Flight from Venezuela In Ruins),” *DolarToday*, 12 February 2018. <https://dolartoday.com/la-huida-desesperada-de-venezuela-en-ruinas-con-bolsos-ninos-en-brazos-y-casi-nada-mas/>; “Clarín: La huida desesperada de Venezuela en ruinas (Clarín: The desperate flight from Venezuela in ruins),” *El Nacional*, 12 February 2018. http://www.el-nacional.com/noticias/latinoamerica/clarin-huida-desesperada-venezuela-ruinas_222785

“The Argentinean daily *Clarín* featured on its online page the desperate attempt by dozens of persons who are escaping hour upon hour from Venezuela, where economic crisis and shortages are affecting the population....Almost 35, 000 people cross the border daily for almost a month, according to data from the Colombian migration office obtained by the daily *Tiempo* of Bogota. The great majority stay in the neighboring country or use it as a trampoline to continue North of the continent or to the South -- to Brazil, Chile, Peru or Argentina.”



Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia (2015).

Source: InterAmerican Human Rights Commission, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:CIDH_Venezuela-Colombia_migrant_crisis.jpg, CC2.0.



Venezuela's PDVSA on the Verge of Collapse, Deepening the Country's Economic Crisis

OE Watch Commentary: Oil production in Venezuela has historically accounted for half of the country's revenue and there are reports that oil facilities in Venezuela are crumbling and production is plummeting. The excerpted article from *Página Siete* discusses how Venezuela's state-owned oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, better known by its Spanish acronym PDVSA, teeters on the brink of collapse amid severe mismanagement and lack of transparency. Venezuela's oil crisis could potentially further destabilize a nation and government facing dire recession, soaring inflation and unbridled crime, as well as gas, food and medicine shortages.

When energy prices started to collapse several years ago, Venezuela and other oil-dependent nations suffered in tandem. The difference now is that oil prices are rising and others in the oil business are on the mend. However, this is not the case in Venezuela despite the fact it has the largest proven oil reserves in Latin America and, possibly, in the world. This idea is further reiterated by the fact that at the end of 2017, PDVSA was operating at 20 percent capacity with only 76 of its 84 plants operational.

Worse still is that the company nearly defaulted on loans in November 2017, leading to the analysis that Venezuela is at the cusp of an imminent financial collapse despite having the oil resources to at least provide the nation with some sort of salvation. The situation is so grave that people in Venezuela are looking at any and all ways to simply survive, including selling subsidized Venezuelan gas to Colombians along the border, as discussed in the excerpted article from *El Vistazo*, but even this is no longer an option as the government is actively cracking down on this practice.

The article from *Crónica Uno* notes while operational, PDVSA profits supported Venezuela's social programs and helped to provide its citizens with basic necessities such as food, medicine and gas. However, that is no longer the case as essential medicines such as antibiotics have disappeared from pharmacy shelves and citizens are forced to wait in line for gas and food for hours. With a potential financial collapse looming, Venezuela is doing all it can to salvage what is left. As noted in the article from *Infobae*, the government recently signed a 10-year restructuring loan with Russia and is also working with China to deal with credit issues, but these measures will only keep the country afloat in the short term leaving Venezuela's oil imperium to be scooped up by Russian and Chinese backers ready to exploit the crisis. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

“...it is not only fuel that is lacking...there are also shortages of diesel, petroleum and kerosene, among others.”

Source: “Crítica situación de PDVSA en Venezuela (Critical Situation of PDVSA in Venezuela)”, *Página Siete*, 07 May 2017. <http://www.paginasiete.bo/inversion/2017/5/7/critica-situacion-pdvsa-venezuela-136811.html>

During recent decades, a large number of governments to include Venezuela have used state-owned oil and gas (NOCs) enterprises for their own personal gain. In the case of Venezuela, extreme politicization has created a precarious future for the oil industry even though the country has the largest proven oil reserves in Latin America and maybe in the world. However, PDVSA is not run transparently and provides little to no information on financials making it hard to analyze. What is known is that production is at extreme lows and that Venezuela has been forced to import natural gas from Colombia in recent years due to lack of investment in the countries' own resources and infrastructure.

Source: “Limitan venta de gasolina en seis estados de Venezuela (The Government Set Ceilings for the Sale of Gasoline in Six States in Venezuela)”, *El Vistazo*, 26 December 2017. <http://diarioelvistazo.com/limitan-venta-gasolina-seis-estados-venezuela/>

The Venezuelan government set ceilings for the sale of gasoline in the west of the country to prevent smuggling, which they attributed to the recent fuel shortage. A communication from the Ministry of Petroleum ordered distributors to sell a maximum of 30 liters to cars, and up to 35 liters to trucks and some freight vehicles.

Source: “Problemas financieros de PDVSA dejan a Caracas sin combustible (PDVSA's Financial Problems Leave Caracas Without Fuel)”, *Crónica Uno*, 20 September 2017. <http://cronica.uno/problemas-financieros-pdvsa-dejan-caracas-sin-combustible/>

It is very common in cities across the country to see long lines of cars waiting at gas stations with the hope of getting something to put in their tanks as many have closed due to lack of fuel. And it is not only fuel that is lacking... there are also shortages of diesel, petroleum and kerosene, among others. This situation affects both the public and private sector as it makes travel impossible. It also signifies large spread outages of electricity coupled with shortages of other basic necessities such as food and medicine.

Source: “La peligrosa influencia de China y Rusia en una Venezuela envuelta en la crisis (China and Russia's Dangerous Involvement in Dealing with Venezuela's Crisis)”, *Infobae*, 17 August 2017. <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2017/09/09/la-peligrosa-influencia-de-china-y-rusia-en-una-venezuela-envuelta-en-la-crisis/>

The government signed a 10-year restructuring deal with Russia in November 2017 for a little over \$3 billion in official debt, but observers say that will at best this will help resolve some payments in the short-term. Caracas has only \$9.7 billion in foreign reserves and needs to pay back at least \$1.47 billion in interest on various bonds by the end of the year, and another \$8 billion in 2018. Russia and China are the two main creditors and allies of Venezuela, which owes them an estimated \$8 billion and \$28 billion, respectively.



Colombian Urban What-Is-Wrong List

OE Watch Commentary: The author of the accompanying reference is a well-known Colombian opponent of the FARC-Santos power sharing agreement. Here he outlines what many Colombians apparently see as the major grievances or maladies affecting the country and the abbreviated version here is a bill of particulars. Still, it seems to be a pretty good summary of what we can expect as the general argument that the candidate of the opposition coalition Democratic Center (not yet determined) will make during the campaign for the coming May elections. Notable on the list of maladies is an assertion that a million items of military weaponry have been spirited from Venezuelan military stores to the ELN and FARC remnants. The author addresses the article to urban dwellers, or more likely to urban voters, given that, as the article notes, most Colombians by far are city dwellers. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...a million pieces of armament from thirty frontier garrisons have gone missing...”

Source: José Félix Lafaurie, “Inseguridad urbana: Suma de todos los males (Urban insecurity: Sum of all maladies),” *Periodismo Sin Fronteras*, 6 February 2018. <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.org/inseguridad-urbana-suma-de-todos-los-males.html>

“...The cynical violence of the ELN and the ‘dissidents’ of the FARC in charge of their illicit businesses, and criminal bands, now including Mexican cartels, all brothers in the drug trade, are not phenomena only of the countryside, but of the cities as well....More than 70% of Colombians live in cities with more than 100 thousand inhabitants, and only five concentrate 16 million...”

- 1. Micro-trafficking. ...increase in drug consumption at increasingly earlier ages ...*
- 2. Narcoterrorism. ...from 46 thousand hectares passing 200 thousand we returned to first place in world production of cocaine...*
- 3. Venezuelan migration. ...thousands of repatriated Colombians and Venezuelans cross the border daily without significant control. It is not about stigmatizing them or closing the doors to them, but the phenomenon is part of the diagnosis of insecurity in Cucuta and other cities....*
- 4. Arms trafficking. ...the Venezuela foundation Redes established that a million pieces of armament from thirty frontier garrisons have gone missing, that they end up with the ELN and FARC dissidences, with the blessing of the Maduro high command....*
- 5. Campesino migration. ...with the signature of the Accord, terrorism, extortion, dispossession, illegal mining and drug trafficking continue dominating the rural scene, with the consequence of displacement toward the cities...*
- 6. Justice. ...the prison system collapsed and in-home detection is a farce...”*



La Picota Prison in Bogota (2017).

Source: EEIM, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carcel_La_Picota_de_Bogot%C3%A1,_Cund_-Colombia_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carcel_La_Picota_de_Bogot%C3%A1,_Cund_-Colombia_(2).jpg), CC 4.0.



What Did FARC Leaders Expect?

OE Watch Commentary: The new FARC political party in Colombia has been allowed and sponsored by the Colombian government to mount a political campaign for this spring's legislative and presidential elections. So far, it has not gone well for the FARC in the sense that the first public appearances of its major candidates have had a lot of eggs, tomatoes, rocks and insults thrown at them. Apparently from what is being reported, to say that the FARC candidates have not attracted large crowds of supporters would be worse than an understatement. They have attracted flamboyant physical intolerance. In late 2016, a majority of the active Colombian electorate voted to reject the Santos-FARC power sharing agreement that was supposed to end the country's internal armed conflict. President Santos went ahead with the agreement anyway. Now it appears that the same electoral majority is not inclined to give campaign space to the FARC candidates. The FARC leaders are complaining about it and claiming victimhood. The first accompanying reference is an editorial opinion from a Medellín newspaper known to be anti-FARC, but the writer's opinion may be generally representative of a dominate current of public mood displayed at the FARC's attempted rallies. The second accompanying reference is from a highly regarded historian and journalist, Eduardo Mackenzie, also anti-FARC. His piece addresses headline events that took place this past month at one of the FARC's attempted rallies, in a place called Yumbo, near Cali in southwestern Colombia. The town itself has historical significance in the long insurgency. Mackenzie notes that a number of major Colombian news organizations are sympathetic and apologetic toward the FARC, that those outlets suggest the egg-throwing is organized violence against a democratic right to campaign. Mackenzie places far more blame on the FARC, outlining their penchant and modus operandi for creating confrontation and then denying responsibility. He stresses the broad underlying frustration in the population at even seeing the FARC leaders enjoy impunity. It is hard to say how all this will actually translate come Election Day, or what it bodes for the future of the conflict, but it may be that the internal war in Colombia is nowhere near over. **End OE Watch Commentary (Demarest)**

“...But here we have them, in full presidential electoral campaign, enjoying absolute impunity...”



Source: María Clara Ospina, “¿Acaso esperaban que les lanzaran rosas? (Or did they expect they would toss them roses?),” *El Colombiano*, 11 February 2018. <http://www.elcolombiano.com/opinion/columnistas/acaso-esperaban-que-les-lanzaran-rosas-DN8186410>

“But maybe they expected that they would be received with roses and hurrahs? Or did they think the people did not remember their atrocities, the pain they inflicted on the disarmed population, the destruction they caused? I would like to ask these celebrities, How many political candidates, communal leaders, council members did you murder, kidnap disappear or threaten during the more than 50 years you terrorized and bloodied Colombia?... But here we have them, in full presidential electoral campaign, enjoying absolute impunity, each one protected by I don't know how many bodyguards, running around in luxury super-SUVs, paid for by the government...”

Source: Eduardo Mackenzie, “Yumbo: lecciones de la resistencia popular anti-Farc,” *Periodico Debate*, 9 February 2018. <https://twishort.com/YVPmc>

“What to make of all this? ... The arrival of Timochenko in whatever locale transforms that place into a site of verbal and physical confrontation, into a battlefield, into shocking provocation, into suffering for the population. ...Certain media outlets are contributing to that disorder. Semana, El Espectador and the portal Las 2 Orillas dedicate themselves to disfiguring events. They say that the demonstrations are not spontaneous, that Timochenko [the FARC presidential candidate] and his band are the victims of ‘politicians of the CD [Democratic Center party], military officers, businessmen, journalists’ and a mysterious ‘closed group’...it is an aspect of the FARC strategy to contain the massive opposition that the terrorist chiefs’ fraudulent tour has awakened in the whole country.”



Peruvian Cocaine Production Associated with Possible Shining Path Resurgence?

OE Watch Commentary: Peruvian authorities were shocked when Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso in Spanish) snipers attacked a police convoy, leaving three officers dead on 18 March 2017. The excerpted article from *Deutsche Welle* reports how the convoy was carrying Special Anti-Drug Operations Division (División de Operaciones Especiales Antidrogas) agents from their headquarters in the Apurímac, Ene and Mantaro River Valley. This region is better known by its acronym VRAEM and is the country's largest coca-producing area. The assassination of the three policemen in the VRAEM is a sign that the Shining Path still maintains presence in Peru's largest coca-growing region despite the fact that a quarter century has passed since the terrorist group's leader, Abimael Guzmán, and some of his top associates were arrested in September 1992. It is also a known fact that the Shining Path has maintained an active relationship with drug trafficking organizations since 1984, because without these relationships, the organization would have never survived.

The excerpted article from *Diálogo* discusses that with evidence in place that the Shining Path is still active and does in fact provide services to drug trafficking organizations, the Peruvian Special Intelligence Group (GEIN) is strongly urging President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski to strengthen intelligence services and to track former Shining Path terrorists after they are released from prison. The purpose of this is to thwart any chance for the group to gain power in the VRAEM. GEIN also recommends that alternative development opportunities be established in remote zones of the country to fight against poverty and inequality, as this issue has only exacerbated criminal activity in the VRAEM for the past 25 years. **End OE Watch Commentary (Fiegel)**

Source: “Después de 25 años ¿qué queda de Sendero Luminoso? (After 25 Years, What's Left of the Shining Path?)”, *Deutsche Welle*, 12 September 2017. <http://www.dw.com/es/despu%C3%A9s-de-25-a%C3%B1os-qu%C3%A9-queda-de-sendero-luminoso/a-40476915>

According to Abimael Guzmán, former leader of the Shining Path, “One can fall, but that does not mean the group ceases to exist.” And according to Peruvian authorities, this may be correct as the group appears to have been involved in the murder of 3 anti-narcotics officers in 2017 despite the fact it was supposedly dismantled more than 25 years ago. There are also rumors that the group continues to play a role in drug operations in the VRAEM...

According to the Peruvian Special Intelligence Group GEIN, the Shining Path could have never lasted without having ties to DTOs in the VRAEM. The GEIN further asserts that the Shining Path sells military services to traffickers to provide security to shipments leaving the zone along roadways. They are also said to play other unspecified roles within the ranks of DTOs operating in the VRAEM.

Source: “Ministro de Defensa del Perú orgulloso de actuación de Fuerzas Armadas (Peruvian Minister of Defense is Proud of Armed Forces' Actions)”, *Diálogo*, 25 September 2017. <https://dialogo-americas.com/en/articles/peruvian-minister-defense-proud-armed-forces-actions-during-el-nino-costero>

The VRAEM is a very complex region because of geographic constraints and non-existent infrastructure. These factors will always make it difficult to combat drug trafficking and the resurgence of groups such as the Shining Path that have a desire to get back into the drug business. Because of this, it is hard to judge if the Shining Path will ever completely disappear, but some ideas to at least thwart its resurgence are alternative development opportunities for peasants and indigenous peoples living in the region.

“...it is hard to judge if the Shining Path will ever completely disappear...”



Valle de los Ríos Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro (VRAEM).

Source: By Galeria del Ministerio de Defensa de Perú, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AMINISTRO_DE_DEFENSA_SUPERVIS%C3%93_BASES_CONTRATERRORISTAS_DEL_VRAEM_\(14240930775\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AMINISTRO_DE_DEFENSA_SUPERVIS%C3%93_BASES_CONTRATERRORISTAS_DEL_VRAEM_(14240930775).jpg), [CC BY 2.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons.



Cuba to Build Massive Windfarms with Chinese Assistance

OE Watch Commentary: Since the creation of the Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement signed between Cuba and Venezuela in 2000, Cuba has had the benefit of importing cheap oil from Venezuela. However, due to reduced oil shipments and political instability in the Maduro regime, Cuba is increasingly exploring alternate approaches to support its energy needs, and China is helping with this search.

As the first excerpt from the official Chinese news site, *Xinhua*, points out, the Chinese are helping to construct “a vast complex consisting of two windfarms, La Herradura 1 and La Herradura 2, located in the province of Las Tunas, some 600 km east of Havana.” Chinese technology will be supporting the plans, with “Goldwind Science and Technology Co., a global provider of wind turbines over the last three years, and Dongfang Electric Corporation” being the two Chinese companies to complete the project. The excerpt states that the complexes “will generate around 101 Megawatts (MW) of energy that will be fed into the National Electric System,” making Cuba “69th worldwide in wind energy.”

The second excerpt (also from *Xinhua*) points out that this new project is part of a national strategy to “increase the participation of renewable energy sources up 24 percent in the country’s electricity generation by 2030.” Considering China’s recent replacement of Venezuela as Cuba’s leading trading partner, renewable energy projects such as this could further strengthen Cuba-Sino trade relations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kelsay)**

“To reach that goal, Cuba plans to produce around 24 percent of its total energy needs from different renewable sources by 2030.”

Source: “Chinese Technology Helps Cuba Build Largest Wind Farm,” *Xinhua*, 22 January 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/22/c_136914462.htm

...To reach that goal, Cuba plans to produce around 24 percent of its total energy needs from different renewable sources by 2030. It is an ambitious target given that as of 2006, the island nation generated only 4.3 percent of its energy from renewable sources. One of the key projects currently under construction is a vast complex consisting of two wind farms, La Herradura 1 and La Herradura 2, located in the province of Las Tunas, some 600 km east of Havana. They will generate around 101 Megawatts (MW) of energy that will be fed into the National Electric System....

Behind the complex is Chinese technology, according to Adela Alvarez, an official at Cuba’s Integrated Wind Energy Management company.... Cuban officials chose two Chinese companies to supply the project -- Goldwind Science and Technology Co., a global provider of wind turbines over the last three years, and Dongfang Electric Corporation, a firm specializing in renewable energies and high technology.

La Herradura 1 will be equipped with 34 Goldwind wind turbines measuring 65 meters in height with three 37-meter blades, generating 1.5 MW of power distributed in five circuits.

La Herradura 2 will feature 20 Dongfang wind turbines of 2.5 MW each, which will contribute a total of 50 MW to Cuba’s electric grid.... Total installed capacity currently stands at 11.7 MW, which means the Caribbean nation ranks 69th worldwide in wind energy.

Source: “Spotlight: Cuba Pushes Development of Renewable Energies,” *Xinhua*, 31 January 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/31/c_136938452.htm

At the opening of the “Cuba 2018 Renewable Energies” business forum, Lopez pointed out that the Caribbean island state has a long-term policy for the development of green energies and environmental sustainability. “To fulfill this program we must increase the participation of renewable energy sources up to 24 percent in the country’s electricity generation by 2030, an ambitious but necessary goal for our country,” said the minister.



La Herradura region of Cuba.

Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Herradura.jpg, Public Domain.



Mexican Army Seizes Claymore Mines, Rifles, and Drugs in Tamaulipas

OE Watch Commentary: On 7 February 2018 members of the Mexican Army deployed to the vicinity of the Bravo River in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, and found claymore mines among other weapons following a search for criminal activity in the area. According to the accompanying article from *El Heraldo de México*, a news outlet based in Mexico, members from the 8th Military Zone (Octava Zona Militar) found a storage space hidden near dry brush and garbage.

According to the article, military personnel seized seventeen assault rifles, two .50 caliber Barrett rifles, and two claymore mines. They also found a grenade launcher, a 38-caliber pistol special, two bullet proof vests, and an abundance of ammunition. An article from *El Mañana*, also a state news source, showed images from the seizure, including the hideout. A white powdery substance, which authorities stated resembled cocaine, was also discovered, as were a radio communication device and over 5,500 gallons of hydrocarbon (fuel). Three people were arrested in connection with the discovery. **End OE Watch Commentary (Keshavarz and Bunker)**



US M18A1 claymore mine parts.
Source: US Air Force, www.af.mil/news/airman/0105/defense5b.shtml, Public Domain.

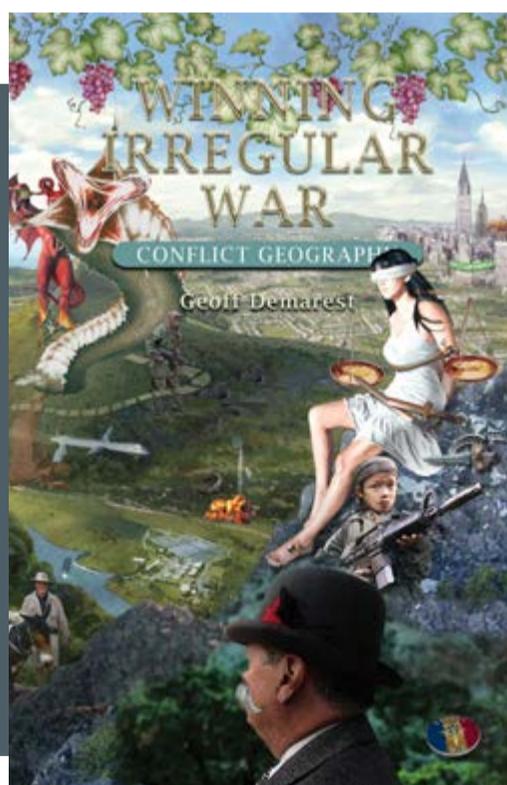
“Two claymore mines, along with other arms and drugs were seized by Mexican Army personnel.”

Source: “Decomisan dos minas antipersonales en Tamaulipas (Two claymore mines seized in Tamaulipas),” *El Heraldo de México*, 7 February 2018. <https://heraldodemexico.com.mx/estados/tamaulipas-decomisan-dos-minas-antipersonales/>

Two claymore mines, along with other arms and drugs were seized by Mexican Army personnel. This action was after a number of deployments in Reynosa, Tamaulipas. In this case, three people were arrested.

Source: “Asegura Ejército armas, droga y 21 mil litros de huachicol (Army seizes drugs and 21,000 liters of hydrocarbon),” *El Mañana*, 7 February 2018. <https://www.elmanana.com/asegura-ejercito-armas-droga-21-mil-litros-huachicol-reynosa-armas-aseguradas-droga-huachicol-militares/4306481>

The patrol intensified during the last 48 hours as they found signs of criminal activity. Mexican Army personnel discovered a hiding place in between a small gap around dry brush and garbage. Three suspects were arrested



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

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/ml/fmso-books/195392/download>



MILF Leaders Seek Lessons Learned from Indonesia

OE Watch Commentary: In recent years Indonesia has battled not only terrorist groups such as Jemaah Islamiya but also separatist insurgents in disparate regions of the country, such as Aceh and West Papua. On 1 February, the Indonesian-language website *beritasatu.com*, featured the excerpted article about how a delegation of leaders from the separatist insurgent Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) based in the Philippines visited Indonesia along with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to learn about Indonesia's experience in peacemaking. According to the article, MILF specifically sought out Jusuf Kalla, who is currently Indonesia's vice president and formerly negotiated a peace deal in Aceh.

Kalla noted that Indonesia has been involved in efforts to attain peace in the southern Philippines since as early as 1996. It was that year when the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Philippine government signed a peace deal in Jakarta that later proved unable to be implemented and fell apart. According to Kalla, the factionalization of the insurgency between MNLF and MILF, the latter of which rejected the 1996 peace deal because of concerns that it granted the insurgents insufficient regional autonomy, had always made it difficult to achieve lasting peace.

Kalla drew similarities between the conflict in the southern Philippines and in Aceh and West Papua. In particular, the conflicts in southern Philippines and in Aceh were both Islamist insurgencies that have required granting some autonomy for the insurgents and allowing a level of sharia law in the insurgents' region in order to achieve peace. According to the chairman of MILF, who led the delegation, the conflict in Aceh was basically the same as the one in the southern Philippines.

According to Kalla there are two key components to a peace mission: mutual respect and compromise. The leadership of Kalla and Indonesia's prior experience in engaging in peace talks in Aceh and West Papua as well as countering terrorist groups, provides an opportunity to extend advice to other countries in Southeast Asia undergoing political violence and attempts at peace and reconciliation. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“We came to Indonesia to learn from the experience of the Indonesian government, especially in dealing with the conflict in Aceh, which is experiencing the same situation.”

Source: “Tokoh Front Pembebasan Islam Moro Minta Nasihat JK (Moro Islamic Liberation Front Leader Asks JK Advice)”, *beritasatu.com*, 1 February 2018. <http://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/476403-tokoh-front-pembebasan-islam-moro-minta-nasihat-jk.html>

Vice President Jusuf Kalla (JK) received 11 leaders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) of the Philippines at the Vice Presidential Office in Central Jakarta. The MILF delegation led by MILF Chairman Murad Ebrahim accompanied by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) asked Jusuf Kalla (JK) for advice because he was a mediator of peace during the Aceh conflict. According to JK, peace efforts in the south of the Philippines actually have been made for a long time. But because there were many groups or factions in the circle of the rebellion, the peace plan was ultimately difficult to achieve. JK said, “Yes, of course, our experience is that every peace mission needs first, mutual respect, and second, there must be a compromise.” Murad Ibrahim stated that JK's experience is very valuable because, “We came to Indonesia to learn from the experience of the Indonesian government, especially in dealing with the conflict in Aceh, which is experiencing the same situation.”



Moro soldier outside USAID GEM 700x500.

Source: Mark Navales, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moro_soldier_outside_USAID_GEM_700x500.jpg (CC-by-2.0).



Indonesia, Malaysia Have Right of Hot Pursuit in Philippines

OE Watch Commentary: After a several month battle with pro-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) fighters in Marawi, Philippines in 2017, the Philippines is now strengthening cooperation with neighbors Indonesia and Malaysia on counter-terrorism. An article in the excerpted Philippine publication, *The Star*, on 31 January reports that Philippine president Duterte has stated that Indonesia and Malaysia may now cross into Philippine territory to pursue terrorists. Duterte said that it was only necessary that they inform the Philippines before entering its territory. He also said that Philippine forces could join Indonesian or Malaysian forces on such missions.

At the same time the article shows that the arrangement may not yet be fully articulated yet. Duterte, who is known for making bold remarks, also gave advice to Indonesia and Malaysia to just blow up the terrorists. Duterte added that he had run out of patience with Abu Sayyaf, which is the jihadist group that is based in the southern Philippines and that has frequently crossed the maritime borders between the three countries.

Duterte's statements may need time to be formalized, but they represent a growing trend of regional cooperation in counter-terrorism in Southeast Asia. This is likely one reason why the region has seen relative success in counter-terrorism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: "Indonesian and M'sian troops can enter Philippines to catch terrorists" *thestar.com*, 31 January 2018. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/regional/2018/01/31/indonesian-and-msian-troops-can-enter-philippines-to-catch-terrorists/#KgOW4ICtCSbHwdxI.99>

President Duterte said Indonesian and Malaysian troops can enter the Philippines in pursuit of terrorists. "I will allow troops of Indonesia and Malaysia to come in if they are pursuing a lead and they think that they are able to defeat terrorists. Just inform the Armed Forces about it," he said. Duterte said the Philippines was even willing to join the foreign troops. He said he had run out of patience, especially regarding the activities of the Abu Sayyaf, a militant-extremist group based in the southern Philippines which has been snatching victims from as far as the Malaysian or Indonesian territories.

"I will allow troops of Indonesia and Malaysia to come in if they are pursuing a lead and they think that they are able to defeat terrorists."



Marawi Lake.

Source: Hansme333, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marawi_lake.jpg, (CC BY 3.0).



Papua New Guinea Balances Between China and Australia

OE Watch Commentary: On 23 January, the excerpted article on Australia's *abc.net.au* discussed whether Australia should be concerned about China's growing engagement in Papua New Guinea (PNG). According to the article, PNG has asserted to Australia that it is depending on China for infrastructure development and that it is not a security related relationship. This is notwithstanding that at the end of 2017 China donated 62 military vehicles to the PNG.

PNG explained to Australia that it has historically received aid from Australia and that the country has learned much about how to assess and manage aid from Australia. However, PNG also said that it needs to look out for its own interests and that it seeks to benefit from the contributions that China is making around the world. PNG businesses also find the Chinese to be more adaptive and flexible and willing to take risks than Australians and that the Chinese are cheaper to hire for projects than Australians.

The article also mentions how Australia has expressed concern that Chinese infrastructure development has often led to waste. One example was the \$390 million expansion at Papua New Guinea's biggest port that the Chinese state-owned China Harbour Engineering Company built. The project ultimately was deemed to be less than successful and failed tests for effectivity.

In other theaters around the world, such as Africa, Chinese investment has led to growing political and military clout. Thus far, PNG's turn to China has been primarily economic. But the possibility remains that China's donation of some military vehicles to PNG last year and increased economic activity this year may similarly lead to greater Chinese political and military influence in PNG, which was historically in Australia's sphere of influence. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

“China is making contributions around the world and Papua New Guinea is no exception.”

Source: “Australia should not fear Chinese influence in Papua New Guinea, Government says,” *abc.net.au*, 23 January 2018. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-23/australia-should-not-fear-chinese-influence-in-png/9349140>

...The Australian Government is becoming increasingly alarmed about Chinese investment and aid to developing countries on its doorstep. But Papua New Guinea's Foreign Affairs Minister, Rimbink Pato, has moved to reassure Australia that Papua New Guinea can manage its relationship with both countries. Mr Pato said Papua New Guinea would continue looking for aid and loans from nations like China, particularly to develop infrastructure. “China is making contributions around the world and PNG is no exception,” he said...

One example is the Lae Tidal Basin, a \$390 million expansion at Papua New Guinea's biggest port built by the Chinese state-owned China Harbour Engineering Company. The cost of the project, financed primarily through concessional loans from the Asian Development Bank — blew out by \$170 million because of engineering problems. The ADB's assessment found the project failed tests of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability and its overall report declared the project “less than successful”... Australian investment in Papua New Guinea has stagnated in recent years as the country's economy struggled, while Chinese investment has been rising...



Tau Geno-Hoire and Mona Balam from AusAID's law and justice team talking to people in Koki village (Port Moresby) about safety concerns.

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tau_Geno-Hoire_and_Mona_Balam_from_AusAID%27s_law_and_justice_team_talking_to_people_in_Koki_village_\(Port_Moresby\)_about_safety_concerns_\(10728202146\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tau_Geno-Hoire_and_Mona_Balam_from_AusAID%27s_law_and_justice_team_talking_to_people_in_Koki_village_(Port_Moresby)_about_safety_concerns_(10728202146).jpg), (CC-by-2.0).



Maldives: Troubled Waters in the Indian Ocean and Growing Relations with China

OE Watch Commentary: The Maldives, an archipelago of some 1,200 islands, located about 745 miles from India's mainland and 435 miles from India's Lakshadweep island chain, are locked in a political tug-of-war between India and China. The root of the concern is centered on the Maldives' shift in loyalty from longtime-ally India to China, beginning in 2012, when former president Mohamed Nasheed, who is pro-India, resigned following weeks of opposition-led protests.

Sudha Ramachandran, an independent journalist and researcher based in India, explains in the first accompanying article from *The Diplomat*, that India had strong relations with the Maldives from 1965 until Nasheed's "forced" resignation. She explains that while India had "played a critical role in building the Maldives' economy and ensuring political stability there," after Abdulla Yameen, who is pro-China, took over the presidency in 2012, the Maldives began shifting toward China for support on massive infrastructure projects. More recently, both countries have entered into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), in which there are zero tariffs over 95 percent of the goods traded, and an opening up to the world's largest consumer market (China) would result in bigger financial gains for the Maldives – a seemingly irresistible proposition.

The second article, from the *South China Morning Post*, explains some of the political turmoil taking place in the archipelago. In addition, Nasheed, who may be seeking re-election, has been urging India to become more engaged with the Maldives. He also went on record accusing China of "land-looting," as noted in the last article from *Xinhua*, an accusation that China vehemently denies.

The potential implications, some of which have been well documented in the first article, are clear. As the Maldives, whose primary source of revenue is derived from tourism, accepts more and more aid and business from China, it could become financially beholden to the Asian giant. The Maldives, while a popular tourist destination, is strategically located in the Indian Ocean, situated in "proximity to international sea lanes through which two-thirds of the world's oil and half of its container shipments pass." It is also ideally located to play a key role in China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Also worth highlighting is China's timing in offering support to the Maldives. According to the *South China Morning Post* article, China's offer of support came just as Nasheed, "who was expected to stand for election under the opposition party later this year – called for military intervention from India." India has joined the United States and Britain in calling for Yameen to abide by a court ruling that gives Nasheed the power to run again. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“China now already has 17 islands in the Maldives and this is a looting...”

Source: Sudha Ramachandran, "The China-Maldives Connection," *The Diplomat*, 25 January 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/the-china-maldives-connection>

Relations between India and Maldives go back several centuries. This relationship grew in the decades following Maldives' independence from British colonial rule in 1965 and strengthened in the 1980s and 1990s. India played a critical role in building Maldives' economy and ensuring political stability there. It supported the authoritarian rule of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, a half-brother of the current president, and enabled him to remain in power for three decades. It even dispatched troops to Maldives to avert a coup attempt to oust Gayoom in 1988.

India's influence over Maldives began fraying after former President Mohamed Nasheed, who was perceived as India-friendly, was forced to resign in February 2012...

Until 2011, Maldives was not a priority in China's foreign policy; Beijing did not even have an embassy in Male. However, Sino-Maldivian relations have grown remarkably since Chinese President Xi Jinping visited the archipelago in September 2014. China's presence, especially in Maldives' tourism sector and infrastructure building, has expanded. It has replaced Europe as Maldives' largest source of tourists. China is funding and building mega infrastructure projects, including the Friendship Bridge linking Male to Hulhule Island and a 1,000-apartment housing project on Hulhumale, a suburb built on reclaimed land.

Source: Kinling Lo, "China Seeks Healthy Ties with Troubled Maldives Amid India Rivalry," *South China Morning Post*, 9 February 2018. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2132757/china-seeks-healthy-ties-troubled-maldives-amid-india>

...Maldives President Abdulla Yameen announced a 15-day state of emergency in the luxury tourist hotspot on Monday, triggered by a Supreme Court ruling last week to free political prisoners and opposition politicians. Yameen rejected the ruling and detained two judges.

The Maldives sent envoys to China, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to brief them on the political crisis, but no envoy went to India because the dates were not "suitable", according to the Maldivian embassy in India.

The bid for support from Beijing came as the Maldives' exiled former president Mohamed Nasheed – who was expected to stand for election under the opposition party later this year – called for military intervention from India, which has joined the United States and Britain in calling for Yameen to abide by the court ruling.

Since Abdulla Yameen became president of the Maldives in 2013, economic ties with China are the closest they have ever been. Through its belt and road strategy, Beijing is trying to revive old trading routes on land and sea, linking China across Asia to Africa and Europe. Chinese funding has gone towards an airport upgrade, land reclamation projects, resorts, roads and housing in the Maldives as part of the ambitious trade and infrastructure initiative.



Maldives: Troubled Waters in the Indian Ocean and Growing Relations with China

Source: Zhu Ruiqing and Tang Lu, “抹黑中马合作不负责任 (Irresponsible to Discredit China-Maldives Cooperation),” *Xinhua*, 14 February 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-02/14/c_1122419142.htm

Former Maldivian President Mohamed Nasheed recently said when interviewed by an Indian news medium, “China now already has 17 islands in the Maldives” and this is a “looting” of the Maldives’s land. Nasheed’s remark, which was a malicious fabrication of facts to discredit China-Maldives cooperation, met with strongly worded refutations from local people with breadth of vision and the Chinese embassy in the Maldives.



Asia Map with Maldives Circled.

Source: By TUBS, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maldives_in_Asia.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Xinjiang Ethnic Harmonization by Quartering and Relocation

OE Watch Commentary: In 2016, the government of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) launched a “family home-stay” program, wherein Han Chinese government cadres stayed with minority families (mostly ethnic Uyghurs) in an effort to promote unity. The program recently finished another iteration, which saw the deployment of over one million cadres and government employees. Following this campaign, the government announced a new commissioning of 76,000 officials to be sent out and monitor rural areas throughout Xinjiang.

The first excerpt from the official Chinese site, *Global Times*, points out that throughout the last-half of December, the unity week campaign was “aimed at promoting the spirit of the 19th National Congress of the CPC” embracing “ethnic unity.” This was sought to be accomplished through an “exchange”—placing cadres in minority community homes and vice versa. It was additionally reported that the exchange lasted for approximately six days for each family and their new “relative.”

The second excerpt, also from *Global Times*, reports that, following the unity week practices, and falling into line with broader concerns over unity and homogeneity, the XUAR government has decided to dispatch 76,000 officials to rural and economically marginalized villages across the province. As reported, an official from the Urumqi National Cadre College said the mission of the new official dispatch would be “mainly...implementing regional policies. Their close involvement with ethnic residents would erase estrangement, which would benefit regional stability in the long run.” However, as noted in the piece, this was not the first attempt at increasing unity through dispatching cadres to villages—with 53,400 officials and 9,500 working teams dispatched in 2017. **End OE Watch Commentary (Shanks)**

Source: “Xinjiang unity week practices spirit of 19th CPC National Congress.” *Global Times*. 3 January 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1083107.shtml>

About a million cadres and employees in Xinjiang participated in the week in which they spent time living, working and studying with people from different ethnic groups, the Xinjiang Daily reported on Sunday. The campaign is aimed at promoting the spirit of the 19th National Congress of CPC to thousands of families in the autonomous region, the Urumqi-based paper reported. Han ethnic majority cadres and employees must take an ethnic minority “relative,” mostly a member of the Uyghur ethnic minority, said Liu Chenyu, a kindergarten teacher living in Qitai county of Changji, a county-level city about 40 kilometers west of Urumqi, the Xinjiang capital. Ethnic minority cadres must also have a Han villager as a “relative,” Liu told the Global Times on Wednesday.

Source: “Xinjiang assigns 76,000 officials to poor villages.” *Global Times*. 1 February 2018. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1087820.shtml>

“In an effort to enhance work in extremely poor villages and to alleviate poverty, the Communist Party of China (CPC) Committee in Xinjiang has assigned 76,000 officials and 12,000 working groups to cover every village in the region, the Xinjiang Morning Post reported on Thursday. Those officials started to work in villages on Monday. Among the 76,000 officials, 2,578 officials selected from universities in Xinjiang will be assigned to each extremely poor village. “The officials are mainly responsible for implementing regional policies. Their close involvement with ethnic residents would erase estrangement, which would benefit regional stability in the long run,” Dong Yong, a professor from Urumqi National Cadre College, told the Global Times on Thursday.



“Han ethnic majority cadres and employees must take an ethnic minority ‘relative,’ mostly a member of the Uyghur ethnic minority.”



Is China's Afghanistan Strategy Modeled on Russia in Syria?

OE Watch Commentary: On 22 January, the excerpted Chinese-language article on *sina.com* discussed Russian analyses of recent reports that China is constructing a military base in northeastern Afghanistan's Badakhshan province, which borders China. The purpose of the base is reportedly to prevent terrorists in Afghanistan from infiltrating China through the mountainous border between the two countries.

According to the article, Russian military experts see the construction of the base as representative of China's increasing activity in regional affairs. According to a quoted expert, China's operations in Afghanistan also follow the example of Russia's operations in Syria. This means China will rely "on cooperation with the national government and maintain friendly relations with the locals" in order to achieve its objectives. The article, however, notes that Russian experts see the situation in Afghanistan as different than Syria because the civil wars in Afghanistan have been ongoing for several decades whereas the war in Syria only began in 2011. Nevertheless, Russian experts state that China can still learn from Russia's experience in Syria supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime.

The article also states that China has not officially recognized that it is constructing a base in Badakhshan. China has only said it is engaging in counter-terrorism cooperation with Afghanistan out of mutual respect. A Russian analyst, according to the article, nevertheless interprets this as a clear sign that China will maintain a presence in Afghanistan. **End OE Watch Commentary (Zenn)**

Source: “俄媒分析中国帮阿富汗在两国边境建基地用于反恐 (Russian media analysis of China's help to Afghanistan border construction sites for anti-terrorism),” *sina.com*, 22 January 2018. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2018-01-22/doc-ifyquixe5821219.shtml>

Russian media analysis says that China is building a military base in the Badakhshan province of northeastern Afghanistan bordering China, due to fears that terrorists will infiltrate the country through the borders with China. Reportedly, a special committee of military experts from China and Afghanistan came to Badakhshan province to locate the site and assess the workload. A military expert at the Russian Higher Institute of Economics, said, “building a new military base for the Afghan army is an aspect of China's active participation in regional affairs. If this trend continues, then China's future is likely to follow Russia's military presence in Syria: relying on cooperation with the national government and maintain friendly relations with the locals.”

Russia dispatched troops in Syria to intervene in the local situation when the civil war had transpired for only a few years. The move was mainly aimed at helping the Bashar al-Assad regime, which has friendly relations with Russia. The conflict in Afghanistan has been decades. If China wants to help the situation in the region, it may learn from Russia's experience in Syria.

As for whether China will help Afghanistan build a base, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry said at a press conference recently that it did not know what the media has been saying but that China always supports carrying out international anti-terrorism cooperation on the basis of mutual respect.

“Building a new military base for the Afghan army is an aspect of China's active participation in regional affairs.”



Fayzabad in Badakhshan Province of Afghanistan.

Source: Julian G. Albert, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fayzabad_in_Badakhshan_Province_of_Afghanistan.jpg, (CC-by-2.0).



China's Evolving Nuclear Strategy: Will China Drop "No First Use?"

by Nan Li

Republished in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, Vol. 18, Issue 1, dated 12 January 2018, Edited for OE Watch. For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-evolving-nuclear-strategy-will-china-drop-no-first-use/>

OE Watch Commentary: The PLA Rocket Force is continuing to upgrade its missile forces and shift its emphasis from a posture of immobile and vulnerable positions hidden deep in mountains to a highly mobile and more survivable mode. A new CCTV documentary also reveals that China's multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV)-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) DF-41 will begin active service in 2018.

While China's strategic nuclear capabilities are changing, there is still a high level of uncertainty among analysts about the specifics of China's nuclear strategy. Though China vigorously censors information about its missile forces, examination of a body of relatively authoritative military texts provides useful context to help understand China's nuclear strategy beyond the more visible changes in equipment. Importantly, it is evident that as China modernizes its nuclear forces, it is also debating a shift in strategy, including the abandonment of its No First Use (NFU) policy.

According to Chinese nuclear strategists, two major concepts best describe the evolution of China's nuclear strategy. The first, overarching drive for China's development of a nuclear weapon was to "curb and stop nuclear blackmail," and secondly to maintain "effective counter-nuclear attack deterrence." China's first nuclear strategy, adopted during the 1960s and 70s, is based on the premise that a country must possess nuclear weapons in order to prevent nations with nuclear weapons from "blackmailing" those without them. China's lack of nuclear weapons during the Korean War and the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958 motivated Chinese leadership to accelerate research and development of nuclear weapons, resulting in China's first nuclear test in 1964. But because this strategy has "no clear requirements for the quantity and quality of nuclear weapons" due to technological and financial constraints, it could only meet the "minimum goal" of symbolic possession to prevent nuclear blackmail.

The second concept, which is understood as China's nuclear strategy from the 1980s up to present, is "effective counter-nuclear attack deterrence." This strategy requires China to possess nuclear counter-attack capabilities that can survive the first nuclear attack and launch retaliatory nuclear strikes. These requirements may account for China's efforts in recent years to develop its own missile defense system and counter-missile defense capabilities, develop and deploy more solid-fuel, road and rail-mobile strategic missiles and nuclear ballistic missile submarines, and test MIRV-capable ICBMs and hypersonic glide vehicles.

China's nuclear policy can be understood as following the principle of No First Use, which is consistent with its second strike-based nuclear strategy of "effective counter-nuclear attack deterrence." But there appears to have been increasing discontent with this policy from within China's analytical community on nuclear policy and strategy in recent years. This discontent has been reflected in several critical views of NFU.

One view is that NFU may impose certain limitations on the strategic use of China's Rocket Force, implying reduced crisis response flexibility due to the highly centralized decision-making in employing nuclear weapons. Moreover, some believe that NFU reduces the credibility of China's already small nuclear forces, and that abandoning NFU may enhance China's nuclear deterrent.

Chinese analysts have also suggested that China abandon NFU in a number of threatening scenarios:

- China's conventional forces are unable to defend against a "large-scale foreign invasion"
- If "the enemy attacks our nuclear bases with conventional arms, posing enormous threat to our strategic nuclear forces"
- PLA's operational objectives face an "enormous threat" by a "large-scale foreign military intervention" in a "war of safeguarding national unity"—referring to a Taiwan conflict scenario
- Escalation indicating an opponent's "intention" to cross the nuclear threshold
- Attacks with conventional arms against nuclear bases and targets of life-and-death value like the Three-Gorges Dam causing destruction comparable to or larger than a nuclear attack" (*continued*).

“The DF-41 has a range of 12,000 kilometers and a deviation of some one hundred meters. It can carry six to 10 multiple maneuverable warheads.”

Source: “Wenyu, Sun “China's latest intercontinental ballistic missile expected to be deployed next year,” *People's Daily Online*, 28 November 2017. <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/1128/c90000-9297997.html>

China's intercontinental ballistic missile DF-41 is expected to be deployed in early 2018, said military expert Yang Chengjun on a TV program broadcasted on China Central Television (CCTV) on Nov. 26...

Public data shows that DF-41 is a rival of the 6th-generation missiles of some developed countries...The Chinese missile even has an edge with regard to some technologies. The DF-41 has a range of 12,000 kilometers and a deviation of some one hundred meters. It can carry six to 10 multiple maneuverable warheads...It can be launched from road- and rail-mobile launcher platforms, as well as silo-based launchers...

(continued)



Continued: China's Evolving Nuclear Strategy: Will China Drop "No First Use?"

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Supporters of NFU offer a number of rebuttals. Rather than hampering crisis response flexibility, they argue, the decision to employ nuclear weapons has always been “controlled in the hands of the state’s top leadership.” Supporters of NFU also argue that a “large-scale foreign invasion” of China is unlikely due to the rapid increase in the destructiveness of modern warfare, which has forced major powers to pursue limited objectives with limited wars.

While No First Use is likely to remain China’s official nuclear policy in the near future, in the meantime, the dynamic evolution of China’s nuclear policy, strategy, and capabilities requires careful analysis. Such analysis is particularly necessary if the anti-NFU view begins to have great popular support within the PLA, if China develops a more grim view of its regional security environment, or if China believes that its economy is sufficient to support a more robust nuclear capability along the lines of Russia or the United States. **End OE Watch Commentary (Li)**



DF-31A intercontinental ballistic missile at military parade in Beijing commemorating 70 years since the end of World War II (September 2015).

Source: By IceUnshattered (Own work), <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e7/Dongfeng-31A.JPG>, CC BY-SA 4.0.



China Promotes Increased Maritime Capabilities

OE Watch Commentary: Three Chinese academics and military theorists have written articles in the official *People's Daily* newspaper arguing in favor of increasing the country's maritime capabilities. The articles appeared in the 11 February edition of the paper, under the title "Now is the Time to Build a Strong Maritime Nation." The authors represented a cross-section of military and civilian think tanks: He Guangshun is the director of the National Marine Data & Information Service. Liu Jixian is a former deputy president of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences. Zhang Haiwen is the Party Secretary of the Maritime Development Strategy Research Institute under the State Oceanic Administration.

Zhang Haiwen links China's economic development to its maritime development, pointing out that the Southern and Eastern coastal provinces that grew the fastest after the "Reform and Opening" of the 1970s. He argued that a renewed focus on using maritime resources and developing trade would be the key to continuing Chinese economic development through the "two centenaries"—major milestones for development that China has set for itself in 2021 and 2049.

He Guangshun highlighted recent Chinese scientific achievements in the maritime realm, including advancements in harnessing tidal energy, maritime monitoring satellites and accessing the natural gas hydrates found in the South China Sea that could potentially revolutionize China's energy security. While the majority of his discussion focused on civilian achievements, he highlighted civil-military cooperation's foundational role in building a strong maritime nation.

Liu Jixian argues that building a strong maritime nation necessitates recognizing that a traditional navy is simply one part of strong maritime force. Not only has the navy expanded to include new services, branches and technologies, but maritime law enforcement and civilian organizations (including maritime militia and science vessels) are necessary. Greater coordination, planning and promotion of civil-military integration, he argues, will help strengthen China's ability to build maritime power.

The Chinese government is making a concerted effort across its military and civilian organizations to promote maritime power. This was reflected in the 2015 Defense White Paper, "China's Military Strategy" which stated that "The traditional mentality that 'land outweighs sea' must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests." The fact that the *People's Daily* has devoted a whole page to the topic should be taken as further evidence that this campaign is continuing and has high-level support. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“In addition to [traditional] naval forces, the modern navy is composed of naval aviation capable of attacking targets on the sea, the conventional missile force, and the strategic support force. Other services and branches maritime capabilities supplement the naval joint combat force system...”

Source: “以强海梦托起中国梦 (Use the Strong Maritime Nation Dream to Support the China Dream),” Zhang Haiwen, *People's Daily*, 11 February 2018. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-02/11/nw.D110000renmrb_20180211_3-05.htm

The ocean is an important arena for nations to increase “Comprehensive National Power,” international influence, and competitiveness. Speeding up the construction of a strong maritime power is an important measure that will preserve and fulfill our national security development requirements, protect our maritime rights and interests, and expand our national strategic interests.

Source: “建设海洋强国是实现中国梦的必然选择, (Building a Strong Maritime Nation is the Natural Choice to Realize the China Dream),” He Guangshun, *People's Daily*, 11 February 2018. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-02/11/nw.D110000renmrb_20180211_2-05.htm

Deepen implementation of the strategy of innovation and breakthroughs in maritime science and technology. Strive to make breakthroughs in the key areas of advanced security, green, and deep-water technologies. Resolve the issue of our maritime development being fast but not good. Thoroughly implement the concept of coordinated development, and promote the comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development of marine undertakings.

Source: “大力推进新时代海上力量建设 (Forcefully Advance Maritime Force-building in the New Era),” Liu Jixian, *People's Daily*, 11 February 2018. http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2018-02/11/nw.D110000renmrb_20180211_4-05.htm

The formation of a modern maritime force is evolving in a comprehensive and diversified direction. No single force can adapt to and meet the strategic needs of safeguarding territorial sovereignty and the maritime rights and interests of the country.

Accompanying the changes in the shape of warfare and the speed at which new platforms and weapons have expanded, the trend toward joint naval combat is becoming more apparent and the composition of maritime forces is expanding. In addition to [traditional] naval forces, the modern navy is composed of naval aviation capable of attacking targets on the sea, the conventional missile force, and the strategic support force. Other services and branches maritime capabilities supplement the naval joint combat force system...

Maritime administrative law enforcement has unique advantages in maritime rights protection in peacetime. It can not only exercise the power of law enforcement on behalf of the government, but also effectively avoid direct military confrontation. In recent years as seen in “rights protection activities” in the Diaoyu Islands and South China Seas, the maritime administrative law enforcement force has become the backbone for safeguarding China's sovereignty and maritime rights and interests...

Marine social forces are mainly composed of the scientific research fleet, merchant fleet, militia fishing vessels, etc. Strong maritime non-governmental actors are one of the important symbols of maritime power... Modern transport fleets can take on the important task of providing logistical support to maritime military operations. Militia fishing vessels have a unique role to play in advancing [China's] maritime interests and are an integral part of civilian maritime forces and national mobilization systems.



Photos Paint a Point of No Return over the Disputed South China Sea

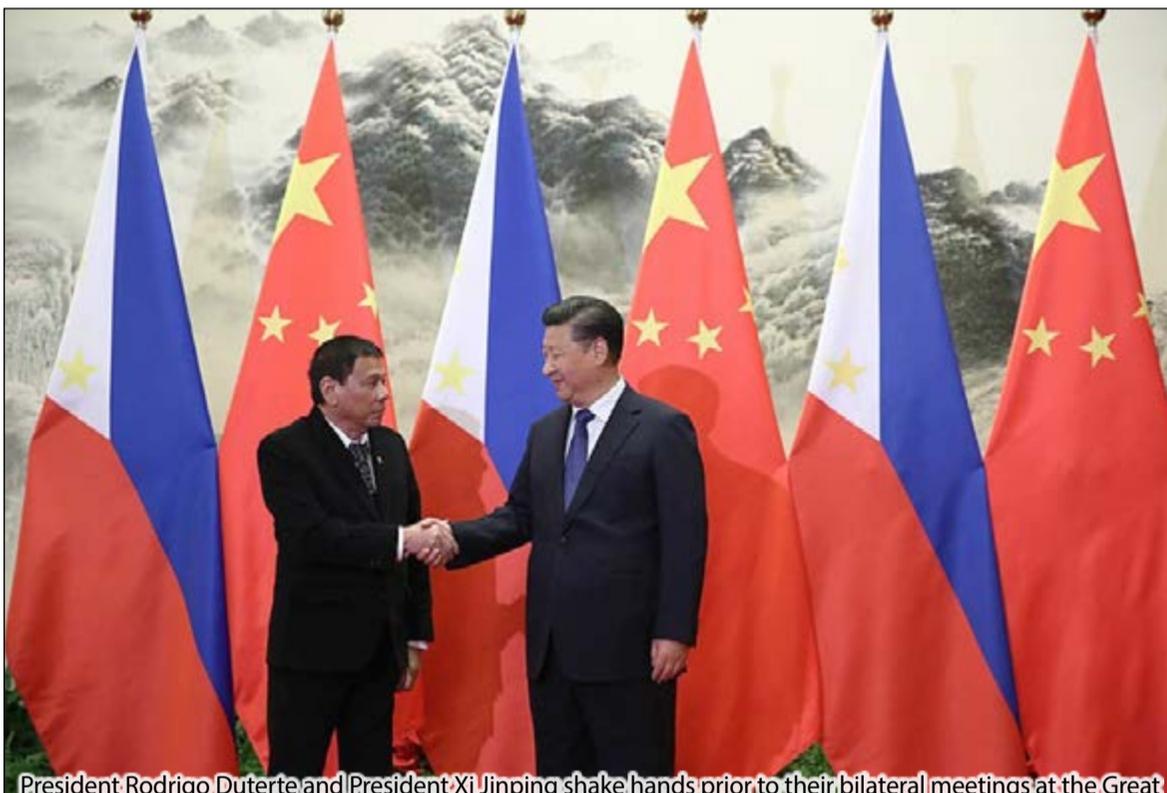
OE Watch Commentary: The Philippines has lost a lot of ground in its claims to the Spratly Islands. The following article excerpts highlight some of the political, military, and economic issues surrounding the situation. The Spratly Islands are among the most heavily disputed territories in the world, with China moving in and taking physical control over many of them through “unrestrained” construction of military facilities. According to the article, much of China’s military construction appears to be complete or nearly complete and the country has placed various military ships, including new generation frigates, coast guard, replenishment, and large cargo vessels among them.

One of the more salient points in the article is how Panganiban (Mischief Reef) lies within the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea and was recognized in 2016 by the UN-backed permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague as belonging to the Philippines. However, this has not stopped China from building a runway, hangars, control tower and radomes, claiming the island for itself. Nor has a 2002 trade agreement between China and ASEAN, which stipulated that in any issues involving the South China Sea, concerned parties must follow restraint and not introduce any activity that could complicate the issue.

The article also points out that North Korea’s missile and atomic weapons tests over the past year had helped to draw international attention away from China’s activities in the South China Sea. Despite this, the author stresses that “the Philippines was not exactly unaware of the Chinese military buildup in the Spratlys.” Harry Roque, a presidential spokesperson in the Philippines, voiced little to no concern over China’s military buildup on the reefs. This should come as no surprise since, as the article points out, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who had formed a strategic relationship with China and who had come to power two weeks prior to the 2016 ruling, refused to take measures to protect Manila’s claims, “wooing China instead for loans and investments.”

According to the article, some of the implications for the Philippines, should it not be able to assert its claim, include the fear that China will never return the territory it grabbed. The country could also lose 80 percent of its EEZ in the South China Sea, which would jeopardize its energy security and source of food. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

“If the Philippines does not assert its legal victory, it stands to lose 80 percent of its EEZ in the South China Sea, covering 381,000 square kilometers of maritime space....”



President Rodrigo Duterte and President Xi Jinping shake hands prior to their bilateral meetings at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

Source: Philippine Government, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3APresident_Duterte_handshake_with_President_Xi.jpg, Public Domain.

Source: Frances Mangosing, “New Photos Show China is Nearly Done with its Militarization of South China Sea,” *Inquirer.net*, 5 February, 2018. <http://www.inquirer.net/specials/exclusive-china-militarization-south-china-sea>

The extent of development on the reefs show that China has gone ahead with building military outposts in the Spratlys despite a 2002 agreement with the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) not to change any features in the sea.

At the same time, China has softened the impact of its military buildup with pledges of investments to the Philippines and talk of a framework for negotiating with Asean a code of conduct for the management of rival claims in the strategic waterway.

North Korea’s missile and atomic weapon tests also helped draw international attention away from China’s construction activities on the reefs, although recent pronouncements from Malacañang indicated the Philippines was not exactly unaware of the Chinese military buildup in the Spratlys.

“And the area we will lose is huge, as big as the land area of the Philippines, about 300,000 square kilometers,” Carpio said.

China will never return the territory it grabs... “We cannot go to the (International Court of Justice) because China has to agree and China will never agree to submit to arbitration.”

China has ignored The Hague tribunal’s July 2016 ruling that invalidated Beijing’s sweeping claim to the South China Sea and declared it violated Manila’s sovereign right to fish and explore for resources in its own EEZ. But President Duterte, who came to power two weeks before the ruling came down, has refused to assert the Philippine victory, wooing China instead for loans and investments.

If the Philippines does not assert its legal victory, it stands to lose 80 percent of its EEZ in the South China Sea, covering 381,000 square kilometers of maritime space, including the entire Recto Bank, or Reed Bank, and part of the Malampaya gas field off Palawan, as well as all of the fishery, oil and gas and mineral resources there...”



Chinese Su-35s Fly Patrols in the South China Sea for the First Time

OE Watch Commentary: On 7 February the Chinese PLA Air Force announced that five Su-35 fighter jets had participated in a joint combat patrol in the South China Sea. This is the first time that the jets, newly acquired from Russia and assigned to the Southern Theater Command, have participated in patrols over the South China Sea. Previously posted photos of the fighters appear to indicate they currently are based at Suixi Air Base, northwest of Zhanjiang in Guangdong province. Video released by the PLA Air Force also showed the aircraft training for low-level flying over the ocean and firing unguided rockets at ground targets.

China finalized a deal for 24 Su-35s in November 2015 after years of negotiation. The first four aircraft were delivered in December 2016. Ten more arrived in China in December 2017. China already possess the J-11B, a derivative of the less-capable Su-27, which has been deployed to Woody Island in the Parcel archipelago southeast of Hainan province. The Su-35's larger internal fuel tanks give it advantages in range, loiter time and performance over the J-11. China has used similar flights to demonstrate sovereignty over its territorial claims. In July 2017 China flew H-6K bombers near Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea.

In an interview with the *Xinhua* state news agency, a military expert and professor at the Air Force Command College, Wang Mingzhi, emphasized that the flight represented the PLA Air Forces' increased focus on realism in training and that they increased the Air Force's long-distance and far seas combat capability. Wang's comments suggest that China's objective in acquiring the Su-35 or other long-range aircraft is not purely about combat capability, but also has to do with the ability to conduct long-range patrols and show Chinese ability to project power over the entirety of the South China Sea. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

Source: “苏-35战巡南海与歼-20列装作战部队的时代含义 (The Significance of Su-35 Combat Patrols in the South China Sea and J-20 Being Commissioned into Service),” *www.81.cn*, 10 February, 2018. http://www.81.cn/zggcdsjd/2018-02/10/content_7941486.htm

In recent years, the Air Force has routinely conducted far-seas training based on the strategic requirements of “integrating air-space capabilities capable of offensive and defensive operations,” and safeguarding state sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

The Air Force will carry out realistic combat patrol operations in the direction of the South China Sea, which will improve Air Force maritime combat capabilities, and also realize the requirements of safeguarding national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.

From now on, the Air Force will not only continue to carry out combat patrols but will frequently conduct patrols, making them a new norm in the South China Sea.

“The Air Force will carry out realistic combat patrol operations in the direction of the South China Sea, which will improve Air Force maritime combat capabilities, and also realize the requirements of safeguarding national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests.”



MAKS Airshow 2015, (Russian) Su-35S in Flight.

Source: By Dmitry Terekhov from Odintsovo, Russian Federation (IMG_8624), [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAKS_Airshow_2015_\(20615630784\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAKS_Airshow_2015_(20615630784).jpg), CC BY-SA 2.0.



Chinese Aviation Academies Introduce Free Air Combat Training

OE Watch Commentary: Since 2011, the PLA Air Force has begun to place a greater emphasis on un-scripted air combat exercises, introducing unexpected elements, flying to unfamiliar areas and using tougher grading. However, the fact that what the Chinese are calling “free air combat” has only begun to be introduced at China’s top flight academy indicates how slow reforms are being implemented.

Following dramatic changes in China’s military command structure initiated in late 2015, China is currently in the midst significant reforms at the unit-level. This has involved major shakeups in unit composition, including aircraft types in the PLA Air Force. Additional reforms are targeted at consolidating and improving the rigor of technical and practical training throughout the PLA’s educational system. The rapid introduction of new equipment and China’s aspiration to link sensors, air defenses and pilots in a networked “system of systems” has created a gap between current capabilities and the necessary technical skills.

The introduction of free air combat training is another step in the PLA’s gradual adoption of more realistic, practical training. This has been a slow process and even combat units have not regularly held these types of exercises. For example, in August 2014, the PLA Air Force and PLA Naval Aviation Force held their first free air confrontation exercise. Chinese participation in international exercises such as Aviadarts with Russia and Shaheen with Pakistan can help introduce Chinese pilots to different scenarios and help become accustomed to encountering different types of aircraft, but the lack of unscripted training in the early stages of pilot training has erected barriers to building a more effective combat force. There are some assessments that in order for the PLA Air Force as a whole to affect the cultural changes needed to create a more effective, professional force capable of fighting in real combat scenarios, there will have to be the much broader adoption of unscripted training beyond Harbin Flight Academy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**

“The Harbin Flight College is the pioneer among the flight academies of the PLA Air Force to include the free air combat training in its syllabus of air combat tactics.”

Source: “Free air combat training course included in air force flight academy syllabus,” *China Military Online*, 6 February, 2018. http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-02/06/content_4804292.htm

Pilot cadets of the PLA Air Force Harbin Flight Academy received their first free air combat training...on January 30.

This is the first time that the PLA Air Force has introduced free combat training in pilot cadets’ training programs of flight academies, conveying a signal of further advancement of the real battle training in flight academies.

The Harbin Flight College is the pioneer among the flight academies of the PLA Air Force to include the free air combat training in its syllabus of air combat tactics.

The contents of the free air battle training course include the air combats with offensive position advantage, defensive position disadvantage and balanced positions, as well as other tactics the air force pilots will take in the real air battle. The fourth-year pilot cadets will be engaged in the free air combat training throughout the whole training session before their graduation. After completing the free air combat training, they will have the basic qualifications of an air force pilot.



Guizhou jl-9 trainer.

Source: By:Czip (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AGuizhou_jl9.jpg, Public domain.



Is the Chinese Air Force Ramping up for Further Action Following the 2017 Doklam Standoff?

OE Watch Commentary: The 2017 Doklam standoff between Chinese and Indian troops, according to the follow extracts, seems to have sparked a series of upgrades and increased activity for the Chinese Air Force in Tibet. As the author explains in this opinion piece from India, “This is part of a pattern of China stepping up its military presence in the region in the aftermath of the bitter standoff with India in the tri-junction area near Bhutan.”

There are several big changes, noted in the article, since the Doklam standoff, which took place between June and the end of August 2017. For example, there was a notable jump in air traffic from October through January. Also, flights that reached the periphery of Tibet in October and December are now extended further, with new flights to Lhasa. There have also been observations of early warning aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and new testing facilities for China’s most modern and stealth aircraft at certain air facilities, as well as newly extended airport runways and facilities and other upgrades. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**

Source: Vinayak Bhat, “Tibet Sees Sharp Jump in Chinese Air Force Activity After Doklam Standoff with India,” *The Print Online*, 14 February 2018. <https://theprint.in/2018/02/14/tibet-sees-jump-in-chinese-air-force-activity-after-doklam-standoff>

The analysis of data of the last one year shows three big changes. First, that in the months of October and December 2017 as well as January 2018 there has been a sudden jump in air traffic. Second, a new flight has been scheduled from Lhasa to Ngari (Shiquanhe) in January. And finally, flights that reached the periphery of Tibet have now been extended up to Lhasa in October and December 2017.

One factor could be that tourism has been subsidized in Tibet and that more cargo is arriving on a daily basis. However, given the modernization and upgradation of the dual-use airports as well as the creation of new heliports by the PLA, there are strong indications of a military preparation that can’t be called a routine affair.

China, which has five operational airports in Tibet, upgraded four of them last year. Two of these are now being used for testing its most modern and stealth aircraft.



“...given the modernization and upgradation of the dual-use airports as well as the creation of new heliports by the PLA, there are strong indications of a military preparation that can’t be called a routine affair.”

KJ-500: According to the article, at least two KJ-500 AEW aircraft have been observed permanently deployed at the Lhasa Gonggar Airport, the largest airport in Tibet.

Source: By Alert5 - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=52895157>, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Another Potential Hit to China-Pakistan Relations

OE Watch Commentary: Significant Chinese investments in Pakistan as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) since 2013 appear to have helped relations between the two sides become even closer, but disputes related to CPEC projects over the past couple of months have caused major issues, including suspension of funding for some projects. The excerpted article from *Dawn* reports on the murder of a Chinese businessman and while he was not involved in a CPEC project, it could have an impact on an already strained China-Pakistan relationship.

The article from *Dawn*, a widely read English-language newspaper in Pakistan, reports on the shooting in Karachi on 5 February which targeted two Chinese businessmen, killing one. The article notes how Pakistani authorities reported that the attack was carried out by “an unidentified lone assailant” and that the shipping firm where the two men worked is “not part of any CPEC-related project.” They did report, however, that “the two Chinese nationals worked for Cosco Shipping.” The China Ocean Shipping Company (Cosco) is one of the largest maritime shipping companies in the world and the Chinese man killed was reportedly its executive in Pakistan.

Pakistan created the Special Security Division a few years ago to protect CPEC projects and workers and the article mentions how the “Chinese nationals were provided with three personnel from the police’s foreigners’ security cell,” but that on the day of the attack “they did not take with them the head constable on duty” and that this was “against the security standard operating procedures.” As the investigation into the shooting continues, it will be worth watching what impact it could have on China-Pakistan relations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

Source: Ali, Imtiaz. “Chinese man shot dead in Karachi attack,” *Dawn*, 6 February 2018. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1387501/chinese-man-shot-dead-in-karachi-attack>

A Chinese national, working for a local shipping firm in a senior position, was gunned down in what police described as a targeted attack carried out by an unidentified lone assailant on Monday...Officials emphasised that the firm was not part of any CPEC-related project as it had been working in Pakistan since the early 1990s.

Karachi’s South-Zone Deputy Inspector General Azad Khan told Dawn that the two Chinese nationals worked for Cosco Shipping the office of which was located in the city’s Lalazar area...They lived in the same locality.

The officials said the two Chinese nationals — 45-year-old Chen Zhu and Ye Fan — after having lunch at a restaurant in Clifton were returning to their office when at around 2.15pm they stopped their car near Zamzama Park...one of them had sat in the car and the other was still outside it when an attacker came in a vehicle and opened fire on the Chinese national sitting on the driving seat. The officials said as soon as the attacker opened fire the other Chinese national — a young trainee of the company — started running to save his life. The attacker fired shots also at him but he remained unhurt...The deceased sustained two bullets in the head.

...According to a police spokesperson, Sindh police chief A.D. Khowaja has directed Raja Umar Khattab of the police’s counterterrorism department to investigate the incident...Mr Khattab said surveillance cameras installed in the vicinity were out of order. DIG Azad Khan told a press conference that the firm, Cosco Shipping Lines Pak (Pvt) Ltd, had no connection with the CPEC project. It had been working in Pakistan since the early 1990s...

He said the Chinese nationals were provided with three personnel from the police’s foreigners’ security cell...On Monday, they did not take with them the head constable on duty, Noor Zaib, which is against the security standard operating procedures...Mr Khattab, however, told Dawn that the head constable had performed duty on Sunday because a delegation had arrived. Therefore, the Chinese nationals had allowed him to take a day off on Monday...

“On Monday, they did not take with them the head constable on duty, Noor Zaib, which is against the security standard operating procedures.”



The new container ship COSCO SHIPPING HIMALAYA in port of Hamburg - rear view.
Source: Hummelhummel, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3ACOSCO_SHIPPING_HIMALAYAS_-_rear_view.jpg, CC BY-SA 3.0



CPEC: “Iron Brothers,” Unequal Partners

by Sudha Ramachandran

Republished in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, Vol. 18, Issue 1, dated 12 January 2018, Edited for OE Watch.
For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/cpec-iron-brothers-unequal-partners/>

OE Watch Commentary: Serious differences have come to the fore between China and Pakistan over the \$60-billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). At a Joint Working Group (JWG) meeting at Islamabad in November 2017, China announced its decision to suspend funding for at least three road projects in Pakistan, pending the release of “new guidelines.” Only a few days earlier, Pakistan rejected Chinese funding for the \$14-billion Diemer-Bhasha dam project and withdrew its request for inclusion of this project in CPEC. Pakistan objected to Chinese conditions, which included Chinese ownership of the project, operation and maintenance costs and securitization of the project by pledging another operational dam.

China and Pakistan often hold up CPEC, a flagship venture of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as a symbol of their co-operative partnership. Recent developments indicate serious differences between the two countries. Although CPEC is widely seen primarily as a “connectivity corridor”, power plants and special economic zones (SEZs) are also being developed. The project is envisioned as linking China’s economically underdeveloped Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region with the deep-sea port of Gwadar in Pakistan’s Baluchistan province through a network of highways, railways, oil and gas pipelines and fiber optic cables.

However, little was known about its massive plans for Pakistani agriculture. Original documents of CPEC’s long-term plan, whose details were disclosed by the Pakistani English daily Dawn in May, reveal that Chinese enterprises will lease thousands of acres of Pakistani agricultural land to set up ‘demonstration projects’ to introduce new seed varieties, pesticides and irrigation technologies. Facilities for processing, storing and transporting, grains, fruits and vegetables are also being set up, indicating that access to the full supply chain of Pakistan’s agriculture is an important goal of CPEC. The number of Chinese nationals working and living in Pakistan has also surged in recent years, transforming entire neighborhoods in Pakistani towns into ‘Chinatowns’. Pakistan faces a “Sinicization” of its economy, population and culture.

Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has said that Baluchistan will be CPEC’s “biggest beneficiary.” Baluchis, however, are not convinced. Baluch opposition to the project is strong and has even been expressed violently. Baluch militants have carried out several attacks on workers from outside the province, including those from China.

Over the past year, a small but vocal group of analysts have begun expressing unease over what CPEC will bring Pakistan. In particular, they are calling for transparency on deals. In Dec 2017, the Pakistani government released a summary of CPEC’s Long-Term Plan. But even this sheds no light on the terms and conditions of agreements, project timelines or the exact nature of Chinese funding. Documents disclosed by Dawn and information trickling out of official meetings point to troubles ahead. The most important is the looming debt trap. Economists have highlighted the estimated \$90 billion in debt that Pakistan will have to repay China over 30 years.

The state-run China Overseas Port Holding Company, for example, which will operate Gwadar port for a period of 40 years, is set to take 91 percent of gross revenue collection from terminal and marine operations and 85 percent of gross operations revenue from the Gwadar free zone. SEZs are being set up exclusively for Chinese companies where they will be exempted from taxes. There is even little clarity regarding who will run or supervise the elaborate electronic surveillance system that China will install in Pakistani cities.

Source: Syed Irfan Raza. “Three CPEC projects hit snags as China mulls new financing rules,” *Dawn*, 5 December 2017. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1374532/three-cpec-projects-hit-snags-as-china-mulls-new-financing-rules>

China has temporarily stopped funding of some projects particularly those related to the road network under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) till further decision regarding ‘new guidelines’ to be issued from Beijing...

The decision of Chinese government was conveyed to Pakistan in the Joint Working Group meeting and the existing procedure for release of funds had been abolished... “In fact the Chinese authorities informed us that the previous procedure of release of funds was meant for early harvest projects only and new guidelines will be issued for future projects of the CPEC,” the official said... (the official) claimed that Chinese side was quite disturbed with increasing news reports being published in Pakistan regarding corruption in CPEC projects and that was the reason China has temporarily halted release of funds for the corridor.

Source: “China not taking ownership, operation of Diemer-Bhasha Dam: official,” *Global Times*, 7 December 2017. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1079282.shtml>

A Chinese official from the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) on Thursday said recent Pakistani media outlets have either falsified information or merely represented a certain official’s stance in reports on a China-Pakistan project.

The unnamed NDRC official said claims in media reports that China “placed strict conditions, including ownership of the project” is inaccurate and the two sides have not even started talks of the development plan, the Xinhua News Agency reported...

Pakistan news site tribune.com.pk reported on November 15, citing Water and Power Development Authority Chairman Muzammil Hussain that “Chinese conditions were about taking ownership of the project, operations and maintenance costs and securitization of the Diemer-Bhasha project by pledging another operational dam.”

The NDRC official on Thursday said that China and Pakistan are staying in contact with each other on the Diemer-Bhasha Dam project, and that the project is not included in the list of energy projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor...

(continued)



Continued: CPEC: “Iron Brothers,” Unequal Partners

by Sudha Ramachandran

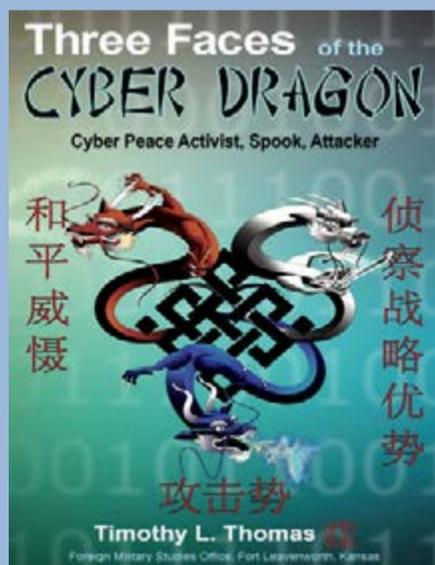
Republished in collaboration with the Jamestown Foundation, China Brief, Vol. 18, Issue 1, dated 12 January 2018, Edited for OE Watch.
For the full article, see: <https://jamestown.org/program/cpec-iron-brothers-unequal-partners/>

Although the Chinese government has avoided publicizing its concerns over political instability in Pakistan, there is apprehension in China over the implications of unrest and insecurity for CPEC. The corridor links Xinjiang with Baluchistan, both turbulent regions, and runs through the insurgency-wracked Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and disputed Gilgit-Baltistan territories. Bomb blasts and grenade attacks have killed scores of Pakistani workers and Chinese nationals employed in CPEC projects.

Pakistan’s upcoming parliamentary elections are an additional cause for concern. While Pakistan’s main political parties are not opposed to CPEC, there are differences in their priorities. The ruling Pakistan Muslim League—Nawaz (PML-N) prioritizes projects along CPEC’s relatively calm eastern route, which runs through its stronghold, Punjab. However, should the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) form or be part of the next government it can be expected to shift focus to the turbulent western route. A change in government could lead to a review and or change in the deals.

China and Pakistan are likely to continue to differ on issues related to CPEC. However, these are unlikely to derail the initiative, given their strong relationship, Pakistan’s deepening dependence on China and Beijing’s determination to make a success of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative’s (BRI) flagship venture. **End OE Watch Commentary (Ramachandran)**

“China has temporarily stopped funding of some projects particularly those related to the road network under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) till further decision regarding ‘new guidelines’ to be issued from Beijing.”



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>



Mirziyoyev's Reforms Reach the National Security Service (SNB)

OE Watch Commentary: A lot of attention has been on reforms carried out by Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev since he came to power in late 2016 following the death of Islam Karimov. Excerpts from the accompanying articles report on Mirziyoyev's recent decision to remove Rustam Inoyatov as the head of the National Security Service (SNB) and they note a couple of things that can help gauge the impact of this change.

The article from *Fergana News*, an independent Russian-language news website with reporters based in Central Asia, reports on how immediately following Inoyatov's removal, he was "appointed to be a member of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis (upper house of parliament)" by President Mirziyoyev and that with this position he "received the right of immunity." The article also notes why Inoyatov likely received immunity as he had been "one of the most influential figures in the Uzbek establishment under President Islam Karimov" and that he had probably been involved in the transition of power following Karimov's death. There was speculation following Karimov's death that Mirziyoyev became president with Inoyatov's approval. Lastly, the article reports how Mirziyoyev is looking to reform the SNB by removing "departments which are not engaged in their assigned tasks."

The article from *Uzmetronom*, a Russian-language independent website with sources in Uzbekistan, reports that in addition to Inoyatov's dismissal, "two of his deputies and 11 head of regional directorates of the SNB were removed from their posts." The article also points out that in Uzbekistan there are predictions that the new head of the SNB, Ikhtiyor Abdullayev, will "finally clean out the 'agency' of supporters or associates of the previous leadership" by "removing those who compromised themselves with bribery or were simply indebted with the former agency head."

Overall, Mirziyoyev's removal of Inoyatov and a dozen other senior leaders of the SNB marks one of his most significant reforms to date. Perhaps just as important, Mirziyoyev did not mention which SNB departments will be removed or if the tasks assigned to them will be transferred to another ministry. While that information may not come out for some time, if at all, it could have just as significant of an impact as Inoyatov's removal. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“According to Article 6 ‘On the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan,’ Inoyatov received the right of immunity.”



Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Source: Kremlin Press Service, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AShavkat_Mirziyoyev.png, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: “Бывшему главе СНБ Узбекистана обеспечили неприкосновенность (The former head of the SNB of Uzbekistan has been provided immunity),” *Fergana News*, 1 February 2018. <http://www.fergananews.com/news/28166>

The former head of the National Security Service (SNB) of Uzbekistan, Rustam Inoyatov, has been appointed to be a member of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis (upper house of parliament) by the decree of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on 31 January...Earlier that day, Inoyatov was removed from the post of head of the SNB...according to Article 6 “On the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan,” Inoyatov received the right of immunity.

...(Inoyatov) was considered one of the most influential figures in the Uzbek establishment under President Islam Karimov...Until recently, Inoyatov's position had been thought to be unshakable...the peaceful transfer of power from the latter (Karimov) to Mirziyoyev was regarded by many observers to be a result of internal agreements...

After coming into power in the fall of 2016, Mirziyoyev practically changed all the ministers of the government power structures...the head of the Interior Ministry has been changed twice and as a result, in September 2017, Pulat Bobojonov was appointed Interior Minister, and Abdusalom Azizov was appointed Defense Minister...the SNB's main tasks are intelligence and counterintelligence activities...However, as Shavkat Mirziyoyev admitted in December 2017, the authority of this department were needlessly expanded...At a National Security Council meeting, Mirziyoyev said that the SNB will be relieved of departments which are not engaged in their assigned tasks...

Source: “Смещение совпало с землетрясением (The removal coincided with an earthquake),” *Uzmetronom*, 31 January 2018. http://www.uzmetronom.com/2018/01/31/smeshhenie_sovpalo_s_zemletrjaseniem.html

On January 31 the President of Uzbekistan introduced the new head of the National Security Service (SNB), Ikhtiyor Abdullayev... Shortly before (Inoyatov's dismissal), two of his deputies and 11 head of regional directorates of the SNB were removed from their posts.

According to experts, Abdullayev's task is to finally clean out the “agency” of supporters or associates of the previous leadership...he performed this kind of work in the Prosecutor General's Office, removing those who compromised themselves with bribery or were simply indebted with the former agency head...



The Russian-South Ossetian Armed Forces Agreement Takes Shape

OE Watch Commentary: When the Russian government announced that it had reached an agreement last year to allow soldiers from Georgia’s breakaway region of South Ossetia to join the Russian Armed Forces, some South Ossetians questioned the impact this would have on the capabilities of their armed forces. The accompanying excerpts from articles in South Ossetian and Russian media show how the agreement is continuing to be discussed as the Russian government recently ratified it and there are a few things worth noting.

Two articles come from *Res*, the South Ossetian news agency, and the first includes statements from Viktor Fedorov, the “Chief of Staff” of the breakaway republic’s armed forces. Fedorov stated that “if the South Ossetian service members cannot find a contract position in the 4th (Russian) military base, they will retain their positions in the armed forces” and this would happen if South Ossetian soldiers do “not meet their (Russian) requirements.” Fedorov also notes that it is “expected that the agreement will provide better weapons and equipment for the South Ossetian forces.” This is the first mention that the agreement would pave the way for additional security assistance and is worth keeping an eye on.

The second article from *Res* includes statements from Mariya Kotayeva, the head of the “State Committee of Information and Press of South Ossetia,” in an effort to assuage people in South Ossetia that the agreement will not liquidate the army. Her statement that “the transfer of separate units to the 4th (Russian) Military Base means that our soldiers will go through the same military service in better conditions” might be seen by some South Ossetians as a positive development, but it could also confirm one of the main concerns people had with the agreement. Some in South Ossetia believe that the most capable units in their armed forces will be transferred into the Russian Armed Forces, not just individual soldiers.

The article from *Izvestiya*, a Russian-language newspaper supportive of the government, reports on the ratification of the agreement and while it does not offer an assessment, it does mention that the Russian government “supported the entry of military units of the armed forces of South Ossetia into the Russian army.” It is possible that new units made up of South Ossetian soldiers will be formed, provided that they meet requirements of the Russian Armed Forces, but statements from South Ossetian and Russian officials have not alleviated the concern South Ossetians have with the agreement. **End OE Watch Commentary (Stein)**

“The transfer of separate units to the 4th (Russian) Military Base means that our soldiers will go through the same military service in better conditions.”



Russian Military bases in Tskhinvali Region of Georgia (2013-15 years data).

Source: Giorgi Balakhadze, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ARussian_Military_bases_in_Tskhinvali_Region_of_Georgia.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: “Депутаты Госдумы ратифицировали военное соглашение с Южной Осетией (Deputies of the State Duma ratified the military agreement with South Ossetia),” *Res*, 24 January 2018. <http://cominf.org/node/1166514662>

...(Chief of Staff of the South Ossetian Armed Forces) Fedorov noted that if the South Ossetian service members cannot find a contract position in the 4th (Russian) military base, they will retain their positions in the armed forces...“In the event that he does not meet their requirements, then he will serve in the Ministry of Defense of South Ossetia,” Fedorov said...It is also expected that the agreement will provide better weapons and equipment for the South Ossetian forces.

Source: “Котаяева: военное соглашение с РФ не предусматривает ликвидацию армии Южной Осетии (Kotayeva: the military agreement with Russia will not result in the liquidation of the South Ossetian Army),” *Res*, 26 January 2018. <http://cominf.org/node/1166514712>

Mariya Kotayeva, the head of the State Committee of Information and Press of South Ossetia, discussed the advantages in a briefing of the agreement between the defense ministries of Russia and South Ossetia, which provides for service members to service in the Russian Armed Forces...

“The transfer of separate units to the 4th (Russian) Military Base means that our soldiers will go through the same military service in better conditions...”...Kotayeva focused attention on another aspect of the agreement...“If, after the signing of the agreement, the improvement of our equipment starts, then it will be a great incentive for the development of our army.”...

Source: “В Совфеде одобрили вхождение военных Южной Осетии в российскую армию (The Federal Council endorsed the entry of South Ossetian soldiers into the Russian Army),” *Izvestiya*, 30 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/702058/2018-01-30/v-sovfede-odobrili-vkhozhdenie-voennykh-iuzhnoi-osetii-v-rossiiskuiu-armiiu>

The Federation Council Committee on Defense and Security supported the entry of military units of the armed forces of South Ossetia into the Russian army...In order to transfer into service in the Russian Armed Forces, the South Ossetian service member must leave service in the Armed Forces of the Republic...



Considering Information War

OE Watch Commentary: As the Russian General Staff studies the nature and role of information war, their military science discipline considers that information war may be best understood as being outside the military sphere and impacting the nature of war itself. In the current volume of the Russian General Staff Academy's journal, *Vestnik*, the authors, V.K. Novikov and C.B. Golubchikov, claim that the "information age is changing the essence and content of modern war."

The article defines information war in this way: "Information war is an extension of a country's politics that consists of purposeful, comprehensive, and methodical informational impacts against foreign information targets in order to achieve political, economic, territorial, national, religious and other goals with minimal loss of life and physical damage and without occupation of foreign soil while protecting its own information sources." In the Russian military, definitions have a doctrinal quality to guide operational developments. The article goes on to say, "The main goal of information wars is to gain control over the minds of individuals and society as a whole and impose upon them the will of the victorious side."

Reiterated throughout the article is a theme of US and Western contrivance and dominance in information war. The article also catalogs instances of information war that occurred outside the Western bloc. China, for instance, is noted as carrying out information war in Thailand in 2014. Overall, the authors calculate that information war events took place in 39 countries since 1991 with an 81 percent success rate. While this sort of analysis is consistent with the Academy's empirical rigor and feeds calculations for correlation of forces, it is also significant that analysis of Russian information war actions is missing. Such data might be considered classified, however.

The article concludes that information war is an alternative to conventional war... "to impose reflexive governance..." The authors state that "In the modern world, such military terms as 'operation', 'battle' and 'combat' often cannot be applied to describe processes occurring to resolve conflicts, particularly political, economic, territorial, national, and religious. Those notions no longer fully correspond to today's realities and hinder the development of the armed forces' capabilities and forms and methods of their application." Elsewhere, the authors argue that "Informational-psychological aspects of war should not be regarded as complementary to conventional weapons or cyberwar."

The authors conclude by suggesting that, in the long term, the key to successful information war will be personnel training. In the short term, they recommend a list of amendments to Russian federal regulations and policy as well as assessing secondary school education with a view to the information war threat. Overall, this article shows that even as Russia is conducting information war, its military is still working out its place in military science. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wilhelm, Vainer)**

"The information age is changing the essence and content of modern war."



"Informational psychological aspects of war should not be regarded as complementary to conventional weapons or cyberwar."

Source: В.К. Новиков, С.В. Голубчиков, Вестник, "," Вестник, 3 (60), 2017, стр. 10-16. (V.K. Novikov and S.V. Golubchikov, "Color Revolutions in Russia: Possibility and Reality," *Vestnik*, 3 (60) 2017, pp. 10-16).

Today mankind is entering a new technological stage, an information stage, that is moving from embryonic phase and actively entering its growth phase. This information stage is changing the essence and content of modern war. In other words, humanity is entering the phase of information war, which has already become a reality. This technological stage stimulates the development of multiple forms of informational-psychological impact on individual and social levels in order to direct the impetus in the needed direction.

Perceived Western domination in such areas as nano-, bio-, information telecommunications technology-, communication-, energy engineering, and science in general, based on new technological principles, results in US and Western superiority in all other aspects of human activity and creates favorable conditions for various activities including information wars.



General Gerasimov on the Syrian Campaign

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted interview with General Valeriy Gerasimov, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation and Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, and conducted by the prolific military journalist Viktor Baranets for the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, describes Russia's involvement in the Syrian campaign and how this experience is changing the Russian Armed Forces. General Gerasimov starts by explaining how the Russian Armed Forces became involved in Syria, how the initial deployment was conducted, and how the mission morphed from just providing air support, to later including ground operations.

Of particular interest is General Gerasimov's description of President Putin's 'hands-on' approach to commanding Russian Forces in Syria. According to Gerasimov, Putin is briefed on all aspects of the campaign and is personally making decisions about how to respond. If this description is accurate, it can be reasonably inferred that Putin is personally managing other high-profile problems, such as Russia's ongoing actions in Eastern Ukraine. This 'hands-on' approach to dealing with problems may be what is often described in the West as Russia's 'whole-of-government' approach. Since Putin is personally involved in planning, a slow "bottom-up" staffing process that requires buy-in and coordination from the different branches of government is not required.

Also of interest in the interview is Gerasimov's description of the importance of military advisors, the way in which advisors are fulfilling their duties, and the benefits for the Russian Armed Forces after advisors return to their home duty stations. According to Gerasimov, Russian military advisors have been a key factor in saving Assad's regime from collapse and regaining control of the country. Interestingly, Russia has chosen a military advisor model different from the US model. The US has recently formed a Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB), which are designed on the US brigade combat team model and that consist of approximately 800 NCOs and officers that are experts in their respective fields (infantry, armor artillery, logistics, etc.). These personnel then receive additional training to advise and train foreign (conventional) security forces. The Russians are taking a different approach. Instead of establishing SFABs or similar specialized units, the Russians are taking complete staffs from Russian division/regiments, brigades, and battalions, and putting these staff elements with their Syrian counterparts. These complete staff elements are likely rotated back to their units in Russia intact, in order to give their respective units' battle-tested staffs that are accustomed to working together. General Gerasimov stated that over 48,000 Russian personnel have served in Syria, so it is likely that many Ground Forces, Naval Infantry, and Airborne commanders and staff officers are getting much valued combat experience. Gerasimov also discusses the value of equipment validation and 'lessons learned' from Syria. Russia has combat tested over 200 new pieces of equipment, with some requiring modification after combat conditions made deficiencies apparent. Gerasimov mentions that the Syrian campaign has led to a host of new training and doctrine products. The accompanying article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses some of the tangible results of this new training and doctrine, namely new training aids and manuals. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



“Sometimes the Supreme Commander in Chief [Putin] himself comes to see me, sometimes the defense minister and I go to him to report. The president identifies the targets, the objectives, he is up to speed on the entire dynamic of the combat operations. And in each sector, moreover. And, of course, he sets the objectives for the future.”

-General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation and Chief of the General Staff of Russia's Armed Forces

Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov before the meeting with Defence Ministry senior officials and defence industry representatives, Sochi, May 2017.

Source: Russian Presidency, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/54503/photos/48378>, CC4.0.

(continued)



Continued: General Gerasimov on the Syrian Campaign

Source: Viktor Baranets, “Начальник Генштаба Вооруженных сил России генерал армии Валерий Герасимов: «Мы переломили хребет ударным силам терроризма» [Chief of the General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov: ‘We Have Broken the Back of the Shock Troops of Terrorism’]” *Komsomolskaya Pravda Online*, 26 December 2017. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26775/3808693>

The defeat of the terrorists’ armed formations in Syria has been one of the main military results of the outgoing year. And the Russian army unquestionably played the decisive role in this.

I wanted above all to discuss this in detail with General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation and Chief of the General Staff of Russia’s Armed Forces...

[Baranets] Valeriy Vasilyevich, how was it possible in the fall of 2015 to redeploy our major troop grouping to Syria so rapidly and surreptitiously? I read in the American press at the time that the generals over there were almost in a panic. They were not expecting such speed and agility from our army. And they even complained that their intelligence was late...

[Gerasimov] It was a meticulously planned operation, all the issues were taken into consideration, the requisite men and equipment were identified. I have in mind both the combat component and the support component. But we had practically no experience of performing the redeployment of troops and forces over such a distance, to the territory of a state that did not border on our country. There was only a single example, Operation Anadyr in 1962, when the USSR deployed troops to Cuba. We also took that experience into account. The proficiency gained by our subunits during the snap inspections also stood us in good stead. During these, we rehearsed redeployment over long distances, making use of all forms of transport...air, rail, sea. The redeployment was conducted with the utmost secrecy, without attracting particular attention. Fifty aircraft were concentrated at Humaymim airfield... All this took something like a month... The support component required more time. The infrastructure had to be created, a system of comprehensive support, logistic support included.

[Baranets] Why, when planning the operation in Syria, did our General Staff not make provision from the outset for the employment of ground subunits and units but instead place the main emphasis on air power? What was the story here?

[Gerasimov] We had assessed the status of the Syrian armed forces’ ground troops. Despite the fact that they had been engaged in combat operations for quite some time and had sustained losses, individual units were nonetheless mission-capable. What was needed was to address the issues primarily of target reconnaissance and effective engagement, and disruption of the enemy’s command and control system. These were missions that could be performed by our aerospace component. But combat operations directly in the ground troops sectors were conducted by Syrian subunits with the involvement of our military advisers. Other pro-government groups were also present, so the deployment of a ground component was not initially envisaged...

[Baranets] And what consideration did our General Staff give to the specific features of the terrorists’ tactics? What was the main focus of attention here?

[Gerasimov]...These armed groups were headed by commanders who had been specially trained by instructors from a whole range of Middle Eastern states and Western countries. There were also former officers of the Iraqi army. During the period when combat operations were in progress they had seized a large quantity of armament and equipment belonging to the Iraqi and Syrian armies. Their inventory included up to 1,500 tanks and armored vehicles alone. Plus something in the neighborhood of 1,200 guns and mortars. This was essentially a regular army...As of 30 September 2015 there were something like 59,000 [insurgents] in...plus in the past two years they have been able to recruit another 10,000 or so... according to our data, around 60,000 militants have been eliminated, with over 2,800 of these originally from the Russian Federation.

[Baranets] Have I understood it correctly that we are retaining these two bases of ours to continue providing assistance to the Syrian government army, yes?

[Gerasimov] Yes, because the situation is still unstable. Some time is needed before full stability is achieved, so the bases are there for a good reason, they are essential there. So as to prevent a repetition of the situation prior to September 2015... It shouldn’t be forgotten, on the other hand, that Russia, too, has its own interests in the Middle East...

[Baranets] During the course of the operation in Syria how frequently did you yourself and the minister of defense need to discuss the progress of the operation with the Supreme Commander in Chief. Was this done face to face in the Kremlin, at the General Staff, or over the telephone?

[Gerasimov] It varies. I usually report to the minister of defense on a daily basis morning and evening on the state of affairs and the progress in mission performance, and he reports to the president. Once or twice a week the minister reports to the president in person, presenting the requisite documents, maps, and video materials. Sometimes the Supreme Commander in Chief himself comes to see me, sometimes the defense minister and I go to him to report. The president identifies the targets, the objectives, he is up to speed on the entire dynamic of the combat operations. And in each sector, moreover. And, of course, he sets the objectives for the future.

[Baranets] What has been the General Staff’s greatest difficulty when planning the military operation in Syria?

(continued)



Continued: General Gerasimov on the Syrian Campaign

“The study and generalization of experience is an ongoing process...We have held several conferences on sharing experiences. A whole range of training manuals that generalize this experience has been published.”

-General of the Army Valeriy Gerasimov, First Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation and Chief of the General Staff of Russia’s Armed Forces

Source: Viktor Baranets, “Начальник Генштаба Вооруженных сил России генерал армии Валерий Герасимов: «Мы переломили хребет ударным силам терроризма» [Chief of the General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov: ‘We Have Broken the Back of the Shock Troops of Terrorism’]” *Komsomolskaya Pravda Online*, 26 December 2017. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26775/3808693>

[Gerasimov] The most challenging element during preparations for the operation and in the initial period of its implementation was that of organizing collaboration with the government troops, and the other pro-government forces...It was no easy matter setting up the collaboration of all these detachments with our aerospace forces, organizing all manner of support. But we have already learned to do this. Everything has fitted into place and is functioning normally. In Humaymim we have established a state-of-the-art command post that supports command and control of our troop grouping in Syria... over 48,000 officers and men [have been involved]...

[Baranets] How do you assess the role of our military advisers who operated inside the Syrian army?

[Gerasimov] I rate their role highly. Within every subunit -- battalion, brigade, regiment, division -- there is a military adviser’s staff. It comprises the essential officials. Namely, operations staff, intelligence officer, artilleryman, engineer, interpreters, and other officials. They essentially plan the combat operations. They provide assistance in subunit command and control during combat mission performance. In all sectors actions are linked by a common concept of operations, by a single plan, leadership is exercised from the grouping’s command post at Humaymim.

[Baranets] And the lessons of the Syrian campaign that the General Staff will need to learn?

[Gerasimov] The study and generalization of experience is an ongoing process. This work has been carried out from the first day of this campaign... All the incidents that have occurred, the experience derived from the combat operations -- all of this has been carefully studied and brought to the attention of all the subunits and the men that were just getting ready to head out there, so that all of this is taken into consideration. We have held several conferences on sharing experiences. A whole range of training manuals that generalize this experience has been published.

[Baranets] We have tested a large quantity of armaments in Syria. What is the General Staff’s assessment of them?

[Gerasimov] We have tested over 200 models of armament and equipment there, modern pieces, those that had recently entered service, those that were on the point of entering service, and those that were already in service. They had ostensibly come through all the state tests, and they are performing normally in exercises... But during combat mission performance some problems arise that weren’t noticed before. There is something that needs modifying...

[Baranets] As far as I am aware, the Russian army has never before employed the quantity of UAVs it has done in Syria. How do you assess the significance of this type of equipment in light of the Syrian experience?

[Gerasimov] In Syria there are now on average around 60-70 UAVs airborne on any given day. They conduct reconnaissance, there are UAVs that perform electronic countermeasures missions and resolve other tasks. In the space of five years we have taken a big step forward in the UAV context. Previously all we had in service were the old Soviet type designated Reys. Now the conduct of combat operations is inconceivable without a UAV. It is used by artillerymen, recon scouts, airmen -- everyone. UAVs are employed to create reconnaissance-strike and reconnaissance-fire loops.

Source: Aleksandr Tikhonov, “Нас ждёт «Восток-2018»: Боевая подготовка была и остаётся основным содержанием повседневной деятельности войск в мирное время [Vostok-2018 Awaits Us: Combat Training Has Been and Remains the Main Troop Activity],” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 1 December 2017. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/35264-nas-zhdjot-vostok-2018>

Lieutenant General Ivan Buvaltsev, Chief of Russian Federation Armed Forces Main Combat Training Directorate, tells about results of the training year that has ended and about plans for the 2018 training year.

[KZ] How is the principle of “teaching troops what is necessary in war” being implemented today with consideration of the experience of combat operations?

[Buvaltsev] The Main Combat Training Directorate developed 11 methods aids taking the experience of combat operations into account. Among them is the Manual for Training Troops to Conduct Combat Operations on Mountainous and High-Mountain Terrain [«Руководство по подготовке войск к ведению боевых действий в горной и высокогорной местности»]; a new textbook, Combined-Arms Training of the Soldier (Seaman) [«Общевойсковая подготовка солдата (матроса)»]; the training aid “Urban Combat” [«Бой в населённом пункте»]; and a number of others. These aids permitted developing uniform approaches to organizing combat training and departing from stereotypes in training commanders, command and control entities, military units, and subunits.



The Development of the Forpost UAV

OE Watch Commentary: Russian UAV development began in Soviet times and there have been assessments that the Soviet UAV program stood on an equal footing as its Western counterparts. The financial turmoil after the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in little or no Russian UAV development throughout the 1990s and most of the 2000s. As a result, by the time of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, the Russian Armed Forces were still using systems initially developed in the 1970s and 1980s. The “Strizh” and “Reys” were built in the seventies by the Tupolev Design Bureau, while the Stroy-P system with the “Pchela” UAV was created by the Kulon Scientific Research Institute and the Yakovlev Design Bureau at the end of the 1980s. It became apparent that a serious upgrade of the Russian UAV program was required after gaps in Russian capabilities were found during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.

Russia’s first action to further this line of effort was to purchase a consignment of BirdEye 400 and Searcher Mk II UAVs from one of the world’s leading UAV developers, the Israeli IAI company. Licensing agreements were then concluded so production could be done domestically under the names Zastava and Forpost at the UZGA plant in Yekaterinburg. In parallel, the Russian Army began procuring purely domestic systems including: the Orlan-10 developed by the STTs company in Saint Petersburg; the Eleron-3SV developed by the Eniks firm in Kazan; and the Granat family of UAVs, produced by Izhmash Unmanned Systems. In addition, the Russian Defense Ministry is financing a series of R&D projects aimed at creating the next generation of domestic UAVs. This includes: a tactical UAV project developed by the Luch Design Bureau in Rybinsk; two different long-duration and medium-altitude UAV projects being developed by the Kronshtadt Company in Saint Petersburg; a reconnaissance-strike UAV project being developed by the Simonov Design Bureau in Kazan; and a large UAV project being developed by the aircraft manufacturer Sukhoi.

The accompanying articles discuss the most common UAV in the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS), the Forpost. A typical Forpost UAV system consists of a ground control station and three UAVs, costing an estimated \$6 million per airframe. The Forpost UAV has a take-off weight of 454 kg and can carry up to 100 kg payload. It is capable of conducting surveillance for up to 17.5 hours, at altitudes of up to 5,700 meters, and at a range of up to 250 km. Due to these characteristics, in Russian parlance, the Forpost is classified as a medium-sized UAV. The Forpost is primarily an aerial reconnaissance platform that can be used for target acquisition and for artillery spotting. Currently, reconnaissance duties are accomplished by video and infrared electro-optical sensors, but as the accompanying 25 January 2018 edition of *Izvestiya* explains, Russia is now developing a radar capability for the Forpost. A radar capability would significantly improve the Forpost’s ability to collect information in nighttime and poor weather conditions. As can be seen in the accompanying excerpted articles from the *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation* and the 17 January 2018 edition of *Izvestiya*, the Forpost has performed well in Syria, and there are plans for its further development. Russia has also decided to establish a special department in the Gagarin Air Force Academy to train pilots of medium and large UAVs, in order to more fully exploit these platforms’ capabilities. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The decision to develop a radar for the Forpost was made on the basis of experience of using unmanned aviation in combat in the Syria operation.”

“In Syria, the Forpost proved itself in the best possible way. We are therefore making plans for using these systems for the next decade. Naturally, they will undergo modernization...”

-Deputy Defense Minister Yuriy Borisov





Continued: The Development of the Forpost UAV

Source: Sergey Valchenko and Aleksey Ramm: “Дрон-разведчик заглянет под облака: «Форпост» оснастят всевидящим радаром [A Drone Will Peer Beneath the Clouds: The Forpost Will Get All-Seeing Radar],” *Izvestiya Online*, 25 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/695715/sergei-valchenko-aleksei-ramm/dron-razvedchik-zaglianet-pod-oblaka>

Russia’s reconnaissance drones are to receive the ability to operate day and night in any weather. Forpost UAVs will be fitted with miniature precision radars, which experts say will greatly enhance their capabilities. Forposts currently carry powerful optoelectronic stations that are not always effective in fog or sandstorms...The military are drawing up the tactical and technical requirements for a UAV radar station, Izvestiya was told at the Defense Ministry. The decision to develop a radar for the Forpost was made on the basis of experience of using unmanned aviation in combat in the Syria operation. The plan is that the radar will become part of the onboard equipment for existing Forposts, with the prospect of it also being fitted to the upgraded Forpost-M.

According to Izvestiya’s information, the radar being created for the drone will to a large extent be similar to the radars fitted to “proper” aircraft. Although it will differ by being smaller, because of the UAVs’ weight and dimensions. For ease of use the radar drone will be contained in a small pod, which can be installed beneath the wing or fuselage...The Forpost tactical UAV is the main “workhorse” of the UAV subunits in Russia’s Aerospace Forces and Navy. Active use has been made of drones during the operation in Syria.

Denis Fedutinov, chief editor of the Unmanned Aviation [UAV.ru] website, told Izvestiya that the decision to fit reconnaissance drones with radar is entirely sound. “Installing a radar station on a UAV in addition to the traditionally used optoelectronic surveillance devices will improve target detection and identification,” he explained...

Russian UAVs in Syria have flown 16,000 sorties, Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu reported earlier. Their total time in the air amounts to 96,000 hours. The intensity of reconnaissance drone use substantially increased in the course of the operation. UAVs flew about 400 sorties in 2015 but by late 2017 this was more than 1,000 sorties every month. As the Minister commented, UAVs ensure round-the-clock monitoring of the situation on practically the entire territory of Syria. According to the military, using UAVs in this country significantly increased the ability of aviation, missile forces, and artillery to destroy guerrilla targets.

Source: Nikolay Surkov and Aleksey Ramm, “Командиры «пилотов беспилотников» пополнят ВКС в 2018 году [Officers Commanding ‘Drone Pilots’ Will Replenish the VKS in 2018],” *Izvestiya Online*, 17 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/687961/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/komandiry-pilotov-bespilotnikov-popolniat-vks-v-2018-godu>

Izvestiya was told in the Aerospace Forces Main Command that as of 2018 drone elements will be commanded by specially trained officers. They are very familiar with the specifics of the employment of UAV and know how to organize with the maximum efficiency the field operations of the squadrons, how many vehicles are needed to monitor a designated area, how to establish interaction with headquarters, and so forth. Officers for drone detachments will be trained by the 4th Department of the N.Ye. Zhukovskiy and Yu.A. Gagarin Air Force Academy. Graduates of the department are capable of operating modern systems for the collection and processing of aerospace intelligence data as part of the integrated system of automated command and control of the armed forces. They will serve in UAV detachments in officer billets.

There are several separate drone squadrons in the Aerospace Forces at this time. One is permanently in Syria, where it is tackling reconnaissance assignments. In addition, two UAV regiments have been organized in the Navy...Denis Fedutinov, expert in the field of drone aircraft, told Izvestiya that the presence in the units of trained UAV specialists will ensure the better-skilled maintenance of the systems and raise the efficiency of their employment. “The decision to entrust drone systems to specialist officers is very timely,” Denis Fedutinov observed. “They know all the possibilities and technical features of the products in service, this is why they are capable of supporting long operating timeframes. This is particularly pertinent at this time, when the number of UAV in the field is growing by the year. It is hard to ensure the proper level of use of the purchased systems without special know-how.”

The expert says that training is particularly pertinent in the use of medium and heavy UAV...“portable systems that are intended for operation at the tactical level may be controlled by relatively low-skilled users. In the case of heavier and costlier vehicles, command and control must be exercised by specially trained officers,” Denis Fedutinov added. The main UAV in service with these elements is the medium-range (up to 250 km) Forpost vehicle...Forpost UAV operators are taught by the Russian Defense Ministry State Unmanned Aviation Center near Kolomna. The training of such a specialist takes approximately four months.

Source: ““Заместитель Министра обороны Юрий Борисов посетил Уральский завод гражданской авиации [Deputy Defense Minister Yuriy Borisov Has Visited the Ural Civil Aviation Plant in Yekaterinburg],” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation Online*, 25 December 2017. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12156214@egNews

Deputy Defense Minister Yuriy Borisov has made a working visit to the Ural Civil Aviation Plant in Yekaterinburg. Speaking at a conference involving the enterprise’s collective, he stated that the Russian Defense Ministry was planning, from 2019, further purchases of Forpost UAVs, which have been improved taking combat experience in Syria into account and assembled entirely from Russian components...“In Syria, the Forpost proved itself in the best possible way. We are therefore making plans for using these systems for the next decade. Naturally, they will undergo modernization,” Yuriy Borisov explained.

He thanked the plant’s employees, who had been constantly present at the Humaymim airbase in Syria, where they had conducted the UAVs’ technical servicing...“The plant has delivered around 30 Forpost systems to the troops, but they had still been assembled from imported components. By order of the Industry and Trade Ministry, the plant has carried out import substitution work and we are discussing plans for ordering a new contract from 2019 with 100-percent local sourcing. Thus, the Forpost will already be wholly Russian,” Yuriy Borisov stressed.



Specialist Training for Russian UAV Pilots

OE Watch Commentary: The Russian military continues to develop unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) technology, something they consider a key component of asymmetric warfare. Integrating these new technologies with traditional training proves a unique challenge. According to the brief excerpt from the pro-Kremlin daily, *Izvestiya*, Russian military leaders have initiated plans to transfer command of drone elements to “specially trained officers.” As the excerpt points out, the initiative “intends to bring the organization of the field operations of elements equipped with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) up to a new level” by training all drone squadron commanders in a new four-month specialist program.

According to the experts quoted in the article, the Russian military began the initiative due to the increasingly large role drones play in Syrian combat zones. According to the article, drones are “now a key reconnaissance resource” in the military’s arsenal. This is supported by “several separate drone squadrons in the Aerospace forces,” including one permanently conducting reconnaissance missions in Syria and another two regiments organized in the Navy.

The author stresses the reconnaissance uses of medium and heavy drones while explaining the strategic advantage provided by employing specialists to command UAV squadrons. The commanders’ specialized knowledge will increase effectiveness and maximize efficiency in the field. The officers are trained in “the specifics of the employment of UAV and [the trained specialists] know how to organize the field operations of the squadrons with the maximum efficiency, how many vehicles are needed to monitor a designated area, how to establish interaction with headquarters, and so forth.”

While non-specialists can operate small drones, training is critical to effectively operate medium and heavy UAV. The article remarks on the timeliness of training drone specialist officers, contending that this will ensure the maximum utilization of drones, which the Russian military is increasingly deploying abroad. **End OE Watch Commentary (Johnson)**

“The command of the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) intends to bring up to a new level the organization of the field operations of elements equipped with unmanned aerial vehicles.”

Source: [Nikolay Surkov, Aleksey Ramm, “Командиры «пилотов беспилотников» пополнят ВКС в 2018 году,” [Officers Commanding ‘Drone Pilots’ Will Replenish the VKS in 2018] *Izvestiya Online*, 17 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/687961/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/komandiry-pilotov-bespiilotnikov-popolniat-vks-v-2018-godu>

The command of the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) intends to bring up to a new level the organization of the field operations of elements equipped with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). As of 2018 they will be directed by specially trained officers, who have been specifically schooled in the intricacies of the accomplishment of reconnaissance missions with drones. Experts believe that against the background of the combat operations in Syria the number of UAV in the field has grown and that they are now a key reconnaissance resource.

Izvestiya was told in the Aerospace Forces Main Command that as of 2018 drone elements will be commanded by specially trained officers. They are very familiar with the specifics of the employment of UAV and know how to organize with the maximum efficiency the field operations of the squadrons, how many vehicles are needed to monitor a designated area, how to establish interaction with headquarters, and so forth....

...There are several separate drone squadrons in the Aerospace Forces at this time. One is permanently in Syria, where it is tackling reconnaissance assignments. In addition, two UAV regiments have been organized in the Navy.

*Denis Fedutinov, expert in the field of drone aircraft, told *Izvestiya* that the presence in the units of trained UAV specialists will ensure the better-skilled maintenance of the systems and raise the efficiency of their employment.*

“The decision to entrust drone systems to specialist officers is very timely,” Denis Fedutinov observed. “They know all the possibilities and technical features of the products in service, this is why they are capable of supporting long operating timeframes. This is particularly pertinent at this time, when the number of UAV in the field is growing by the year. It is hard to ensure the proper level of use of the purchased systems without special know-how.”

The expert says that training is particularly pertinent in the use of medium and heavy UAV.

“Army portable systems intended for operation at a tactical level may be controlled by relatively low-skilled users. In the case of heavier and costlier vehicles, command and control must be exercised by specially trained officers,” Denis Fedutinov added....



Russia Developing Top-Attack Tank Mine

OE Watch Commentary: In general, Russia still believes mines are a key capability for restricting maneuver and shaping the modern battlefield. While other countries have for the most part have abandoned mine use, the Russians have made no such commitment. The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russian efforts to develop a top-attack tank mine. A top-attack tank mine has several advantages over its less technologically advanced cousins. The primary advantage is that a top-attack tank mine can avoid the tanks thick side and frontal armor, instead hitting the tank on its less armored top, thereby increasing the chances of a critical hit. Since the top-attack tank mine has a range of approximately 100m, far fewer top-attack tank mines are required to defend a given area versus the use of conventional proximity mines. Perhaps the most insidious advantage of the mine is the difficulty in removing it. Mine plows and other such systems would be ineffective as the mines would likely have to be found and removed by dismounted personnel, a time consuming activity in high-speed maneuver warfare.

The Russian Armed Forces not only use engineers to deploy mines, but they also have developed other, more novel approaches. Mines may be deployed by conventional (tube) artillery, multiple rocket launch systems, or as the accompanying article from the *Russian Federation Ministry of Defense* describes, by helicopter. These developments show that commanders and staffs still believe in the importance of mines to restrict enemy maneuver, and make it clear that Russia will likely use mines in the event of any type of maneuver warfare. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“A mine like this controls a fairly large sector of ground to a radius of up to 100 meters, which means that blanket minelaying is not necessary...A small group of servicemen with a couple of dozen of these mines can rapidly cover a decent area of a front. Also, flails and plows do not work against a ‘smart’ minefield like this because vehicles are hit from a distance...In future it will be possible to link Russian ‘smart’ mines into a network run from a single control panel. The munitions’ sensors will transmit to the panel data about objects detected -- type, number, speed, and direction of travel. The operator will be able to select which mines to activate to destroy targets and which to keep in reserve.”

Source: Nikolay Surkov, Sergey Valchenko, and Aleksey Ramm, “«Противотанковый часовой» ударит сверху: Для российской армии разработаны «умные» противокрышевые мины [The ‘Antitank Sentry’ Will Strike From Above: ‘Smart’ Top Attack Mines Are Being Developed for the Russian Army]” *Izvestiya Online*, 15 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/677597/nikolai-surkov-sergei-valchenko-aleksei-ramm/protivotankovyi-chasovoi-udarit-sverkh>

The Russian military are to receive an “antitank sentry” -- the PTKM-IR [ИТКМ-ИР], the first top attack mine. Thanks to sensitive electronic sensors and “smart” innards, it can autonomously track a hostile tank and destroy it by firing a special submunition from the least protected direction -- above. In the expert’s opinion, these new engineering munitions will remove the need to densely sow mines in a locality, and on armor approach routes will make it possible to quickly create minefields that are impassable without specialized equipment.

*Development of the first domestic top attack mine, the PTKM-IR, is nearing completion for the military, *Izvestiya* was told at the Defense Ministry. Prototypes are already in testing. The design concept is for a fundamentally new and high-tech engineering munition that will significantly increase sapper subunits’ capabilities against tanks and other modern armor.*

The PTKM-IR mine is a green cylinder the size of an ordinary fire extinguisher and weighs about 20 kg. After being planted and activated it opens up like a flower, its petals unfurling from the casing to hold it in a vertical position. The mine is planted upright (it just needs to be taken from the back of a vehicle and placed on the ground) and can remain armed for up to 10 days at temperatures from minus 40 to plus 30 degrees Celsius. After that time it can self-destruct so as not to endanger civilians. A combined sensor (seismic and thermal) can detect a target at a range of 150-250 meters. When a tank or armored vehicle is detected the mine leans slightly in the required direction. When the target is within the kill zone, the submunition is launched. It climbs to an altitude of a few dozen meters, locates the target with a thermal imager (which reacts to heat from the engine), and shoots an explosively formed slug of molten metal into the roof of the turret...

*By creating top attack mines Russian developers are following global trends in advances in weaponry, military expert Aleksey Leonkov told *Izvestiya*...“A mine like this controls a fairly large sector of ground to a radius of up to 100 meters, which means that blanket minelaying is not necessary,” he explained. “A small group of servicemen with a couple of dozen of these mines can rapidly cover a decent area of a front. Also, flails and plows do not work against a ‘smart’ minefield like this because vehicles are hit from a distance.”*

In future it will be possible to link Russian “smart” mines into a network run from a single control panel. The munitions’ sensors will transmit to the panel data about objects detected -- type, number, speed, and direction of travel. The operator will be able to select which mines to activate to destroy targets and which to keep in reserve.

Source: “Вертолётчики ЗВО на учении в Ленинградской области заминировали танкоопасные направления с воздуха [Western Military District Helicopter Crews Mine Tank Approach Routes from the Air in an Exercise in the Leningrad Oblast],” *Russian Federation Ministry of Defense*, 26 January 2018. https://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12159658@egNews

The crews of Mi-8 helicopters of a separate transport mixed aviation regiment of the Western Military District carried out aerial mining of tank approach routes during an exercise in Leningradskaya Oblast... Flying from Levashovo airfield, they used VMR-2 Dozhd mine dispensers installed in the Mi-8s’ fuselages, from a minimum altitude of 10 meters. During the process the aircraft held a speed of not more than 20 kph as they maintained the intervals for sowing the antitank mines, which were concealed in deep snow. The pilots received coordinates from reconnaissance groups on the ground. The aerial mining made it possible to halt the progress of notional enemy armor. More than 10 square kilometers of terrain were sown with several hundred antitank mines. Twenty Mi-8 helicopter crews took part in the exercise...



Russian Expeditionary Capabilities, a Relatively Low Priority

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses the logistic issues regarding Russia's Syrian campaign. Russia relies upon Large Landing Craft (BDK) such as the Project 1171 "Alligator" and the Project 775 "Ropucha" class ships to provide the vast majority of heavy lift for the Syrian campaign. The article reports that Russia is having difficulty providing logistical support for the operation. The Russian Navy's auxiliary fleet, as well as chartered vessels, are participating in logistic support operations, which is often referred to as the 'Syrian Express.' On 30 December 2017, the Yamal, a 775 "Ropucha," collided with a Sierra Leone flagged freighter in the Aegean Sea. The Yamal received extensive damage, and will be unavailable for operations for the foreseeable future, resulting in some scrambling to mitigate the loss. The temporary loss of the Yamal highlights how much difficulty an overtaxed Russian Navy is having in order to support a relatively modest sized operation (in comparison to US operations).

The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russian efforts to obtain Universal Landing Ship (UDK) class ships. This class of ship is much larger than a BDK and they are capable of transporting a full naval infantry battalion and act as a docking station for air-cushioned vehicles and other landing craft. They can also function as a helicopter carrier for an aviation group. Aside from the obvious tactical advantages of such a vessel, there was also a less obvious operational or strategic one. A UDK equipped with an assault force and aviation group is an effective instrument of deterrence in remote theaters, making it possible to quickly, easily, and relatively cheaply deploy a complete air, land, and sea force off a given coastline to intervene in local conflicts or possibly even prevent them by the force's mere presence. The UDK is likely perceived by Russia to also be a defensive asset. The Russian Federation has a vast coastline to defend with a relatively small coastal defense infrastructure and personnel base, so Russian naval infantry exercises often involve forced-entry landings on Russian territory to combat an enemy that has already landed on Russian soil. The *Izvestiya* article discusses the Russian UDK requirements, methods of attainment, the amount of technical experience the Russian ship industry would gain from building such a ship as well as the often delayed timeline for acquisition. The earliest a UDK could be delivered is 2024, but given the history ship production delays, 2024 seems unrealistic.

The accompanying excerpted article from *RIA Novosti* explains that Russia will deploy its first Project 11711 "Ivan Gren" class, Large Amphibious Warfare Ships (AWS) this spring. The Ivan Gren is based upon the Project 1171 "Alligator" class, and was designed long before Universal Landing Ship (UDK) class ships, such as the Mistral, had been considered. The AWS 11711 is capable of transporting 300 naval infantry personnel, and 38 armored personnel carriers or 13 tanks. It is fitted with a Grad-M multiple rocket launcher system (the letter 'M' stands for maritime) with a range of up to 20 km; two AK-630M 30mm automatic six-barrel artillery systems capable of expending up to 1,000 rounds per minute; a AK-176 76.2mm gun; and facilities for a ship-based Ka-29 helicopter. Initially, Russia planned to build four Ivan Gren class ships, but has recently decided to only build two. Undoubtedly, development of the UDK, a larger more capable platform, with similar capabilities, has diminished interest in the Ivan Gren class, but there have also been many problems and delays with the project. The keel for the first in the class was laid in December 2004, and it was lowered into the water in May 2012.

To summarize, these three articles demonstrate the lack of emphasis the Russian Navy is placing on expeditionary capabilities. In the near term, Russia can only expect two Ivan Gren class ships and will have to wait till at least 2024 for the first UDKs to come online, at a time when Russia is already having difficult sustaining ongoing operations. The Navy's top priorities appear to be coastal defense, and precision munitions and their associated platforms, not expeditionary support and warfare. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“...the Russian Navy is in dire need of large amphibious warfare ships. Even the decommissioning of one of them is disrupting deliveries of weapons and hardware to Syria.”

Source: Andrey Riskin, ““Сирийский экспресс” живет лишь за счет стареньких десантных кораблей [Syrian Express Survives Only Thanks to Very Old Amphibious Warfare Ships],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 17 January 2018. http://www.ng.ru/armies/2018-01-17/100_express170118.html

...As is known, large amphibious warfare ships and vessels of the Russian Navy's auxiliary fleet, as well as chartered vessels, are participating in the operation named Syrian Express to deliver freight for the Russian air group at Humaymim Airbase near Latakia, the material and technical support center at Tartus, and the Syrian Government Army...the Russian Navy is in dire need of large amphibious warfare ships. Even the decommissioning of one of them is disrupting deliveries of weapons and hardware to Syria. The Russian Navy's amphibious warfare fleet today consists of Project 1171 large amphibious warfare ships that were commissioned during the period from 1966 through 1975 and more "recent" Project 775 large amphibious warfare ships (1976-1991). Hopes were being pinned on the Ivan Gren, the first of a new series of Project 1171 amphibious warfare ships that was laid down back in 2004! But, there is no way the Ivan Gren, which is being built at the Yantar Baltic Shipyard, can be handed over to the fleet because of problems..

...A source at one of the Russian designer-enterprises robustly lambasted the seagoing qualities of the large amphibious warfare ship Ivan Gren and cast doubt on the need for series building of ships of this project. He emphasized that the ship was being created to operate in 'river-sea' zones for the transfer of a landing force from various theaters of military operations, and its dimensions were originally tied to the parameters of the Volga-Don locks and the height of the bridges. Project 11711 was conceived as a replacement for the small, aging Project 775 large amphibious warfare ships and was literally 'pasted together.' When the restriction for the 'river-sea' class fell away, the superstructure of the large amphibious warfare ships was increased. As a result of this and other design changes, the ship's stability worsened significantly.”

(continued)



Continued: Russian Expeditionary Capabilities, a Relatively Low Priority

“Navy requirements for such [amphibious assault] ships are estimated as six to eight optimally and four minimally...Two ships unquestionably will not provide capabilities for a constant presence in necessary areas, but will permit forming the nucleus of expeditionary forces, which will be able to perform missions in remote Theaters of Military Operations (TVDs) as necessary...”

Source: Ilya Kramnik, “С опозданием на 10 лет: Какие вертолетоносцы получит ВМФ России [Ten Years Late: What Kind of Amphibious Assault Ships Will the Russian Navy Get?],” *Izvestiya Online*, 15 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/694802/ilija-kramnik/s-opozdaniem-na-10-let>

According to reports by TASS sources in the defense establishment, construction of the first domestic amphibious assault ship for the Russian Navy should begin in Saint Petersburg in 2020...

You Bought the Wrong Thing and Too Few

Back in the 1980's the domestic Navy leadership recognized the need to have Universal Landing Ship (UDK) in the Navy that are capable of playing the role of a nucleus of expeditionary formations by landing assault forces at a great distance from friendly bases (including beyond the radius of action of coastal aviation). Project 11780 UDK's, which were given the facetious nickname “Ivan Tarava” for the similarity to US Tarawa-Class general-purpose amphibious assault ships, were supposed to be the first Soviet ships of this type...In addition, the characteristics and equipment of the Project 11780 permitted these UDK's to be employed as headquarters ships as well as in hunter-killer groups for antisubmarine operations.

The USSR's disintegration made this project, construction of which was proposed to begin at the Black Sea Shipyard in Nikolayev, moot, and for a long time the Russian Navy had to forget about a presence in remote ocean areas in principle. The situation began to change by the mid-2000's, when a growth of the economy permitted thinking again about getting the necessary political tools. Considering that domestic industry was not in the best condition, it was decided to hold a tender with the involvement of foreign manufacturers...the political situation ensured victory of the French Mistral-Class UDK project... The fate of this agreement is known: the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 caused France's refusal to fulfill the contract.

What Is Necessary

...As of today it is known that Russia is studying two concepts of an amphibious assault ship...Both concepts propose the possibility of using the amphibious assault ships as headquarters ships, antisubmarine warfare ships, and floating bases in conducting humanitarian/rescue operations and for a number of other missions. In the assessment of those in the military department interviewed by portal iz.ru, Navy requirements for such ships are estimated as six to eight optimally and four minimally. For now, though, it is planned to limit the series to two units. “Four ships in the Navy will permit keeping one amphibious assault ship constantly at sea, one other in immediate readiness, and a third capable of going on combat duty in a few weeks, while the fourth will be undergoing lengthy repairs or modernization. Six to eight such ships will permit rotating forces in a timely manner and building them up where this will be required,” ...Two ships unquestionably will not provide capabilities for a constant presence in necessary areas, but will permit forming the nucleus of expeditionary forces, which will be able to perform missions in remote Theaters of Military Operations (TVDs) as necessary. The usefulness of amphibious assault ships as mobile bases for prompt deployment of forces in local conflicts has been proven repeatedly...

What Amount Is Involved

...An amphibious assault ship designed above all for landing an assault force having armament limited to air defense and short-range antisubmarine warfare weapons carries considerably less expensive systems. Depending on specifically which amphibious assault ship project will be made the primary one -- the 14,000 ton DVKD or 24,000 ton UDK -- the cost of the lead ship should result in R30-50 billion. Construction of the lead ship should begin in 2020 and her turnover to the Navy is planned for 2024. A second ship should be transferred to the client in 2026. Of course, the cost of the air group should be counted separately. For a ship of this class it can be R20 billion, but even in this case amphibious assault ships remain a rather economical means of projecting force. And the two ships planned to be built for the Russian Navy can be provided with the necessary escort even without increasing the extent of construction of non-aircraft-carrying combatants...with respect to the DVKD's/UDK's, their construction should provide industry with necessary experience, which in the future permits shifting to the creation of larger ships, including aircraft carriers.

(continued)



Continued: Russian Expeditionary Capabilities, a Relatively Low Priority

Source: “ВМФ к концу весны получит большой десантный корабль “Иван Грен” [The Navy Will Receive the Large Amphibious Landing Ship Ivan Gren by the End of Spring],” *RIA Novosti Online*, 9 February 2018. https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20180209/1514317277.html

The large amphibious warfare ship (AWS) Ivan Gren, Project 11711's leading ship, will be handed over to the Russian Federation Navy by the end of spring, Aleksey Rakhmanov, the United Shipbuilding Corporation (OSK) president...The Kaliningrad-based “Yantar” shipyard's newsletter published a report earlier, according to which the large AWS Ivan Gren was due to complete all the state tests by the end of February. However, the Navy was due to receive this ship back at the end of last year.

The large AWS Ivan Gren is Project 11711's leadship, which was developed by the Nevskoye Planning and Design Bureau. The keel was laid at the shipyard in December 2004, and it was lowered into the water in May 2012. The state test program began 30 November 2017 in the Baltic Sea. According to the RF Defense Ministry's order, the “Yantar” shipyard is building one more ship of this project -- the large AWS Petr Morgunov...A Project 11711 large AWS is a development of Project 1171 large amphibious warfare ships, which proved their worth over decades of service in the Soviet Navy, and later also in the Russian Navy. A major proportion of the design has undergone serious changes.

Project 11711 large AWSs are intended for amphibious landing operations and transporting vehicles and equipment; they can convey and land up to 300 naval infantry personnel, and 38 armored personnel carriers or 13 tanks. The ship is equipped with an assault transport helicopter...The project is the only one in the world in which the idea of noncontact offloading of personnel and equipment from the ship onto an austere beach by using pontoon equipment has been put into practice.



The Ivan Gren, a Project 11711 Ivan Gren-class Ship.

Source: Mil.ru, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/%C2%AB%D0%98%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD_%D0%93%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BD%C2%BB.jpg, CC BY 4.0.



Engineer Troops Organizational Reforms

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses a major reform that is being made in the engineer regiments found in Russian Army Groups (a Combined Arms Army or Tank Army). According to *Izvestiya*, this reform will involve the regiments receiving augmented capabilities for obstacle/mine clearing and mine laying. New sapper-assault companies, sapper-spetsnaz units, UAV companies, and engineer robots will also now be found in these new regiments. In exchange, the engineer regiments will give up some road construction and pontoon bridging assets. In general, this reform means that Russia is increasing engineer maneuver support capabilities (in combat conditions), while shedding some of the more mundane (and less tactically relevant) maneuver support capabilities at the Army Group level. Although not mentioned in the article, it is likely that the Army Groups will maintain a few of its pontoon bridging sets, but the majority of pontoon-bridging and road construction assets will likely be managed at the military district level. Placing the majority of these units at the military district level may more easily facilitate the use of assets that are seldom used, but are of high-value for the military and civilian populace, as they are frequently used to repair civilian infrastructure during times of natural disaster.

The accompanying article from *Krasnaya Zvezda* features an interview with Lieutenant General Yuriy Stavitskiy, the Chief of the Engineer Troops of the Russian Armed Forces. Lieutenant General Stavitskiy discusses Russian demining activities in Syria, engineer modernization (including robotics), and the training of both Russian and foreign mine-clearing specialists at the Russian Federation Armed Forces International Antimine Center. Russian demining and explosive ordinance removal specialists have reportedly cleared 65 square kilometers of territory, 1,500 km of roads, more than 17,000 buildings of mines and other explosive devices and removed or destroyed a total of more than 100,000 explosive objects. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“...it is impossible to conduct successful combat operations in cities without well-trained and well-equipped engineer-sapper units...They will be optimized to accomplish assault and obstacle clearing missions, mine-clearing of the forward area, and clandestine mine-laying. Assault companies, sapper-spetsnaz subunits, and robot and unmanned aerial vehicle companies will be in their composition.”

Source: Nikolay Surkov and Aleksey Ramm, “Саперы станут частью ударного тарана: Минобороны наращивает численность и расширяет функционал Инженерных войск [Sappers Will Become Part of the Shock Battering-Ram: The Ministry of Defense Is Building up the Strength and Expanding the Functionality of the Engineer Troops],” *Izvestiya Online*, 19 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/683387/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm/sapery-stanut-chastiu-udarnogo-tarana>

The Russian Military Department is conducting the large-scale reform of the Engineer Troops. They will become a powerful strike force, which is designated for the conduct of modern warfare. An engineer-sapper regiment, which can perform standard missions and assault operations in cities, clandestine mine-laying, and rapid clearing of terrain of enemy explosive devices, will appear in each Army Group [a Combined Arms Army or Tank Army] in the next six months. This is being done based upon the experience obtained in Syria. In the experts' opinion, it is impossible to conduct successful combat operations in cities without well-trained and well-equipped engineer-sapper units...They will be optimized to accomplish assault and obstacle clearing missions, mine-clearing of the forward area, and clandestine mine-laying. Assault companies, sapper-spetsnaz subunits, and robot and unmanned aerial vehicle companies will be in their composition.

The first regiment of the new MTO&E will be formed in 2018 and will become part of 8th Combined Arms Army. A total of a minimum of four of those army units are being created. In the future, they plan to transition other Engineer Troops regiments (at least six) to the new MTO&E. Right now, there are battalions of sappers, road construction personnel, pontoon brigade personnel, and specialists on engineer obstacles and signaling in the composition of engineer-sapper regiments. During the course of the reform, the strength of the road-bridge construction and pontoon subunits will be reduced, but then again, assault personnel and sapper Spetsnaz personnel will appear.

The assault sappers, who are dressed in armor, will provide the clearing of the path for the advancing infantry – to destroy obstacles and permanent fire positions and to blow up buildings. The Spetsnaz will be involved with the clandestine minelaying of facilities in the enemy rear and the organization of mine ambushes. There will be more ordinary sappers in order to ensure the effective clearing of the terrain from landmines, mines, and improvised explosive devices that have been installed by the enemy.

*Military Expert Oleg Zheltonozhko explained to *Izvestiya* that the increased attention to the Engineer Troops is absolutely justified since well-trained and well-equipped engineer-sapper units are very important in the conditions of modern wars. “The combat operations in Syria demonstrated that the sapper subunits are very much in demand in conditions of local wars,” Oleg Zheltonozhko pointed out. “They must work directly in the forward area and in close cooperation with the combined-arms units. This coordination plays an especially important role in urban conditions”...*

**Izvestiya* previously reported that, according to the Ministry of Defense concept, sapper-assault personnel battalions will become part of the composition of military district brigades and companies will augment army regiments. It is assumed that the formation and combat shakedown of the new assault subunits will take several years. They only began to train “engineer-spetsnaz” officers at Tyumen Higher Military Engineer School in 2014. And special courses for sergeants and privates opened at the military district training centers in 2015.*

(continued)



Continued: Engineer Troops Organizational Reforms

“Based on the results of the fulfillment of special tasks by the Engineering Troops in Syria, the development of future engineering armament means has been organized – a multifunctional robot-engineering system for clearing antitank mines (MRTK-RT), a condenser explosive instrument (TPVK-43), an induction mine detector (IMP-3), individual and group sources of electricity, and other means that enhance our potential and broaden the arsenal.”

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



Source: Viktor Khudoleyev, “У военных инженеров не бывает условностей: У военных инженеров не бывает условностей [Military Engineers Have No Conventionalities: Experience of Combat Use of Engineering Subunits Is Constantly Analyzed and Generalized],” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 19 January 2018. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/35731-u-voennykh-inzhenerov-ne-byvaet-uslovnostej>

January 21 is Engineering Troops Day. On the threshold of the professional holiday Lieutenant General Yuriy Stavitskiy, Chief of the Engineer Troops of the Russian Armed Forces, answered *Krasnaya Zvezda*’s questions...

[Khudoleyev] Yuriy Mikhaylovich, tell us about the specific nature of the fulfillment of combat tasks in Syria by servicemen of the Engineering Troops, including specialists of the Russian Federation Armed Forces International Antimine Center.

[Stavitskiy] The special features of the mine clearance that was carried out in Syria under conditions of combat operations – under complex climatic conditions, moreover, that we are not accustomed to – consisted in the high density of mines and the presence of a multitude of improvised explosive devices of various modifications and yields between three and 120 kg, radio- and wire-controlled, as well as a considerable number of devices designed to be nonremovable and surprise mines. In 2017 detachments of the Russian Federation Armed Forces International Antimine Center cleared mines from the cities of Aleppo, Palmyra, and Dayr az Zawr in Syria. In the course of those humanitarian operations more than 6,500 hectares of territory, 1,500 km of roads, and more than 17,000 buildings were cleared of mines, and more than 100,000 dangerously explosive objects were neutralized and destroyed. The work was both hard and dangerous.

[Khudoleyev] Was the experience acquired there of value? Were lessons drawn for the future?

[Stavitskiy] I can speak with confidence about the increased level of training of both Russian and foreign sappers at the Russian Federation Armed Forces International Antimine Center. This was founded, on the one hand, on the celebrated school of Russian military engineering science. On the other, on the experience that accrued, inter alia, in Syria. Our sappers had to encounter a great diversity of mines and dangerously explosive objects. Here there is still a great deal to be analyzed, generalized, and conveyed to the specialists...Extensive work was carried out in 2017 to make changes to the officer training programs, taking account of the Syrian experience. We will continue this work in 2018...One of the main tasks that the Engineering Troops fulfilled in Syria was, I will stress, to clear mines from terrain and facilities. In the course of this, approval was given to the Uran-6 multifunctional robot-engineering mine clearance system, the Skarabey guided inspection robot-engineering system, and the Sfera guided inspection robot-engineering system. Their adoption for supply is scheduled for 2018. This is reliable hardware.

Based on the results of the fulfillment of special tasks by the Engineering Troops in Syria, the development of future engineering armament means has been organized – a multifunctional robot-engineering system for clearing antitank mines (MRTK-RT), a condenser explosive instrument (TPVK-43), an induction mine detector (IMP-3), individual and group sources of electricity, and other means that enhance our potential and broaden the arsenal.

[Khudoleyev] What is the system for training future officers for the Engineering Troops like today, as well as young specialists of engineering subunits?

[Stavitskiy] Engineering Troops specialists are trained by two military educational institutions and four training centers. We train officers with higher operational-tactical training – I will name it officially – at the Military Institute (of Engineering Troops) of the “Russian Federation Armed Forces Combined-Arms Academy” Ground Forces Military Scientific Training Center. We train specialists with full military special training at Tyumen’ Higher Military Engineering Command School. We train junior specialists of the Engineering Troops at the 187th and 210th Interbranch Regional Training Centers. The 66th Interdepartmental Methods Training Center functions to train specialists in the sphere of mine clearance for the Armed Forces and other Russian Federation security structures. It is entrusted with the tasks of training and retraining specialists to clear terrain of dangerously explosive objects and for the mine detecting service. The Russian Federation Armed Forces International Antimine Center engages in training foreign specialists to look for, neutralize, and destroy improvised explosive devices and to clear mines from terrain and facilities during peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. When training troops, we introduce new forms and methods of conducting lessons, everything most progressive, interesting, and productive. We revive competitiveness by holding competitions regularly. We are doing everything to ensure that every brigade and regiment has one shock subunit by the end of the year.



Promised Pay Raise for Military

OE Watch Commentary: Over the past decade, the Kremlin leadership has invested heavily in restoring both the combat power and prestige of military service. While not lavish, today's military salaries are competitive with other government workers and some civilian careers. The accompanying excerpt from the official government newspaper, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, describes the details of the recently promised (January 2018) military pay raise.

The article asserts that pay raises have been budgeted for the next three years, first reminding readers that the military has not seen a pay increase since 2012 (an increase undertaken during the last presidential election). The excerpt provides an example of the “monthly pay of a battalion commander in the rank of lieutenant colonel” who in January 2018 receives R88,759 (approx. \$1,560). This constitutes the officer's base pay and does not include additional payments for “proficiency rating, for special conditions of service, for work with classified information, and so on,” which can amount to “up to half of the soldier's cumulative pay.”

The article cites Deputy Defense Minister Tatyana Shevtsova, who states that the four percent annual increases are budgeted through until 2020, which includes pay hikes for both contract soldiers and officers. This pay increase will also affect retired military, and the excerpt provides pay data for “a former battalion commander who retired in the rank of lieutenant colonel.” As of January 2018, this retiree will receive R24,610 per month (\$432) which is planned to increase to \$467 by 2020. The article concludes with a comparison between what a new Russian officer receives today compared to those who served in the tsarist army before the 1917 revolution, suggesting that today's officer enjoys greater purchasing power.

If all goes according to plan, Vladimir Putin will be re-elected as Russian president on 18 March (which happens to coincide with the anniversary of his most notable achievement during his latest term of office: the annexation of Crimea). Besides reminding the electorate of his many achievements, President Putin has also made generous campaign promises to win over the loyalty of those wearing the Russian military uniform. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Deputy Minister of Defense Tatyana Shevtsova.
Source: www.kremlin.ru, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tatiana_Shevtsova.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

“In contrast to soldiers, the wallets of military retirees grew heavier back at the end of December, when the January pension that had already been increased accrued for former officers and warrant officers.”

Source: Yuriy Gavrilov, “Про довольствие: Жалование военнослужащих и выплаты отставникам выросли с января,” [About Allowances: Servicemen's Pay and Retiree Payments Increased Since January] *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 17 January 2018. <https://www.rg.ru/2018/01/17/denezhnoe-dovolstvie-voennosluzhashchih-i-vyplaty-otstavnikom-vyrosli.html>

Regular military personnel will receive increased pay beginning in January, and their pay and allowances will continue to grow for the next two years....

...Army pay has not increased for the last five years. On the other hand, it now will grow annually right up to 2021. According to Deputy Defense Minister Tatyana Shevtsova, indexation will be four percent per year. They put R18 billion in this year's defense budget for these purposes and the raise itself will take place from January....

...Shevtsova explained how all this will look in practice in the example of monthly pay of a battalion commander in the rank of lieutenant colonel. Together with various additional payments, he now will receive R85,345 per month. Counting the January raise, his pay and allowances will increase to R88,759. Thus, the increment will be R3,414. After another year it will increase almost to 7,000, and in 2020 it will be R95,239....

...It is known that in addition to money for military rank and position, regular military personnel also receive various payments and increments comprising up to half of the soldier's cumulative pay. Money is added for a proficiency rating, for special conditions of service, for work with classified information, and so on. Certain amounts accrue monthly and others once a year or from time to time. There is a total of up to 15 additional payments of all kinds in the Army....

...In contrast to soldiers, the wallets of military retirees grew heavier back at the end of December, when the January pension that had already been increased accrued for former officers and warrant officers.... For this the amount of the previous pension must be multiplied by 4 percent. That was the figure named by Deputy Defense Minister Tatyana Shevtsova, and this same figure also is in plans for revising retired payments not only for 2018, but also for the subsequent two years.... For example, a former battalion commander who retired in the rank of lieutenant colonel receives R24,610 per month from January instead of the previous “averaged” R23,633. Counting other raises, R25,595 already will begin to accrue for this retiree from October 2019, and 26,619 a year later....

...Before the Revolution the pay of a podporuchik (lieutenant) together with “additional” money was around R80. Today's lieutenant receives R66,000 per month. With this money a lieutenant could buy 170 kg of meat; 230 kg of sugar; 66 kg of butter; 100 kg of Tula honey cakes; 115 kg of “Rossiyskiy” cheese; and 200 bottles (0.61 L) of government-issue vodka.

Today's lieutenant: 260 kg of meat; 1,600 kg of sugar; 110 kg of butter; 120 kg of Tula honey cakes; 130 kg of “Rossiyskiy” cheese; and 260 (0.5 L) of consumer-grade vodka.



Sacrificing Beans for Bullets

OE Watch Commentary: From the Kremlin’s perspective, Russia is well on its way to regaining its status as a superpower. A key component of this status is a modern, well-equipped, and combat-ready military to defend perceived Russian interests, whether in Ukraine, Syria, or the Arctic. However, given the size and structural weaknesses of the Russian economy, combined with continued Western sanctions, there are increasing doubts regarding the Kremlin’s future ability to produce both “beans and bullets.” The accompanying excerpt from the semi-independent news site, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, examines the “new National Arms Program for 2018-2027 (GPV-2027)” and suggests that this plan “will be attended by certain problems,” which “will not best impact Russia’s socioeconomic indicators.”

The author begins by describing the projected defense outlays (“approximately R20 trillion” [or \$360bn]) over the next ten years, which roughly amounts to \$36bn per year “on arms and military equipment,” asserting that this level of funding indicates “that there is no question of any sequester of military spending.” He goes on to list the various promises of the president and senior defense officials regarding providing the military with the latest equipment, concluding that “Russia thus not only aspires not to trail the modern armies of the world but also aims to possess one of the world’s highest military potentials.” The author questions, however, whether today’s Russia possesses the economic base to support such aspirations.

The author goes on to examine the related Kremlin directive which mandated that the enterprises of the defense industrial complex be required to “raise by 2025 the share of commercial output to 30 percent of total defense industrial complex output, and to 50 percent by 2030.” Theoretically, the revenues generated by state defense firms producing commercial goods could be reinvested for research and development for both military and civilian goods. Unfortunately, for these defense firms to compete successfully in the civilian market will require significant capital investment, and as the author points out, “the state does not have the money for this.” The author ends the article with a brief examination of this year’s military budget compared to major expenses, concluding that to pay for more “bullets,” the Kremlin will likely cut back on civilian “beans.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Russia thus not only aspires not to trail the modern armies of the world but also aims to possess one of the world’s highest military potentials.”

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “Москва не выходит из гонки вооружений: Диверсификацию в ОПК решили стимулировать директивными методами,” [Moscow will not Leave the Arms Race: It Has Been Decided to Stimulate Defense Industry Diversification by Directive Methods] *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 26 January 2018. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2018-01-26/1_7159_moscow.html

Russia has adopted the new National Arms Program for 2018-2027 (GPV-2027). This was announced by President Vladimir Putin in Ufa during exchanges with the engine builders. He allayed the misgivings that the state would be reducing spending on arms manufacturing. And he assured them that all enterprises of the defense industrial complex would in the coming years be provided “steadily, rhythmically” with a government contract.

...Whereas experts put the cost of GPV-2010 at approximately R20.7 trillion (R19.4 trillion of which for the needs of the Defense Ministry), Tatyana Shevtsova, deputy head of the Russian Federation Defense Ministry, says that approximately R20 trillion are planned for supplies of arms and military equipment and plant of the military infrastructure. That is, it is planned to spend R2 trillion annually on average, as in previous years, on arms and military equipment. This means that there is no question of any sequester of military spending.

Second, the Kremlin, government, and Defense Ministry have already identified ambitious tasks for the re-equipment of the Russian army. Vladimir Putin said at the final meeting of the Defense Ministry Board at the end of the last year that special emphasis in GPV-2027 would be put on provision of the troops with air-, ground-, and sea-launched precision weapons and unmanned strike systems and also with the servicemen’s personal gear and equipment and the latest intelligence, communications, and electronic-warfare systems. Deputy Premier Dmitriy Rogozin said recently that the priorities of the new National Arms Program include the attainment by 2020 of provision of the army and navy with modern arms and equipment to the level of 70 percent and development of the nuclear deterrence forces and aerospace defense resources.... Russia thus not only aspires not to trail the modern armies of the world but also aims to possess one of the world’s highest military potentials. This cannot be called anything other than an arms race.

Third, the RF leadership evidently understands that an arms race cannot last forever. And following the program of saturation of the army and navy with new types of arms and military equipment, enterprises of the defense industrial complex will sooner or later, evidently, have to switch to the manufacture of peaceful products.... Putin set a specific task: “Raise by 2025 the share of commercial output to 30 percent of total defense industrial complex output, and to 50 percent by 2030.” Since there are directive instructions, centralized funds for their execution have to be allocated also, consequently, since almost all military industry in the country is state-owned....

...He tasked their resolution, for a search for “mechanisms of special investment contracts” included, but said nothing material about plans for state investments in the diversification of enterprises of the defense industrial complex.... But no one in industry is as yet in any hurry to finance these projects. And the reason is plain – the state does not have the money for this.

The 2018 Budget Act has already set the spending on national defense for the coming three years. And it will amount on average to R2.8 trillion.... It may thus be expected that execution of GPV-2027 will be attended by certain problems. And these problems will not best impact Russia’s socioeconomic indicators.



Strengthening Civil Defense

OE Watch Commentary: Alongside its electoral mandate, a key component of the Kremlin's legitimacy rests upon its perceived ability to protect the Russian people from external threats. Defending against these ever-present dangers is a major theme in the Kremlin-sponsored media, with maintaining a robust civil defense (CD) program as a natural response to this besieged-fortress mentality. The accompanying excerpt from the Russian government news source, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, describes a recent interview with "Aleksey Chirikov, head of the Russian Emergencies Ministry Institute for Problems of Civil Defense and Emergencies."

The article begins by talking about how the specific nature of the risks facing Russia have changed since the Cold War ended, and that therefore CD officials "are developing and rehearsing options to protect against new threats." As the excerpt elaborates, the modern strategy of civil defense approved by the President remains "an integral part of defense building," focusing upon three major areas: social ("ensuring the protection and life of the population"), defense ("preserving human mobilization resources and the country's military-economic potential"), and economic ("preserving facilities essential for sustainable functioning of the economy, the survival of the population, and protection of material and cultural values").

The most revealing part of the interview deals with how the CD chief perceives the new threats confronting Russia. Since nuclear parity has been preserved, Russia's "potential geopolitical adversaries" ... "are developing new strategies." According to this Russian official, "Western political strategists have learned with the use of neurolinguistics and psychological training, ideological brainwashing, even hypnotic suggestion, how to make these rear sectors themselves go and sweep away their governments, as well as those who are on the front line of defense." He goes on to point out that "gas masks" and "bunkers" will provide little defense against these new dangers, and that therefore, the 1.2 million involved in Russian CD "are preparing for and calculating all the [new] threats." The Kremlin leadership wants to ensure that the Russian population knows where to look for and defend against foreign threats. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Western political strategists have learned with the use of neurolinguistics and psychological training, ideological brainwashing, even hypnotic suggestion, how to make these rear sectors themselves go and sweep away their governments, as well as those who are on the front line of defense.”

Source: Timofey Borisov, "Защита выходит из бункера: Гражданская оборона меняется вслед за возникающими вызовами," [Protection Is Leaving the Bunker; Civil Defense Is Changing in Wake of Emerging Challenges] *Rossiyskaya Gazeta Online*, 4 October 2017. <https://rg.ru/2017/10/03/kak-grazhdanskaia-oborona-menietsia-vsled-za-voznikaiushchimi-vyzovami.html>

Gas masks are no longer relevant, and also nuclear shelters? This question set the stage for a conversation between your "RG" correspondent and Aleksey Chirikov, head of the Russian Emergencies Ministry Institute for Problems of Civil Defense and Emergencies....

[Question] *On 20 December 2016 the Russian president approved the Principles of State Policy in Civil Defense for the Period up to 2030 that regulate the conceptual provisions of the shape of the country's civil defense today. Out of habit, many people expected that bomb shelters would be refurbished, that the population would be reminded about flashes from left and right, and would purchase new gasmasks. But the path to the nuclear bunker was not newly built that way. So, does it mean that things are different and protection from nuclear attack is no longer relevant?*

Aleksey Chirikov: It is thought that generals always prepare for past wars. Fortunately, that is not the case with us, although until nuclear weapons in the world disappear, today's civil defense is obliged to take this factor into account. But recently other threats have emerged and continue to emerge.... In a changing world nothing is static, and we are developing and rehearsing options to protect against new threats....

[Question] *What does the new concept of civil defense say?*

Aleksey Chirikov: The principles of state policy define strategic directions. Civil defense as an integral part of defense building and ensuring of state security performs three essential functions: social, defense, and economic. First, ensuring the protection and life of the population, rescue, and rendering assistance to victims. Second, preserving human mobilization resources and the country's military-economic potential. And, third, preserving facilities essential for sustainable functioning of the economy, the survival of the population, and protection of material and cultural values....

... [Question] *But this is about natural threats, but let us take manmade one, so to speak. Is there no protection against sanctions?*

Aleksey Chirikov: Clearly, the danger of nuclear attack now is not as great as during the cold war years. Nuclear parity is preserved. And our potential geopolitical adversaries know this, which is why they are developing new strategies.

Whereas decades ago our enemies faced the challenge of destroying the rear to weaken resistance, now none of that is required. There is no need to launch missiles. Western political strategists have learned with the use of neurolinguistics and psychological training, ideological brainwashing, even hypnotic suggestion, how to make these rear sectors themselves go and sweep away their governments, as well as those who are on the front line of defense. The whole world sees this in the scripts of the so-called color revolutions in different countries. And you cannot protect yourself against them with a gasmask or hide from them in a bunker....

We in the Russian Emergencies Ministry are preparing for them at a modern level. The forces of civil defense today comprise trained specialists, modern equipment and appliances, a significant aviation segment, and units that work on water, under water, on land, and in the air. The total grouping of civil defense forces today comprises more than 1.2 million people.... And we are preparing for and calculating all the threats.



Pros and Cons of Legalizing Private Military Companies

OE Watch Commentary: While not legally authorized, the Kremlin nevertheless has made use of Russian Private Military Companies (PMC) to conduct operations both in Ukraine and Syria. The accompanying excerpt from the pro-business daily, *Vedomosti Online*, discusses possible future legislation which might authorize and regulate the activities of Russian PMCs. The article includes a comment made by Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov who was recently asked “about the fate of the Russians executed by gunmen in Syria.” Earlier reports “had described them as employees of PMC Wagner.” Since, however, Russia has yet to authorize PMCs, these individuals lacked any state or legal protection.

The article revisits previous unsuccessful attempts to introduce legislation dealing with PMCs over the past several years, suggesting that “the special services disapprove of the very idea of a law that would effectively legalize private armies as they do not want to deal with professionally trained and armed people operating outside the state’s control.” Since creating a PMC is still illegal in Russia, the author doesn’t mention how PMCs are currently being funded nor which agency is responsible for their overall coordination.

The author quotes one expert who believes that the time “is ripe for bringing Russian PMCs out of the shadows,” and that provided the legislation is well-written, PMCs would be prohibited “from acting against Russia and on Russian territory.” Another expert posits that by developing “the legal base for the activities of PMCs,” such legislation might actually reduce Kremlin aggression, since it would “make it more difficult to use them for unofficial military operations against foreign states.” However, these legal sentiments are not shared by all. One reader comment points out that “if PMCs are legalized, then it will be more difficult to use their most useful feature – plausible deniability on the use of force.” The current Kremlin leadership remains intent upon restoring Russia as a great power, and will use all the tools in their arsenal, to include PMCs, whether they are supported by the appropriate legislation or not. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

Source: Pavel Aptekar, “Стоит ли легализовывать ЧВК? Частным армиям пора выйти из тени,” [Should Private Military Companies be Legalized? It is Time for Private Armies to Step Out of Shadow] *Vedomosti Online*, 18 January 2018. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2018/01/18/748171-legalizovivat-chvk>

The protracted conflicts in Syria and the Donets Basin are reviving the topic of legal regulation of the activities of private military companies (PMCs): the gray underside of many armed confrontations and civil wars. The PMCs are a shadow today: Russian legislation does not define their status in any way, while mercenary activities -- recruitment, training, financing, and use of mercenaries -- are prohibited in Russia. On the one hand, the illegal status of the PMCs makes it possible, while retaining formal neutrality, to covertly use such forces for various types of dirty political work in the conflicts where the country is not formally involved or is involved but does not want to risk its military. On the other hand, when Russian fighters from a PMC are killed or taken prisoner on foreign territory, the authorities cannot avoid the responsibility for their fate as Russian citizens, which means that the question of legal regulation of the activities of PMCs must be resolved sooner or later in one way or another.

Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov noted Monday, answering a question about the fate of the Russians executed by gunmen in Syria (the media had described them as employees of PMC Wagner), that “it is necessary to create a clear legislative base in order for those people to also have legal protection.” Mikhail Yemelyanov, State Duma deputy from A Just Russia, announced Wednesday that he is planning to submit a draft law on Russian PMCs to the parliament in the near future. If this does happen... Yemelyanov’s draft will be a third document of this kind proposed for consideration in the State Duma. Draft laws on PMCs were submitted to the State Duma on two occasions in 2012. In 2014, Frants Klintsevich, who is currently a senator and was deputy chairman of the Defense Committee at the time, prepared a draft law on the same subject but did not submit it to the parliament. According to one theory, the special services disapprove of the very idea of a law that would effectively legalize private armies as they do not want to deal with professionally trained and armed people operating outside the state’s control....

...International relations expert Vladimir Frolov believes that the situation is ripe for bringing Russian PMCs out of the shadows: It is important to define the situations where they can be used, while also prohibiting them from acting against Russia and on Russian territory, in order to exclude the possibility of violation of the state monopoly on legal use of force and prevent them from becoming a parallel army or police. On the other hand, in the current circumstances, the legalizing of PMCs will also mean legalizing the activities of those who were involved in the east of Ukraine in subversive work that is against the Montreux document. Andrey Kortunov, general director of the Russian Council on Foreign Affairs, believes, however, that future development of the legal base for the activities of PMCs should, on the contrary, make it more difficult to use them for unofficial military operations against foreign states. If only for this reason, legalizing is better than keeping these formations in a gray area.

Reader Comment (Kosmik)

...if PMCs are legalized, then it will be more difficult to use their most useful feature – plausible deniability on the use of force ...

“...if PMCs are legalized, then it will be more difficult to use their most useful feature – plausible deniability on the use of force ...”



The Russian Narrative of US Biological Weapons Research in the CIS

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles discuss Russian conspiracy theories about foreign funded human genome and pathogen research in the former Soviet Union. These theories are not just being discussed in the blogosphere, but appearing in the mainstream news sources. President Vladimir Putin has even mentioned the issue: “Do you know that biological material is being collected all over the country, from different ethnic groups and people living in different geographical regions of the Russian Federation? The question is – why is it being done? It’s being done purposefully and professionally...”

In general, most concerns relate to the activities of The International Science and Technology Center (ISTC), an organization established by an international agreement in 1992 to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The treaty was signed during the economic chaos resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union. The intent of the treaty was to ensure that WMD scientists from former Soviet republics did not proliferate WMD technologies by finding employment with other nations or terrorist groups. In order to prevent this proliferation, certain ‘donor’ states would fund programs for ‘recipient’ states in the former Soviet Union. WMD scientists from the former Soviet Union would work foreign sponsored projects, such as basic and applied research. The ISTC donors are: Canada, the United States, the European Union, Japan, Norway and South Korea, while the ISTC recipients are: Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan.

The accompanying articles from *Krasnaya Zvezda* and *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* lay out a Russian (conspiratorial) view of the ISTC activities in the former Soviet Union. There are several accusations made regarding research on the human genome and dangerous pathogens. The first is that dangerous pathogens are being studied so they could possibly be weaponized at some point in the future. In a similar vein of thinking, a theory is also promoted that the US wants dangerous pathogen development to be conducted on foreign shores to lessen risk to the US population. Perhaps the most interesting theory is discussed in the article from *RT*. It suggests that the US may be attempting to create a genetic weapon to target ethnic Russians, based upon a US Air Force contract tender. Although even these Russian sources make it clear that the creation of such a weapon is far-fetched, the Russians are still quite skeptical about the intent of the research. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

Source: Oleg Vladykin, “Бактериологические мины заложены во всех странах СНГ: Дядя Сэм знает, какой «вершок» или «корешок» полезнее ему [Bacteriological Mines Are Being Planted in the CIS Countries],” *Krasnaya Zvezda Online*, 26 January 2018. <http://redstar.ru/index.php/syria/item/35868-bakteriologicheskie-miny-zalozheny-vo-vsekh-stranakh-sng>

A system of American biological espionage is operating in the post-Soviet space. The head office of an intergovernmental organization with which Russia terminated its collaboration some years back in view of the manifest threat to our national security moved out of Moscow relatively recently. It is now relocating in Astana, Kazakhstan. This is a reference to the International Scientific and Technical Center (ISTC) established in 1994 ostensibly to monitor the WMD nonproliferation regime. But as has become clear over time, this center may make the entire population of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) into guinea pigs for the testing of new types of American bacteriological weapons. In the early 1990s, taking advantage of the “chaos in the heads” of the Russian elites, as well as the support of pro-Western politicians, the United States was able to impose on Russian colleagues its own perception of the problem of the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. To this end the US State Department mounted an information attack aimed both at “brainwashing” the post-Soviet public and intimidating the average Westerner...

The interest of the ISTC’s employees -- or, more precisely, State Department staffers -- extends to the following research projects being conducted with their oversight: environmental security issues; the creation of new vaccines, medicines, and pharmaceutical products; fundamental research on the given topic, infectious pathology, and so forth. And of course, the classic genre is that of combating bioterrorism, projects on which are included in the scientific research plans of all the recipient countries among the former USSR republics without exception. In essence, the program to combat bioterrorism being implemented within the ISTC framework embraces an extensive range of diverse research studies...

...The support for scientific projects in the former union republics on the part of the aforesaid organization, behind which lurks the United States, is doubly significant in the strategic perspective. First, this is a unique kind of political instrument for the introduction of American influence in the post-Soviet space via the formation of “Uncle Sam”-dependent scientific centers in the republics of the former USSR. With the aid of partial funding and assistance in technically reequipping the scientific institutions and finding internships for their employees in the United States and its satellite countries. Second, this enables the donor countries to evaluate the “breakthrough” quality of any given scientific field from the standpoint of prospective feasibility, and this will allow them to substantially relieve the expenditure side of the budget being allocated to the needs of their own science...

There is yet another facet to the ISTC’s activity that is unseen at first glance. The implementation of an entire range of programs, primarily in the context of combating bioterrorism, requires the performance of microbiological research involving the pathogens of particularly dangerous infectious diseases...by shifting the performance of research involving dangerous microorganisms onto someone else’s shoulders (outside the United States), the Americans are reducing their own risks on this score to a minimum. But this is not all, either. The investigations in question have a dual subtext, as it were. On the one hand, a study is being made by experimental means of the particularly dangerous causative agents of epidemics with the aim of their effective neutralization; on the other hand, efforts are being made for the subsequent identification by the laboratory method of particular cultures of microorganisms with unusual biological properties that would be entirely suitable for the development of a new generation of bacteriological weapons... the pinpointed regional peculiarities give Washington and its allies the capability as and when necessary to conduct an act of biological sabotage, disguising it as the activation of natural seats of “local” infections.

(continued)



Continued: The Russian Narrative of US Biological Weapons Research in the CIS

“Do you know that biological material is being collected all over the country, from different ethnic groups and people living in different geographical regions of the Russian Federation? The question is – why is it being done? It’s being done purposefully and professionally...”

-Russian President Vladimir Putin

Source: Andrey Vaganov, “За Родину, за русский геном! Версия для печати: Биоматериалы из России вряд ли используются для создания этнического оружия, но четкий контроль в этой сфере необходим, [For the Motherland, For The Russian Genome: Biomaterials from Russia Are Unlikely To Be Used To Create Ethnic Weapons, But Strict Control in This Sphere Is Essential],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 1 November 2017. http://www.ng.ru/kartblansh/2017-11-01/100_7108_kart.html

...in 1989 the USSR joined the world Human Genome program... Several Russian military experts have long been asserting that the Human Genome program is only the tip of what is in fact a military iceberg. And they claim that this program is aimed not so much at decoding the genome as at collecting biological material, including various pathogens and other unusual biological specimens. However, access to the banks of collected biodata is strictly restricted. Specialized laboratories have been created with the Americans’ aid in virtually all countries surrounding Russia: Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan...

Once again it is no accident that on 1 November Sergey Ryabov, Russian Federation deputy foreign minister, stated that “the threat of the use of biological weapons by state and nonstate entities cannot be discounted. Especially since this use could be disguised as natural outbreaks of infectious diseases among people, animals, or plants.” And all this ties in with Vladimir Putin’s statement.

...in addition there is also a commercial component to this whole story to do with the export of biomaterials from the Russian Federation. The point is that organizations outside Russian Federation territory which export biological specimens abroad are outside the Russian taxation system and do not pay taxes in Russia, unlike Russian laboratories. The majority of serious experts who have had time to comment on Vladimir Putin’s statement are inclined to believe that “it is scarcely likely that these specimens are being used in some additional way. Although, following the specimens’ export, foreign companies do not come under Russian legislation and it is impossible to effect any control over the use of specimens and of the data that has been obtained.” Still, though: Can the data from, for instance, the Human Genome project be used or not to create genetic weapons which selectively destroy representatives of a particular race or ethnicity?...

Source: “Russian biological samples ‘collected for research’ – US Air Force,” *RT Online*, 1 November 2017. <https://www.rt.com/news/408416-russians-biological-samples-research/>

The choice of the Russian population for genetic material was not intentional, and is related to research on the musculoskeletal system, the US Air Education and Training Command (AETC) spokesman said. Eyebrows were first raised in July when the AETC issued a tender seeking to acquire samples of ribonucleic acid (RNA) and synovial fluid from Russians. It announced that all samples... “shall be collected from Russia and must be Caucasian.” The Air Force noted that it would not consider tissue samples from Ukraine, for reasons not explained... According to AETC spokesman...the 59th medical group’s molecular research center is currently conducting “locomotor studies to identify various biomarkers associated with trauma.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Monday that Russian genetic material is being harvested all over the country. “Do you know that biological material is being collected all over the country, from different ethnic groups and people living in different geographical regions of the Russian Federation? The question is – why is it being done? It’s being done purposefully and professionally. We are a kind of object of great interest,” Putin told Russia’s Human Rights Council, without specifying who might be behind the activities involving Russians’ biological samples. “Let them do what they want, and we must do what we must,” he said. The fact that Russian tissue samples specifically are on the wanted list made some wonder whether the Pentagon is working on a biological weapon to target Russians...

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov confirmed on Tuesday that Russian special services are in possession of intelligence suggesting that NGOs are collecting genetic material from the population. “Some emissaries are really carrying out such activities, representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other bodies. Such cases were registered, and security services, the president naturally have this information,” he said.

This is not the first attempt to collect samples of Russian genetic material by foreign agencies in Russia, Igor Nikulin, a former member of the UN biological weapons commission, told RT. “Such attempts were made back in the 90s, when there was a Human Genome program, then there were various programs in the 2000s too... under different pretexts, including the most noble, but for some reason all this happens in the interests of the US military department, and this raises suspicion,” Nikulin said...



Ukrainian Perception of Javelin

OE Watch Commentary: March 2018 will mark the 4th anniversary of Russia’s annexation of Crimea, followed the next month by hostilities between pro-Russian separatists and pro-government forces in Southeastern Ukraine. Since then, the Kremlin has strengthened its military position in Crimea and along the border with Ukraine, while continuing to provide the separatist cause in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions with economic, diplomatic, and military support. More than 10,000 have been killed, many more injured, with the infrastructure in the region badly damaged. Negotiations to resolve the political status of the separatist regions have stalled and sporadic fighting continues. The accompanying excerpt comes from an interview with a Ukrainian military expert in the independent Ukrainian news site, *Apostrof*, where he offers his near-term assessment on the conflict.

The article begins by reviewing developments in Ukrainian arms manufacturing, pointing out that while the country is on the verge of producing a “high-precision multiple launch rocket system,” the Ukrainian “army remains low-tech and solves its main tasks at the expense of lives.” The most interesting part of the interview deals with Ukraine’s relations with Russia and the expert posits that “nothing strategic will happen” between the two countries until after summer. He goes on to suggest that by then “Putin’s Russia” will have “de facto completed the cycle of preparations for a big, large-scale war to capture new territories.” He supports this assertion by claiming “the Russian public is prepared for it and ready to approve such steps - due to the performance of the propaganda machine, total lies and fakes.”

The interview concludes on a problematic note, describing how many Ukrainians perceive the recent American decision to provide the Ukrainian military with the Javelin anti-armor system. The expert claims that the “Javelins are psychological aid. This is a signal that Americans decided to defend Ukraine,” claiming that such a transfer “has created conditions for Ukraine changing its status from a partner to an ally.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“But the transfer of Javelins has created conditions for Ukraine changing its status from a partner to an ally.”

Source: Ekatarina Shumilo, “Путинская Россия завершила цикл подготовки к большой войне - военный эксперт,” [Putin’s Russia has Completed Preparations for a Major War-Military Expert] *Apostrof*, 1 February 2018. <https://apostrophe.ua/article/society/accidents/2018-02-01/putinskaya-rossiya-zavershila-tsikl-podgotovki-k-bolshoy-voyne---voennyiy-ekspert/16654>

A video of the full interview with Ukrainian military expert, Valentyn Badrak: <https://youtu.be/w6LMM-NJtkk>

The head of the Centre for Studies of the Army, Conversion and Disarmament, military expert Valentyn Badrak, has spoken about the rearmament of the Ukrainian army, Vladimir Putin’s main goal in Ukraine and the importance of US Javelins for the country’s military potential.

[Question] The National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine [NSDC] has approved the main indicators of the state defense order for 2018-20. How does it meet the Ukrainian army’s demands?

[Badrak] ...Now we expect an upsurge in rearmament. The Vilkhva serious missiles are in the pipeline which may herald the emergence of a high-precision multiple launch rocket system.... as before, our army remains low-tech and solves its main tasks at the expense of lives...

...[Question] Should we expect the Kremlin’s troops’ new attempts to create a land corridor to the occupied peninsula?

[Badrak] Nothing will happen until the presidential election in Russia is over. Even after it, regardless of who will win, although we already presume the outcome, in my opinion, till the summer we will have a period of time when nothing strategic will happen.... But one should realize that Putin’s Russia has de facto completed the cycle of preparations for a big, large-scale war to capture new territories. Moreover, one of the negative signs is that the Russian public is prepared for it and ready to approve such steps - due to the performance of the propaganda machine, total lies and fakes....

[Question] You say that Putin is almost ready for war. What new territories may he be interested in capturing?

[Badrak] There is no doubt that Putin’s global goal is to destroy the very fundament of Ukraine as an independent state....

[Question] How can US Javelins help the Ukrainian army and what military aid should we expect this year?

[Badrak] In fact, Javelins are psychological aid. This is a signal that Americans decided to defend Ukraine - in some possible ways, not by force, but to turn Ukraine into a buffer between the West and Russia which is a bit stronger than it used to be.... For example, we should try to get US technologies for our companies that would jointly manufacture weapons.... If we look further ahead, it would be right for Ukraine in this situation to ensure that an American base is set up on our territory, like the one in Poland, which would be defended by US Patriot systems. If it happens, it will be very serious. But, of course, this is not the task for this year but for many years to come. But the transfer of Javelins has created conditions for Ukraine changing its status from a partner to an ally.



The Eastern Military District and Pacific Fleet Control the Eastern Entrance to the Russian Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The Eastern Military District and Pacific Fleet continue to control the Eastern entrance to the Russian Arctic. The straight line distance from Khabarovsk to Wrangel Island is 3408 kilometers (2117 miles) and as the accompanying news brief from the *Russian Ministry of Defense* reports, a helicopter unit from Khabarovsk is supplying remote military garrisons on Wrangel Island and Cape Schmidt. The article does not state where the helicopter unit is operating from, but the harbor town of Anadyr is a good bet. The original Anadyr airfield was built during World War II for use in ferrying Lend Lease aircraft from Alaska for eventual service against Germany. The straight line distance from Anadyr to Wrangel Island is 731 kilometers (454 miles). It is still a long haul and rugged flying.

End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)

Source: Eastern Military District Press Service, “Airmen of an Eastern Military District Army Aviation Formation based in Khabarovskiy Kray Take up Duty in Arctic Zone of Responsibility” *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation*, 29 January 2018. <http://www.mil.ru>

The flight routes go through a number of major mountain passes with difficult climatic conditions, which require the ultimate skills and experience on the part of the flight personnel.

The crews of Mi-26 transport helicopters delivered more than 70 tons of various cargo during their duty last year, to remote Eastern Military District garrisons stationed on Wrangel Island and Cape Schmidt.

In addition, the district’s army aviation crews delivered two hydraulic presses weighing a total of about 15 tons to Wrangel Island to support the work of an Eastern Military District ecological subunit.

“The crews will be transporting personnel during troop rotation at military units in the Arctic zone and also various types of cargo for remote garrisons, using Mi-8AMTSh helicopters. In addition, they will deliver provisions to Arctic operating bases. The flight personnel have arrived in the Arctic zone as part of a routine rotation.”



Map showing the Chukchi Sea, north of the Bering Strait and Sea, between Russia and the United States. Location of Anadyr has been added.

Source: Norman Einstein, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chukchi_Sea_map.png, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Arctic S-400 reaches operational status

OE Watch Commentary: The S-400 air defense system has apparently achieved operational status according to the accompanying article from *The Independent Barents Observer*. It is worth noting that Severodvinsk is located on the White Sea next to Archangel and as the article notes, Northern Fleet chemical defense units were also involved in masking the city by laying particulate smoke screens. Lastly, Su-24 close air support aircraft, apparently from Severomorsk-3 airbase, provided the “attacking enemy” for the exercise. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“No real missile launch was conducted. But electronic launching was carried out and all enemy aircraft were successfully eliminated, according to a Northern Fleet press release. The Northern Fleet’s Belomorskaya base is located in Severodvinsk and played a key role in the drills.”

Source: “Northern fleet trains shooting with missile complex S-400 over Severodvinsk”, *The Independent Barents Observer*, 9 February 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en>

Locals in Severodvinsk were told not to worry as the exercise unfolded on 8 February. The training could include release of artificial smoke in the city center, according to the local newspaper Severnaya Nedelya. But there was more than smoke in the air.

As part of the training, Su-24 jet fighters were airborne and played a role as enemy aircraft. On the ground, units of the Northern Fleet’s missile forces were told to defend the strategically important city. The city of Severodvinsk hosts two of Russia’s leading military shipyards. All new nuclear-powered submarines are built at Sevmash, while a lion’s share of upgrades and service is conducted at the neighboring Zvezdochka.

According to the Northern Fleet, its air defense units in 2017 conducted a total of 20 missile launches. They all successfully hit their targets in the Ashuluk shooting range in south Russia.

The S-400 is Russia’s new mobile surface-to-air missile complex. It has been in service for the Russian Armed Forces since 2007 and been deployed in the Northern Fleet presumably since 2015. In the 9th May parade in Murmansk, 2015, the missiles were on display in the Russian north for the first time.

With the new system, the missile forces of the region add range and powers to its already well-equipped weapon arsenal. The S-400 can simultaneously hit up to 36 targets with a total of 72 missiles. It can neutralize enemy aircrafts at up to 240 kilometers distance and enemy missiles at 60 kilometers distance.

The S-400, an upgrade of the S-300 family, is the new generation Russian anti-aircraft weapon system developed by the Almaz Central Design Bureau. Russia currently has a total of 16 battalions with S-400 systems, based in six different regions. Each of the battalions have eight S-400 systems....



S-400 «Триумф» (S-400 “Triumph”).

Source: Cokонpыc, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3A%D0%A1-400_%C2%AB%D0%A2%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%83%D0%BC%D1%84%C2%BB.JPG, CC BY-SA 4.0.



Birthrate Soars Among Service Families in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: One of the consequences of the increase of contract service personnel in the Russian Armed Forces is the increase in the number of service families and the accompanying excerpted article from *Red Star* takes a look at this. Russian garrison communities are not known for an overabundance of family-friendly facilities and this holds true particularly in the Arctic. Admiral Yevmenov, who commands the Northern Operational Strategic Command, has ground forces, aerospace forces (air force, air defense and space), Spetsnaz as well as a naval fleet. This is a lot of personnel, equipment and territory to worry about. The Admiral is also worried about living conditions for the families of personnel and interaction with the Arctic communities. As the article notes, the Admiral has been looking into kindergartens, schools, day care, jobs for wives, shopping centers, leisure and recreation facilities, roads, public transportation and medical care, and he is involving the local authorities as partners in the planning and solutions. One of the problem areas not discussed in the article is family housing-which is a problem since the military provides barracks and family housing-and is in short supply in much of the Arctic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



A parade of ships of the Northern Fleet 9 May 2010.

Source: Alexey Pavlov, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:3AParade_korably.JPG, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The Admiral is also worried about living conditions for the families of personnel and interaction with the Arctic communities. As the article notes, the Admiral has been looking into kindergartens, schools, day care, jobs for wives, shopping centers, leisure and recreation facilities, roads, public transportation and medical care, and he is involving the local authorities as partners in the planning and solutions. One of the problem areas not discussed in the article is family housing-which is a problem since the military provides barracks and family housing-and is in short supply in much of the Arctic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov, commander of the Northern Fleet, held a conference call on social support for servicemen and their families at the fleet’s bases. Urgent problems were discussed in the fleet staff with the participation of the governor and ministers of Murmansk Oblast. Formation commanders, task force commanders, and the leaders of municipalities reported on their situations through video-conferencing.”

Source: Olga Vorobyeva, “Seeking the proper approach with Local Authorities: The Creation of Comfortable living Conditions for Northerners Is a Priority Concern of the Fleet Command”, *Красная Звезда [Red Star]*, 25 January 2018. <http://www.redstar.ru>

The format of the meeting immediately brought the conversation round to a consideration of the problems in each specific garrison. The participation of Marina Kovtun, governor of Murmanskaya Oblast’, Sergey Dubovoy, chairman of the Murmanskaya Oblast’ Duma, Andrey Sysoyev, head of the administration of Murmansk, and a number of ministers of the governments of Murmanskaya and Arkhangel’skaya oblast’s and also of the leadership of closed administrative and territorial formations and municipalities permitted submission of proposals for change on the spot.

Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov noted that many social issues of significance for the servicemen and their families are being resolved positively thanks to joint efforts with the local governments... The problem of provision of the servicemen’s children with kindergartens has been completely resolved in Arkhangel’sk, Severodvinsk, Nar’yan-Mar, Murmansk, Zaozersk, Monchegorsk, Olenegorsk, Vidyayevo, and Severomorsk-3...The Admiral noted that “The commanding officer is responsible not only for the servicemen but also for the conditions under which their families live, to the extent which the children are provided with schools and kindergartens, employment of the wives, medical treatment of family members, and much else.” Our professional duty is not only to fulfill our missions but also to resolve the social problems which the men encounter.”

The remote garrisons of Alakurtti, Pechenga, and Sputnik [garrisons of the 80th Arctic Motorized Rifle Brigade, 66th Naval Infantry Brigade, and 200th Coastal Defense Motorized Rifle Brigade] are in need of greater-than-usual attention....

“I would like to live here, and now, what is more, not postpone this until tomorrow,” the fleet commander expressed his principled position. “Every effort to provide people with comfortable conditions needs to be made, therefore.”

Garrisons differ, but the problems are similar.... An increase in day-care centers is needed, the cultural and leisure institutions need updating. There are difficulties with public transport.... Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov emphasized that no money should be spared in improving the lives of the citizens of our country, and servicemen are citizens. Residents of the “outback” also complain about the lack of chain stores with a wide selection and affordable prices.... The shortage of doctors is a problem of many northern regions. The twice annual “Health Train” for all localities of Murmanskaya Oblast’ was a big help. As far as regular doctors are concerned, there is still a problem. Specialists are reluctant to go to the peripheral regions since there are no financial incentives. The latest data show that Murmanskaya Oblast’ needs 638 doctors, Arkhangel’skaya, 890. An Arctic Doctor proposal is being considered....

Pothole repair does not resolve the problem of the roads and....restoration of the entire road bed to the remote Severomorsk-3 airmen’s garrison is required.

Among the problems requiring a joint solution with the local leaders ...is the instruction of children in schools in a single shift, provision of places in kindergarten, particularly in day-care centers, and the construction of playgrounds and sports fields.... A kindergarten opened at the end of last year in the Sputnik naval infantry garrison and a school is nearing completion in Severomorsk-3... Considering that the birthrate in the six garrisons has risen noticeably, the need for children’s preschool institutions is entirely justified.

The commander tasked the garrison’s senior officers with immersing themselves in social issues in depth. And he set a deadline to submit joint proposal with the municipal authorities for the development of the garrisons and base compounds by 1 February. Considering all the wishes, the “road map” will have been put together in full by mid-March.



Career Appeal of KGB

OE Watch Commentary: This past December, Russia marked the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Soviet secret police. The first excerpt from the popular daily, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, commemorated this date by describing in glowing terms a visit to one of the major secret police buildings in St. Petersburg. The article makes no mention of the awful repression or arbitrary punishment during the Soviet period by the predecessors of today's secret police (FSB-Federal Security Service), but rather highlights the heroes who worked for this agency (to include Vladimir Putin).

This positive change in public attitudes toward Russia's secret security agencies stands in stark contrast to those of the 1990s. Then, the Russian media was filled with reports at how the Cheka/NKVD/KGB had used terror and coercion to keep the Soviet system alive. Over the past two decades, however, the media's portrayal of these security agencies has been more positive. Not surprisingly, as the second excerpt from the pro-business site, *Vedomosti*, points out, today, many young Russians aspire to a career with the security services.

The article provides polling data which reflects this "increase in the popularity of the special services," asserting that this change coincides "almost exactly with Vladimir Putin's time in power." One of the experts quoted in the article suggests that "the rising prestige of the special services stems from the growing confrontation with the West," and that this "besieged fortress syndrome... has been created, first and foremost, by television." Moreover, today, "many people consider it [career in the special services] an effective social ladder." This sentiment is echoed by another expert cited in the article who asserts that "people can see that security officers, not businessmen or officials, are the real masters of the situation in the country and they want similar success in life for their family members." **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“People can see that security officers, not businessmen or officials, are the real masters of the situation in the country...”

Source: Elena Molchanova, “100-лет ВЧК-КГБ-ФСБ: экскурсия по альма-матер петербургских чекистов,” [100th anniversary of the Cheka-KGB-FSB: an excursion to the alma mater of the St. Petersburg Chekists] *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 20 December 2017. <https://www.spb.kp.ru/daily/26769/3805599/>

This year, 20 December, marks the 100th anniversary of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (the Cheka) - the State Security Committee (KGB) - now the Federal Security Service (FSB). On the anniversary “Komsomolskaya Pravda” visited the main building of the FSB in St. Petersburg and the Leningrad region and saw what lay behind the thick walls of the building...

...If you climb up the spacious staircase to the floor above, visitors will be shown a stained-glass window with a distinctive control symbol and a plaque with the names of the St. Petersburg heroes who fell on the fighting post.... By the way, in one of them - under number 643 - in 1998 the future president of Russia worked, Vladimir Putin.

Source: Pavel Aptekar, “Как спецслужбы стали престижными. Почти половина россиян хотели бы видеть своих детей чекистами,” [How Special Services Became Prestigious. Almost Half of Russians Would Like Their Children to Become Intelligence Officers] *Vedomosti Online*, 6 February 2018. <https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2018/02/06/750030-spetssluzhbi-prestizhnimi>

The key role of the special services (first and foremost, probably of the FSB [Russian acronym for the Federal Security Service]) in the implicit hierarchy of the law enforcement structures and their PR activeness against the background of deteriorating relations with the West have rendered the profession of a security officer more prestigious: Nearly half of the Russians would like their children and grandchildren to serve in the security bodies.

A survey by the Public Opinion Foundation has revealed an increase in the popularity of the special services over a period of time which coincided almost exactly with Vladimir Putin's time in power. In 2001, almost the same number of people assessed the special services' work positively and negatively (35 and 34 percent respectively), but the number of those who assess their work positively almost doubled to 66 percent by January 2018, while the number of those who assess it negatively dropped by a factor of three to 12 percent. Over the same period of time, the number of Russians who consider service in the FSB attractive grew from 42 to 69 percent...

...Grigoriy Kertman, head of a division at the Public Opinion Foundation, noted that the rising prestige of the special services stems from the growing confrontation with the West: The besieged fortress syndrome which has been created, first and foremost, by television...The backgrounds of Putin and many of his cohorts who have worked in special services also matter: Many people consider it an effective social ladder.

...Political analyst Nikolay Petrov believes that it has become a universal controller overseeing both the law enforcement structures and the state apparatus. People can see that security officers, not businessmen or officials, are the real masters of the situation in the country and they want similar success in life for their family members.



“Russia’s Patriot Act”: New Law Empowers FSB

OE Watch Commentary: This interview with IT-multimillionaire Igor Ashmanov, one of the most highly placed and conservative technology experts in President Putin’s administration, and spouse to Natalya Kasperskaya of Kasperskiy Anti-Virus fame, helps us understand Russia’s desire for digital sovereignty. Clearly not a fan of the US or its level of digital sovereignty, Ashmanov advocates for Russian communications to be more strictly monitored and is in favor of data collection on all Russian Internet users. The Yarovaya laws, which Ashmanov equates with the US Patriot Act, were adopted in 2016 and call for extensive recording of Internet and cell phone traffic.

Ashmanov calls the Internet in Russia the freest in the world, because smartphones don’t “spy for the FSB” but he says, “The Yarovaya laws will fix that.” According to the author, some Russian experts assume the law was passed not to protect freedom of speech but to make money for its main beneficiaries, including Ashmanov and his wife, but Ashmanov denies this, saying the law had been put forward by some behind-the-scenes player, probably the FSB.

According to Ashmanov, the FSB does not have access to communications between Russian citizens, and says the Yarovaya laws will provide that, ostensibly to help the government catch terrorists. Each time the interviewer presses him about why the FSB needs Internet users’ data, Ashmanov returns to the need for the laws as a tool to fight terrorism.

When asked about the need to gain digital sovereignty, which he defines as, “the right of the government to independently determine what is happening in their digital sphere, and make its own decisions,” he suggests Russia is growing its sovereignty, as is China. Although Russia has passed several Internet laws in the last few years, Ashmanov suggests it lags behind the West in communications regulation and oversight.

As part of the president’s working group to establish an Internet road map, Ashmanov supports the idea of Russia using domestic technology. He says Russia has its own operating systems and more than two thousand domestically produced computer programs registered, with hundreds more being added each month. Ashmanov suggests Russia has its own version of practically everything, but when asked why the rest of the world does not use Russian software, he simply responds, “We’re not the ones who print the world currency.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**

“That’s why our authorities have a decision to make: we need...information control.”

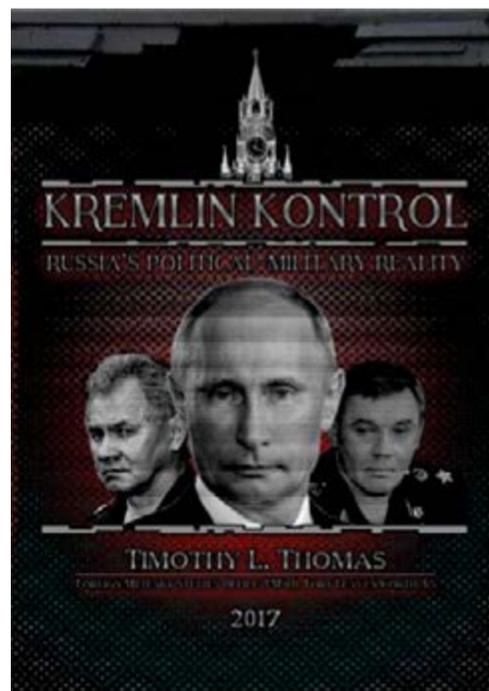
Source: Besedova, I. “Закон Яровой спасёт нас от ЦРУ” (The Yarovaya Law Will Save us From the FBI), *Fontanka.ru*, 22 October, 2016. <http://www.fontanka.ru/2016/10/22/061/>

“It’s possible to make a “page certificate” that would decrypt information along the way and then re-encrypt it and give it to Facebook.

It would have to be something already in the operating system and browser, not an opt-in button. But this is a political or social issue, not a technical one. The government could arrange with Microsoft to put it in the next version of Windows or they could arrange with a browser maker. Antivirus programs often put their own certificates on the computer – they could put a government one on and you wouldn’t know it was there.

...
You’ll recall that the very same law [as the Yarovaya laws], only in a much harsher form, was passed in the US in 2001, right after the terrorist act [9/11]. It was called the Patriot Act. And it obligated all providers to turn in their data.

...
Russia’s mission is to stop those striving for world domination. We defeated the [Golden] Horde, the Swedes, Napoleon, Hitler, and now we see all this digital horror: all the information in the world goes to the Americans. That’s why our authorities have a decision to make: we need to do the same thing...Information control.”



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>



His Holiness Patriarch Cyril Tells Parliament What Keeps Him Up at Night

OE Watch Commentary: The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), Patriarch Cyril, has accompanied President Putin side by side in the latter's long residence in power. Cyril's presence has been widely noted in both the Russian press and in the West, firmly indicating the President's preference for the ROC. While stopping short of declaring it a state religion, the President's "silent" endorsement for the ROC, was on display again as he participated in the annual ROC ice-hole plunge celebrating Christ's baptism, shown live on television.

In his 25 January 2018 address to the upper house of Russian Parliament, at the opening of the Sixth Annual Christmas Parliamentary Meetings, Patriarch Cyril lauded the event as an opportunity for lawmakers and Russian Orthodox Church leaders to exchange ideas. He also took the opportunity to remind the audience he had spoken at the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (an international body made up of members of the Commonwealth of Independent States) earlier in the year. His primary message at both events was that the law is based in morals and a proper spiritual mindset.

It is difficult to know who his actual intended audience is, given his emphasis on the connection between the lawmaking process and lawmakers' faith. Perhaps in an attempt to inspire lawmakers, he says lawmaking is not just about finding compromise and legalizing the existing norms, rather, lawmakers are obligated to make laws that create conditions for people to have the best life possible. He also bemoans the state of "freedom" as a value, saying it has been stripped of the other side of the coin, responsibility, and is now left a more hedonistic value that one belonging to a moral society.

In addition to contravening the conventional wisdom that morality cannot be legislated, Patriarch Cyril echoes President Putin in imploring his audience to remember, "We are one people". He hews to a more commonly heard concern in noting that technological progress, especially electronic means, are both useful and potentially harmful. Leaving no doubt which side he comes down on, he states unequivocally, "A side effect of new technologies is a complex dehumanization of social relationships." This, ostensibly, paves the way for the government to sell how "safe" its new monitoring and information collection technologies are – keeping its citizens safe from terrorism and preventing crime by making financial transactions (forcibly) transparent.

Cyril concludes by declaring lawmakers can only be guided by one thing: their conscience. His words will serve as a backdrop for lawmakers' actions to come. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**

“For now, government legislation retains its fundamental loyalty to traditional morals and its serves to limit evil. But if the moral dimension gets exiled from legislation, the law will turn into a dangerous weapon for dehumanizing the society.”



Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Cyril.

Source: By Kremlin.ru, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5390236>, CC BY 4.0.

Source: “Доклад Святейшего Патриарха Кирилла на VI Рождественских парламентских встречах” (His Holiness Patriarch Cyril's speech at the Sixth Annual Christmas Parliamentary Meetings), www.patriarch.ru, January 25, 2018. <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/5136914.html>

“For now, government legislation retains its fundamental loyalty to traditional morals and its serves to limit evil. But if the moral dimension gets exiled from legislation, the law will turn into a dangerous weapon for dehumanizing the society.”

...

A new conceptualization of freedom, as a value that exists separately from responsibility and obligation, is squeezing out morality... Guided by this understanding of freedom, people do not gain new opportunities for self-realization, just the opposite – they move into a shameful condition of being slaves to their desires.

...

I am compelled to talk about a phenomenon that not just worries a lot of people, it has also caused many to suffer. Recently, the world has seen the spread of co-called cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin... The Church sees its task as teaching people not to be slaves to their desires and to strive to do righteous work, which will be justly rewarded. But the government, too, is called upon to protect people from extreme risk and even straight-out lies, including by means of legal regulation.



The “Electronic Concentration Camp” of National Cryptocurrencies

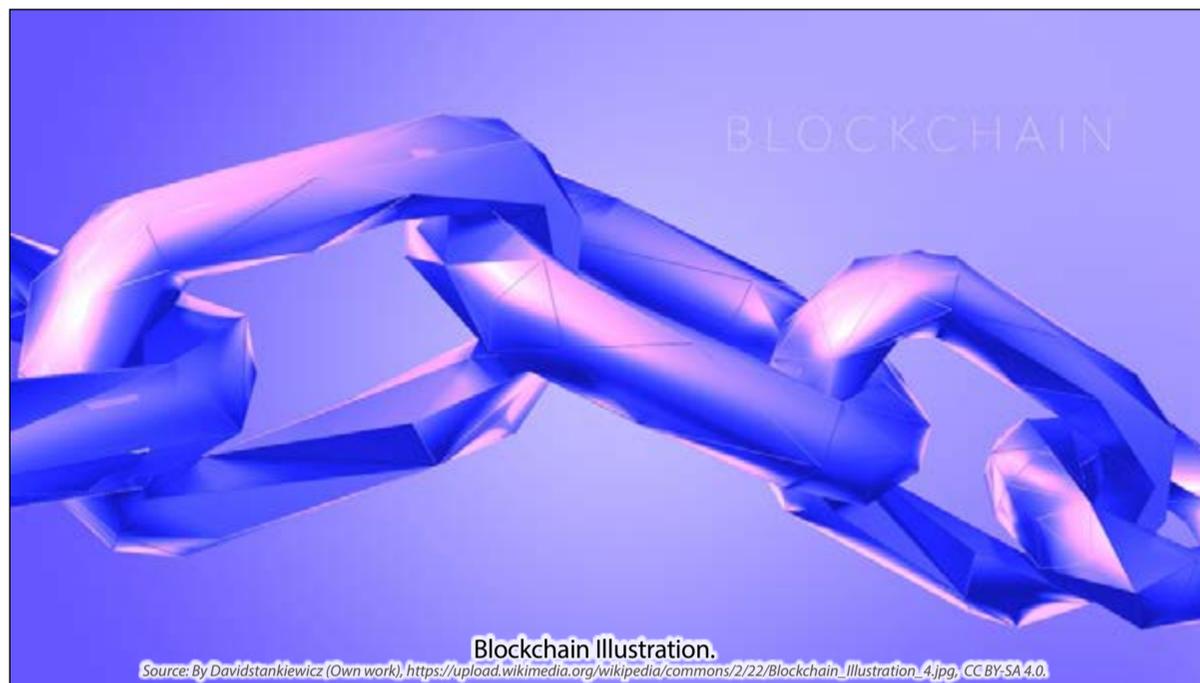
OE Watch Commentary: The current Russian-language Internet universe has been described surprisingly still very much in “Wild West mode” as far as netizens’ ability to speak freely and imagine the worst. Russian-language web participants on a wide variety of websites have teased out the idea of a national cryptocurrency to its potential dystopian end: total state control of Russian citizens via the country’s financial system.

As the idea of a blockchain-based government takes hold, tech-forward web users have started writing about how the proposed cryptoruble and blockchain-based banking will make it possible to trace and check every money transaction of every citizen. According to the author of the first excerpted article, state control over money flows is likely to grow exponentially. The author anticipates the government will sell the idea by claiming blockchain will help intensify its fight against corruption, against syphoning money off from the government budget, and against tax evasion and money laundering. As one user concludes in the comments to this article, “for sure whatever awaits cryptoruble users, it’s nothing good,” echoing widespread negative comments about the cryptoruble found on the Russian-language internet.

In the second article, the author speculates about the long-term effects of introducing a cryptoruble. In the Orwellian future described, the state would be able to completely control individuals’ behavior with the threat of excluding them from the financial system altogether. The author makes the case for readers to resist moving to a cashless society, because they would be giving up their independence, allowing themselves to rely completely on – and be at the mercy of – the central banking system.

Calling e-government a “fashionable trend”, the author practically begs people not to let themselves become “bio-objects” the government would be able to manipulate. With full access to all financial transactions for every individual, the government could put people on state-authored social black lists for bad credit or missed payments (as reportedly practiced in China recently), or even cut them off from the economy entirely by eliminating their access to bank accounts, and thus, their ability to earn money. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**

“The only thing left will be to declare a dictatorship for a made-up reason, like, ‘this is all for your safety’...after which they’ll be able to manipulate people as they wish.”



Source: mr-kryply59. “CrypNews. Крипторубль и криптоюань, сразу два убийцы биткойна” (CrypNews: The Cryptoruble and CryptoYuan – Two Bitcoin Killers at Once), *Golos.io*, October 16, 2017. <https://golos.io/ru--bitkoin/@mr-kryply/crypnews-kriptorubl-i-kriptyuan-srazu-dva-ubiicy-bitkoina>

I suggest simply calling the cryptoruble and cryptoYuan electronic blockchain-based currencies – that’s the real idea behind the creation of these cryptofrankensteins.

I assume it will be mandated that all non-cash payments for business and the government be replaced [with the cryptoruble]. The non-cash ruble will be squeezed out and completely replaced by the cryptoruble in the near future...

Bitcoin itself gave authorities the technologies for complete inventory and control of money operations. And it would be dumb to think the authorities would pass up such a fantastic opportunity.

Source: nalivaiko43. “Электронный концлагерь получится. (It’s Going to End up Being an Electronic Concentration Camp), *Golos.io*, October 16, 2017. <https://golos.io/ru--konclagerx/@nalivaiko/elektronnyji-konclager-nacionalnykh-kriptoalyut>

In the long-term we’re going to have an electronic concentration camp. If cryptocurrencies mean anonymity in all financial operations, then in the case of national digital money, it immediately becomes clear: all financial and physical movements are under control. Everything is recorded and copied from miners.

The only thing left is to declare a dictatorship for a made-up reason, like, “this is all for your safety”, “we’re fighting against corruption, terrorism, extremism, and money laundering”, after which they’ll be able to manipulate people as they wish.

And if anyone starts to voice any liberal, free-speech values, like, it’s unacceptable to get into our private lives and record everyone and everything, those anarchists can immediately be excluded from all sources of income – by that time they’ll all be digits in the blockchain.



Russian Speculation about the Cryptoyuan

OE Watch Commentary: The *EKD* project started off as a social media interest group on *Vkontakte*, the Russian version of *Facebook* and which is widely reported to toe the party line in the content it publishes. *EKD* quickly developed into its own website, aimed at setting the record straight in Russian media reporting on China. On their website, they claim China is one of Russia's main trading partners, and that there is not enough reporting on China for Russians to understand their relationship.

According to this particular article, this spring, the Chinese Central Bank established the Institute for the Study of Digital Currencies. In October, its director said China needed to have its own digital currency to further develop online payments and electronic commerce, and that blockchain technology had good prospects. Later the director put out an announcement saying there was no need for China to create a national digital currency that would be specifically blockchain-based.

This reflects the wavering seen in statements by finance officials in a number of countries, who have struggled both with categorizing independent cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, as well as determining their legality. Despite their intense reluctance to embrace a financial instrument ostensibly aimed at disrupting their sovereign currency system, officials must walk a fine line, damning Bitcoin et al. without damning the blockchain technology on which they are built.

As the author suggests, China could create a non-blockchain-based digital currency. There are already precedents for that such as the cryptocurrency Ripple, which is still based on distributed ledger technology, but which is somewhat different from blockchain. Or they could still use blockchain technology, while assigning the state to control emissions, thus avoiding mining and miners as a source of disruption. While Russia could learn from watching China's experiment and determining what works well for the government and what pitfalls to avoid, the prospect of a Chinese cryptocurrency being issued before Russia issues one threatens Russia with the potential for China to displace the US dollar as a reference currency or at least as a viable multinational trading currency. Although that may have economic benefits for Russia, the specter of one hegemon replacing another is unpalatable for the current Russian administration.

China is where cryptocurrency mining is currently most concentrated, thanks in part to access to cheap electricity. This may help create a built-in demand for the cryptoyuan, unlike the cryptoruble, the demand for which will likely have to be forced to appear at all. Both pseudo-crypto-currencies (they would actually be digital currencies, not cryptocurrencies per se) share the dubious distinction of being highly suspect as to their real capacity to add value. **End OE Watch Commentary (Hall)**

“We can only guess what the Chinese digital currency will look like.”



A modern 'money tree' observed in Yunnan, China, 2015.
Source: By Pratyeka (Own work), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Modern_money_tree.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Source: Каким будет государственный криптоюань? (What Will the State Cryptoyuan Be Like?), *EKD*, November 25, 2017. <http://ekd.me/2017/11/kakim-budet-gosudarstvennyj-kriptoyuan/>

“For more than three years, rumors have been swirling about the creation of a state cryptocurrency. At the beginning of 2014 the Chinese National Bank announced it would study digital currencies. That’s when people started talking about the possibility of creating a cryptoyuan – a Chinese national cryptocurrency. Nevertheless, the Central Bank did not issue any official clarification on that account until this year. Everything changed somewhat this year, but the situation did not become any clearer.”

...

“After a flurry of activity by Chinese regulators in the decentralized cryptocurrency market, the Chinese National Bank established the Institute for the Study of Digital Currencies. In one interview, the Director, Yo Tsyang, said China needed its own digital currency...and said blockchain had good prospects. Later, however, Yo Tsyang put out another announcement, saying there was no need to create a national digital currency based on blockchain per se. We can only guess what the Chinese digital currency will look like.”